Anglicans are not the only Christian communion suffering from what former CMS general secretary Max Warren once described as a peculiar “ecclesiastical squint which gets virtually every important issue out of focus.” This wry, self-deprecating observation, cited by Timothy Yates in his masterful article on John V. Taylor, is a reminder that even—perhaps even especially—the most theologically astute among us perceive God only “through a glass darkly.” Such humble self-awareness is prerequisite to an ability to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches, regardless of the religious condition or cultural setting. Aware that they understand only the dim contours of God’s self-revelation, thoughtful Christians readily attest that when it comes to being transformed into the glory of our Lord, the Spirit still has plenty of work to do, even in the most saintly among us.

The Holy Spirit, prominent at Pentecost, was active also in Old Testament times. In fact, the Spirit has been, is now, and will always be present in all places and at all times. It thus should come as no surprise that Christian missionaries to China who went to convert its people found themselves transformed by the

Continued next page
neither primarily a Christian heresy nor totally a devilish for the Ultimate God.” In these troubling times, this awareness of giving him the eyes and the ears to recognize in the songs, of things African to fellow Europeans of the twentieth century,” openness to the ongoing, “all of creation” conversion work of the (SCM Press, 1972). Timothy Yates concludes that it was Taylor’s as deeply illuminating Edward Cadbury Lectures in Theology, worship their own Trinitarian God more truthfully and richly” Kärkkäinen—that “the other may teach Christians to know and inclusion many theological notables. The experiences of Reichelt and others support D’Costa’s contention—cited by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen—that “the other may teach Christians to know and that such teaching may save the church from “unwittingly practicing cultural and religious idolatry.”

Reichelt’s pilgrimage is reminiscent of John V. Taylor’s deeply illuminating Edward Cadbury Lectures in Theology, delivered at the University of Birmingham in 1967 and published as The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission (SCM Press, 1972). Timothy Yates concluded that it was Taylor’s openness to the ongoing, “all of creation” conversion work of the Holy Spirit that made him “one of the most sensitive interpreters of things African to fellow Europeans of the twentieth century,” giving him the eyes and the ears to recognize in the songs, proverbs, and riddles of African traditional religions the “desire for the Ultimate God.” In these troubling times, this awareness of the go-between God will allow us to acknowledge that Islam is “neither primarily a Christian heresy nor totally a devilish abomination,” a perspective characterizing Timothy I of Baghdad, the story of whose encounter with Caliph al-Mahdi is retold by Frederick Norris in this issue.

Kärkkäinen reminds us that it is this “go-between God” who spans the seemingly unbridgeable religious chasm between “blind exclusivism” and an all-encompassing pluralism. As he puts it, “The Christian, coming from a particular perspective, is both encouraged and entitled to witness to the triune God of the Bible and his saving will, yet is at the same time prepared to learn from the Other.” Ecclesiastical failure to learn from and adapt to the other is identified in Robert Gallagher’s portrayal of the plight of the church in Australia, alienated from the nation’s “average blokes” by its imported and deeply irrelevant Anglocentric religious forms and rituals.

The black-and-white pencil sketch accompanying this editorial is appropriately enigmatic. Entitling his work Holy Spirit, Sawai Chinnawong of Thailand explains that “God’s all-seeing eye takes in the whole creation, here represented by slivers of his cosmos. A great mother bird feeds us, her spiritual young.” He captures something of the mystery of the Spirit at work within and throughout his creation, complementing the essays in this issue of the IBMR, gently reminding us that our culturally veiled religious minds can make us resistant to the full weight of God’s glory. In the familiar words of St. Paul, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17–18).

Front cover: Sawai Chinnawong, Holy Spirit, ink. A former resident in residence at OMSC, Chinnawong is from Chiang Mai, Thailand.

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Chosen by the East: Notes on Missionary Communication and Transformation

Notto R. Thelle

Many of the missionaries who journeyed to China to convert its people were themselves transformed by the encounter and became mediators between the East and the West. This article describes a characteristic change in the missionary community in China in the early twentieth century, focusing particularly on one Norwegian missionary, Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952). In many ways he was a classic expression of the dual, and sometimes ambivalent, role of Christian missionaries: they were important agents in the global transfer of Western Christianity and Western values, and at the same time they contributed to the transfer of Eastern traditions to the West.

“Converted” Missionaries

Reichelt belonged to the generation of missionaries who came to China around 1900, a time when an increasing number of them were won over by a new appreciation of Chinese culture and wisdom. Feelings of cultural superiority and contempt for the native culture no longer dominated, and the missionaries had to reorient themselves and find ways to integrate Chinese traditions into their understanding of God’s work in the world. Earl Cressy, an American observer, described this new awareness as “the conversion of the missionary.” The missionaries had come to the Far East with a burning passion for preaching the Christian message, but in the process they discovered that the East had also spoken its message to them. Abroad in the Far East they represented a universal religion and wanted to change the society to which they had committed their service. At home, though, they changed peoples’ attitudes by bringing a new breadth of cultural vision, helping them to appreciate more fully the greatness and worth of the civilizations of the Far East. “He had gone out to change the East, and was returning, himself a changed man. . . . The conversion of the missionary by the Far East results in his being not only a missionary but an internationalist, an intermediary between the two great civilizations that inherit the earth.”

This article is part of a broader study of the large and complicated network of international contacts that influenced interreligious relations in China in the early twentieth century. Knowledge of a number of important elements will be assumed, including experiences from missionary encounters in earlier periods; the extraordinary impact of Western economic, political, and military expansion and its implications for the understanding of mission; and the new disciplines of university-based sinology, science of religion, and Buddhist studies.

The Pilgrim Missionary: Karl Ludvig Reichelt

The contribution of Karl Ludvig Reichelt to the early Buddhist-Christian dialogue in China can be adequately understood only in a broader international context. Reichelt came to China in 1903 as an ordinary missionary evangelist in the newly opened field of Hunan. Within a few years he became professor of New Testament at the Lutheran Union Theological Seminary in Shekow in Hubei Province. Then in 1922 he began a unique missionary work among Chinese Buddhists, at first in Nanjing, and then later in Hong Kong, where he served from 1930 until his death in 1952.

Reichelt’s dialogical relationship with the Chinese Buddhist community in the 1920s and 1930s was a refreshing change for both Buddhists and Christians: finally a missionary appeared who broke the pattern of wholesale condemnation of the other. He not only wanted to respect Buddhism and write learned books about it, as some missionaries had done before him, but he also evidently felt a strong attraction to its piety. Holmes Welch describes him as “the first successful apologist” for Mahayana among Christian missionaries. He was changed by his encounter with Buddhism and became a messenger to his own home constituency, giving them a new appreciation of the greatness of Buddhist piety. Even with all his fascination with Buddhism, however, Reichelt still was driven by an intense Christian missionary calling and consistently tried to convert Buddhist monks.

I first give a brief sketch of Reichelt’s work against the background of the prevailing attitudes in Protestant missionary communities, emphasizing his uniqueness. My main focus, however, will be to interpret him in the context of the dramatic changes that Christian missions in China underwent in the early twentieth century. The impression of his uniqueness will then fade to some extent, but his specific contribution to the process remains.

In an earlier article in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, I described Reichelt as a pilgrim missionary. His life was multifaceted and can even appear to be self-contradictory. But the two words “pilgrim” and “missionary” appropriately characterize him: he was equally a missionary pilgrim and a pilgrim missionary.

As a missionary he was convinced that he had a special calling to preach, with a particular vision of a mission to Buddhists. Whatever he did—as a student of religion, a dialogue partner, and a preacher—he wanted intensely to share his faith with others.

As a pilgrim he was on a journey, not only to spread the message, but also to search for truth. His pilgrimage brought him into previously unknown territories and gave him new experiences and insights. In his many decades of missionary work Reichelt traveled to famous Buddhist monasteries and pilgrimage centers, from central China to the borders of Tibet and Mongolia, to Taiwan and Japan, to Malaya, Burma, Thailand, Indochina, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He dialogued with the monks, studied their practices, and participated in their rituals and meditations, always eager to learn. He often was able to address the monks, for the abbot would frequently invite him to lecture to the entire monastic community; other times he engaged in simple dialogue with interested groups and individuals. He seemed to use every opportunity to deliver his message, expecting some of the monks to be prepared to grasp the Gospel. But in the process his own

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Reichelt broke away from the contempt for Chinese culture and religion that had permeated Western attitudes toward China in the nineteenth century.

Reichelt’s understanding of Buddhism was to a great extent inspired by, and hence also limited by, his understanding of religious evolution and by his expectations that Mahayana in particular was a preparatory stage for Christian faith, as described in more detail below. Reichelt’s lifelong spiritual journey into Buddhism clearly gave him a unique position as a firsthand observer and also brought about changes in his own spiritual life. No other contemporary missionaries and few, if any, other scholars of religion in the early twentieth century were able to establish such a broad network of contacts and friendships with the Buddhist community in China as Reichelt.

The most striking feature of Reichelt’s pilgrimage was undoubtedly his ability to transform abstract theories about religious evolution into a mission strategy that enabled Buddhists and Christians to meet in an atmosphere of friendship and respect. His mission, with the somewhat offensive name “Christian Mission to Buddhists,” was known in China as the East Asia Christian Tao You Hui (i.e., Association of the Friends in the Way/Tao). It was a thoroughly Christian community, with a rhythm of worship and meditation, work and study, dialogue and teaching. Based upon a generous vision of God’s work among all people who were seeking truth, it was to a great extent inspired by Buddhist models of monastic life.

This brief sketch has featured Reichelt’s unique contribution to Buddhist-Christian relations in China. It is easy in hindsight to find weaknesses in his approach, but he certainly played a pioneering role in trying to overcome the religious and cultural barriers that separated Buddhists and Christians.

In order to get a more balanced understanding of Reichelt, however, we would need to examine in greater detail some of the many contexts that shaped his approach. Even with all of his originality, he was part of a tightly knit network of both national and international relationships, which suggests that he represents a broad movement that to some extent changed the relationships and attitudes between East and West. Perhaps he was not so unique after all?

Other Missionary “Conversions”

I referred above to “the conversion of the missionary,” which is discussed in Lian Xi’s study of changes in the American missionary community in the early twentieth century. Lian’s perspective suggests that Reichelt was part of a broader process of change, and I follow his suggestion by mentioning others who also played a role in the changing relationship between Buddhism and Christianity.

Richard and Reid. One of the towering figures in this context is the Welsh Baptist missionary Timothy Richard (1845–1919). After a few years of traditional preaching, he became increasingly involved in social work. He realized that China would not change unless one also addressed the Chinese leadership, that is, the religious and political leaders, most notably the Confucian-trained officials. One element in Richard’s approach was to develop language and terminology that could make the Gospel immediately understood at various levels of society. He established a great network of contacts with Chinese leaders, engaged in dialogue with them, and studied their scriptures. He even wrote a catechism for Confucians and planned to write corresponding literature for Taoists and Buddhists. His work, however, was increasingly regarded as controversial, and in 1891 he had to leave his missionary society. He then involved himself in literary work and became active in what was later organized as the Christian Literature Society.

Richard is significant in our context because in many ways...
he laid the foundation for Reichelt’s involvement with Buddhism. Richard’s influence can be observed not only in Reichelt’s policy of seeking contact with religious leaders and searching for terminology suitable for preaching but also in his understanding of Mahayana as a preparation for Christian faith, or rather as a sort of hidden Christianity. Richard’s translation of central Mahayana scriptures, notably *The Awakenings of Faith in Mahayana* and *The Lotus Sutra*, not only presents these as almost Christian but also introduces renderings of Buddhist terminology that Reichelt later accepted uncritically and used as a foundation for his own work. Even though he regarded Buddhism as one of the “noblest attempts” to solve the great problems of humankind, Richard’s real concern was to convince the Buddhists that once they took their own religion seriously, they would be guided toward the Christian faith, which had originally inspired the development of Mahayana.

Another original contribution to theological and strategic rethinking came from Gilbert Reid (1857–1927), an American Presbyterian who came to China in 1882. Frustrated both by traditional missionary work and by difficulties with the political elites, he established the Mission to the Higher Classes in China in 1894. It was reorganized in 1897 as the International Institute of China, an “inter-national, inter-racial and inter-religious” institute promoting harmony, goodwill, and universal brotherhood. Reid is a classic example of a liberal missionary who desperately wanted missionaries to come “out of our own ruts” and to establish contact between the religions, even if it happened at the cost of abandoning traditional evangelization. It is difficult to determine whether he had any direct impact on Reichelt, but they certainly met and were probably well informed about each other.

Richard, Reid, and a few others anticipated in many ways a process of change that became far more noticeable in the next generation of missionaries, that is, those who arrived in China around the turn of the century, including Reichelt. The changes appear partly as a broad collective trend in missionary communities, and partly as dramatic changes in the attitudes and activities of a few outstanding missionaries.

**Conferences and literature.** The collective changes are revealed in the ways Chinese religion was presented at the great regional missionary conferences and in the missions literature. Chinese religion and culture had previously been a topic of missionary conferences, journals, and publications, where it was generally presented as the negative background for missionary work. In 1907 the hundredth anniversary of Protestant mission in China was celebrated with a large centenary conference. In many ways it represented the first broad manifestation of both the movement toward ecumenical unity and the wish to “naturalize” or “sinicize” Christianity. The latter concern also implied a new positive interest in Chinese religion and culture. One of the resolutions of the conference affirmed that theological education for the Chinese ministry “should be broad and comprehensive in its scope, should include the study of other religions, of other forms of ethical thought.” We note similar changes in the *Chinese Recorder*, the most representative organ for China missionaries, whose articles and comments increasingly described Chinese religion in positive terms and made attempts to relate it to Christianity.

**Hume, Rawlinson, and Buck.** I exemplify these changes by referring to a few missionaries who in different ways experienced the transforming power of China. Lian Xi pays special attention to the American missionaries Edward H. Hume, Frank J. Rawlinson, and Pearl S. Buck.

Edward Hume (1876–1957) came to China in 1901 as a medical missionary in order to make the Chinese “cleaner and happier and more Godlike,” using the hospital as a “battlefield” for the victory of Christianity and for conquering the province of Hunan for “Christ and civilization.” Finding unexpected values in Chinese medicine, he became one of the first Westerners to study it systematically. He also became fascinated with Chinese religion, regarding the Chinese classics as a sort of Chinese Old Testament. Hume argued that the time might even be ripe for messengers from the East “who would enlarge and enrich our conceptions of Christianity.”

Frank Rawlinson (1871–1937) came to China in 1902 as a Southern Baptist missionary, heavily encumbered with prejudices against Chinese religions. His convictions began to crack, at first in questioning the confessional exclusivism of the Baptists, and later through his discovery of the classical culture of China. Questioning the methods of traditional missionary work, Rawlinson eventually developed a rather romantic enthusiasm for Chinese religion and culture. The spiritual civilization of China, as he understood it, had to be absorbed by Protestant thinkers and integrated into a new Christian civilization.

Pearl Buck (1892–1973) was brought up in China as the daughter of a conservative missionary, and she returned in adulthood as an educational missionary. After few years, however, she proclaimed that honest and intelligent missionaries must understand that they no longer had a message to China.

**Goddard and Wilhelm.** Two other missionaries from the same period who are particularly relevant for Reichelt are Dwight Goddard and Richard Wilhelm. Both are remembered more as scholars and communicators of Chinese religion and culture than as missionaries, but it was actually their missionary background that prepared them for their scholarship.

Dwight Goddard (1861–1939) came to China around the turn of the century and had a superficial contact with Buddhism, based on his own interest in Christian mysticism. Only later, in the early 1920s, did he become more involved with Buddhism, due in part to his contact with Reichelt in Nanjing. At that time Goddard was hoping to create a meeting place where Buddhists and Christians could together seek “light and reality,” which he envisioned as a hospice in Nanjing or Hangzhou, designed after Buddhist models. The ultimate goal was to unite Buddhism and Christianity into one common Chinese (native) church.

Goddard regarded Buddhism and Christianity as almost identical in their search because historical studies had convinced him of the esoteric roots of Christianity, primarily in Essene traditions, in which he also found strong Buddhist influences. The great problem was that Christianity had become estranged from its roots and had become exclusive. The only basic difference between the two religions was the word “only,” expressed...
in the Christian claim that Christ was unique, as Goddard argued in 1924. He was convinced that, if the errors of Christianity could be abandoned, one might follow the golden middle way “with entire loyalty to Jesus and his way of Love.”

Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930) is primarily known as a sinologist who contributed to Western knowledge of Chinese classics through translations, and he is celebrated in esoteric circles almost as a guru of Chinese wisdom. But he actually came to China as a missionary in 1898 with the Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein (General Evangelical Protestant Mission Society), and he did not leave the mission until 1921. The mission stood for a moderately liberal and tolerant missionary tradition, with a clear expectation that religions might be an expression of God’s preparatory work in the world. A number of the mission’s representatives in both China and Japan conducted thorough studies of indigenous traditions and represented what currently might be called an emphasis on dialogue.

Wilhelm wanted to encounter Chinese culture at its highest level. His aim was not to plant churches but to influence the entire society like leaven, through schools and medical work, preparing individuals for a personal commitment to the “origin of personal-spiritual life in Jesus Christ,” as he expressed his vision. Wilhelm wanted to combine Western knowledge and Christian faith in a synthesis with the essence of Chinese culture, and his role was to be a spiritual bridge of mutual communication rather than an evangelist.

The experiences of a number of other missionaries could be added as examples of the transforming power of Chinese culture for those who opened themselves to its influence. Lian Xi refers to several such missionaries, but we already have sufficient material here to see that Reichelt in many ways was part of a broader trend among missionaries to China, whose encounter with indigenous religion and culture stimulated rethinking and new approaches and strategies.

**Young Christian leaders wanted to “de-Westernize” Christianity in order to make it indigenous.**

International Trends, National Consciousness

The change of climate I have described in China not only was caused by individual missionaries who became attentive to the riches of Chinese religion and culture, but it was undoubtedly also related to new trends in international theology and missionary thinking. The nineteenth-century missionary movement was generally opposed to all forms of relativizing, but in certain missionary circles there was room for a theology of fulfillment that combined missionary triumphalism with a new openness to other religions. The major breakthrough for Protestant fulfillment theologies took place at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, which is also regarded as the beginning of modern church ecumenism. Impulses from Edinburgh not only made an impact on missionaries’ efforts to achieve unity in their work through Continuation Committees but also strengthened the demand for independent national leadership and the need for developing indigenous forms of Christianity, with a corresponding interest in inherited culture and religion.

Along with new attitudes in international ecumenical and missionary communities, there were also remarkable changes among Chinese Christian leaders and their attitudes to Chinese indigenous religions and culture. Although nineteenth-century Chinese Christians included a few strong personalities, most were rather anonymous and did not occupy important leadership positions until the early twentieth century. The revolution in 1911, and notably the dramatic wave of anti-Western nationalism in the 1920s, created a new generation of self-confident Christian leaders, many of whom began to emphasize the independence of the church and the need to create an indigenous Christianity. Also important here was the increasing demand for dialogue with Chinese traditions in order to develop a uniquely Chinese Christian identity.

An early advocate for an independent Chinese role was Chengting Wang (C. T. Wang), who in 1915 became the first Chinese general secretary of the YMCA and, later, an influential politician. He insisted on the need to make Christianity indigenous. Christianity was “capable of adaptation,” he argued, and the Chinese were “capable of leadership,” accustomed as they were to doing things “in their own way.”

Not until the 1920s, however, did this tendency reach its full strength, evident particularly among Christian intellectuals who had studied overseas and returned as culturally aware leaders. Many of them worked as youth leaders or teachers in the YMCA or at universities and colleges. They regarded the anti-Western (and to a great extent anti-Christian) wave—often named the New Tide, the New Thought, or the Renaissance of China—as a sign of renewal to be incorporated in their approach. The movement’s strongest criticism was directed against Western imperialism, military pressure, unjust treaties, and oppressive trade and industrial policies. Christian mission was to a great extent identified with such injustices, and Chinese Christians were attacked as “lantern bearers” for the missionaries. A paradoxical aspect of the New Tide was the combination of anti-Western and anti-Christian agitation along with an appeal to ideas imported from the West, which to a great extent had been introduced by Christian missionaries. In spite of its anti-Christian elements, however, a number of Christian leaders sympathized with the movement and spoke enthusiastically about the birth of the New China. They expected that Christianity alone—though a Chinese Christianity—would be decisive as a liberating force. For many of these young Christian leaders, the combination of nationalism with the demand for modernization paradoxically stimulated their own interest in the old Chinese traditions, which were threatened by modernization. Nurtured by Western ideas of democracy and modernization, they wanted to “de-Westernize” Christianity in order to make it indigenous, and several of them dreamed of synthesizing Christianity and Chinese culture.

Of particular interest for Reichelt and the mission to Buddhists were the writings of two Chinese intellectuals who devoted special attention to Buddhism: Wang Zhishin and Zhang Chunyi. In 1924 Wang, professor at the theological seminary at Nanjing University, published a study of Buddhism from a Christian perspective. His booklet, which describes core Buddhist teachings and traditions, was meant to enable Chinese Christians to relate to Buddhism as their own inherited tradition. One of his arguments was that Christian preaching would not communicate with the Chinese people unless the preacher had a grasp of Buddhism. He regretted that Christian literature in
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Chinese could hardly compare with Buddhist literature, and he was convinced that a thorough education in Chinese culture was a necessary step in the process of indigenization. Although Wang was critical of outward “Buddhization” and superficial adaptation of external forms of indigenous religions, he nevertheless formed a community that used incense and Chinese music. Reichelt apparently had close contact with Wang in the early 1920s, and he even wrote a foreword to Wang’s book, recommending it for further studies.

A far more radical tendency was expressed by Zhang Chunyi, another Chinese intellectual. His journey toward Christian faith had begun in the 1890s, when in his studies of Buddhist scriptures he found “traces of Christ.” Out of all the Chinese religions, he argued, only Buddhism was comparable with Christianity. Buddhism was profound but difficult, while Christianity was so simple that even a child could find the way. The spirit of Christ had guided him in a way that made it impossible not to become his disciple. But in the New Testament he also found room for the other religions of China: “I believe that the New Testament gathers all the great truths of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and presents them in a concrete and practical way so that all men could receive and live by it. Christianity has the realism of Confucianism, the mysticism of Taoism, and sharing the essence of Buddhism, excels it in dynamic power. For this reason I hold fast to Christ and wish to preach him to the rising generation.”

Zhang was frustrated, however, by the superficial understanding of Christians who, on the one hand, failed to grasp the inexhaustible riches of Christianity and, on the other hand, were ignorant of other religions. If Chinese Christians would use the cultural and religious inheritance of their country to “magnify the radiant life and immeasurable love of Christ,” he argued, Christianity would spread like mustard seeds or like leaven in the meal. In this way the greatness of Christ might be brought back to the West. He even envisioned the day when “all truths and all religions will be one, without frontiers, beyond national and racial divisions.”

Zhang’s frustration with the superficiality of traditional Christianity seemed to strengthen his need to search for his own Buddhist roots. In his book Fohua jidujiao (Buddhified Christianity), from 1933, he expanded on his idea of a Christianity that is transformed by the application of Buddhist concepts.

The description of some of Reichelt’s many contexts in China—local, as well as international—shows that he was part of global networks that fostered a radical rethinking of the relationships between religions and cultures. He was one of the many missionaries who went to China in order to change the East, particularly the Buddhist monks, but who eventually found themselves changed by the encounter. He remained a missionary, but at the same time he became a messenger on behalf of the wisdom of the East.

Notes


2. The research project “Religion in a Globalized Age” (RIGA), at the University of Oslo, deals with various aspects of globalization. My own research is related to various aspects of interreligious changes in China in the 1920s and 1930s, with Karl Ludvig Reichelt as a focus.

3. Major studies of Reichelt include Håkan Eilert, Boundlessness (Århus: Aros, 1974); Filip Riisager, Forventning og opfyldelse (Expectation and fulfillment) (Århus: Aros, 1973); and Lotusblomsten og korset (The lotus and the cross) (Copenhagen: Gad, 1998); Eric J. Sharpe, Karl Ludvig Reichelt: Missionary, Scholar, and Pilgrim (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1984); and Notto N. Thelle, Karl Ludvig Reichelt—en kristen banebrytere i Øst-Asia (Karl Ludvig Reichelt—a Christian pioneer in East Asia) (Oslo: Buddhistmisjonen, 1954).

4. Holmes Welch, The Buddhist Revival in China (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 240. Mahayana is the northeastern branch of Buddhism which at Reichelt’s time was often regarded negatively as a deviation from original Buddhism. It was thought to be mixed with non-Buddhist elements from local cultures and characterized by superstitious practices, innumerable gods and saviors, and moral decay.


9. This event is described in detail in Reichelt’s Kinas buddhister for Kristus (China’s Buddhists for Christ) (Stavanger: Det Norske Misjonsselskap, 1920). See also the Chinese Recorder (hereafter CR), 1920), pp. 491–97.


12. Richard’s Forty-five Years in China describes numerous such contacts.

13. Ibid., p. 204.


While the theme of the theology of religions—as to how to relate our faith to other faiths—has always appeared on the radar of Christian theology, as a theological discipline the theology of religions is a fairly new enterprise. No wonder its canons are still in the making. What has been characteristic of the recent developments is the emergence of yet another “turn.” At the cost of oversimplifying my case, let me simply call these turns a movement from Christocentric to another “turn.” At the cost of oversimplifying my case, let me simply call these turns a movement from Christocentric to pneumatocentric approaches. As long as Christian theology was based on a more or less exclusivist standpoint, the point of departure for the theology of religions discourse was the finality of Christ. A turn to theocentrism seemed to give more space for opening up to other religions:

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

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How to Speak of the Spirit Among Religions: Trinitarian “Rules” for a Pneumatological Theology of Religions

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

While the theme of the theology of religions—as to how to relate our faith to other faiths—has always appeared on the radar of Christian theology, as a theological discipline the theology of religions is a fairly new enterprise. No wonder its canons are still in the making. What has been characteristic of the recent developments is the emergence of yet another “turn.” At the cost of oversimplifying my case, let me simply call these turns a movement from Christocentric to theocentric and then pneumatocentric approaches. As long as Christian theology was based on a more or less exclusivist standpoint, the point of departure for the theology of religions discourse was the finality of Christ. A turn to theocentrism seemed to give more space for opening up to other religions:
while Christ is one way to the Father, he is not the only one. God is bigger than any single religion. Soon, among theologians from across the ecumenical spectrum, a turn to the “Spirit” was enthusiastically initiated. The turn to pneumatology seemed to promise a lot. After all, doesn’t the Spirit speak for universality, while Christ speaks for particularity? Pneumatology also seemed to connect with the strongly pneumatological and spiritualistic orientations of other religions, especially in the East. It is here that I want to pick up the discussion and offer both critical and constructive thoughts on the question of how to speak of the Spirit among religions.

Does a focus on the Spirit truly help us avoid, on the one hand, the trap of blind exclusivism, which completely ignores the contributions of other religions, and, on the other, the flirtation of pluralism, which seems to downplay all real differences among religions? To address this question, I argue in this presentation that every one of these turns, including the last one, the turn to the Spirit, in itself is inadequate and leads to insurmountable problems. A more coherent framework must therefore be found, which for me means yet another turn—to the Trinity itself. My basic thesis, thus, is simply that the proper framework for speaking of the Spirit among religions is a healthy Trinitarian theology.

I am not saying that the turn to the Spirit was a mistaken move in the Christian theology of religions; indeed, it is a badly needed corrective to one-sided theocentric or Christocentric approaches. Yet the turn to the Spirit—apart from its Trinitarian ramifications—creates as many problems as it solves, the most typical ones being the disconnection between the Spirit and Christ or the Spirit and God. These disconnections, in turn, lead to the separation between the Spirit and the church and between the Spirit and the kingdom. What usually happens is that the Spirit turns out to be a sort of “itinerant preacher” who only occasionally visits the Father’s House; most of the time the Spirit is doing his own business in the Far Country, as it were.

A healthy Trinitarian theology is the best safeguard against lacunae such as these. Here I can only touch on some elementary issues; for those interested in a fuller discussion, I refer to my 2004 monograph Trinity and Religious Pluralism. Here I first give a brief review of existing Trinitarian approaches to religions and highlight their problems and their promises. Second, I suggest five foundational “rules,” or guidelines, for speaking of the Spirit among religions in a Trinitarian framework. Third, I conclude with a few comments regarding how to begin to apply these rules to an actual interfaith dialogue.

Trinity and Religions: Crucial Explorations

The pioneer in the field of relating the Trinity to religions was the Catholic Raimundo Panikkar. In his small yet highly significant book The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man (1973), Panikkar argued for the viability of a Trinitarian approach based on the groundbreaking idea that not only do all religions reflect a Trinitarian substructure but there is also a Trinitarian structure to reality. He speaks of a “cosmotheandric” principle—the coming together of cosmic, divine, and human, the supreme example of which is the incarnation. The main problem with Panikkar’s argument is that he ends up constructing a highly idiosyncratic view of the Trinity that is hardly sustainable biblically. Also problematic in Panikkar’s proposal is the divorce between Christ and history and, consequently, also between the Spirit and Christ.

Another Catholic theologian—the late, veteran theologian of religions Jacques Dupuis, in his magnum opus Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (1997)—made a lasting contribution to the topic of the Trinity and religions. I am somewhat critical of Dupuis’s approach, however, for its tendency to downplay the integral relation of the Spirit to the church and, consequently, the relation of the kingdom to the church. Recently, the most significant Trinitarian theology of religions outside Catholic theology has come from the hand of S. Mark Heim. His book The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends (2001) claims to be the “most pluralistic” theology of religions yet to appear. On the basis of the diversity in the trune God, Heim advances the thesis that, not only are religions different, but they also have different God-willed “ends” in terms of salvation goals. While I applaud Heim’s sincere effort to construct a new way of looking at other religions through the lens of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, I find both his methodology and the main results of his proposal wanting. The whole logic of jumping from the fact of “diversity” in the Godhead to the idea of “diversity” of religious ends is unwarranted and resists the basic goal of the concept “Trinity,” namely, to maintain the unity of God’s salvific work and person.

A very promising contribution titled The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity (2000) comes from the Catholic Gavin D’Costa of England. I see three major contributions that D’Costa makes. First, he shows the fallacy of pluralistic approaches, both Christian and those of other religions. Second, D’Costa argues that because of the presence in the world of the Spirit of God, “there too is the ambiguous presence of the trume God, the church, and the kingdom.” In other words, the Spirit’s presence in the world is not only integrally Trinitarian but also ecclesiological, which in turn is related to the coming of the kingdom. D’Costa, unlike most contemporary theologians who avoid an exclusivistic approach to religions, thus keeps together Spirit, Trinity, church, and kingdom. Third, D’Costa argues that while religions as such are not salvific, we Christians cannot—and should—learn much through “the Holy Spirit’s invitation to relational engagement.” Other proposals have been made, but I find the work of these four the most valuable.

Five Trinitarian Rules

In this section we consider five rules for speaking of the Spirit in the world and among religions.

Rule 1: The Trinity is the way to distinguish the Christian God from all other gods. No less a theological giant than Karl Barth made the following programmatic statement: “The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation.” In other words, “Trinity” is not an appendix to the notion of the
one God; rather, the “name” of the biblical God is Father, Son, and Spirit. It is not possible to speak of the Father as “God,” as if Son and Spirit were not needed to consider God. The Father’s relation to the Son and the Spirit is foundational for the identity of the Father. The very understanding of God thus becomes relational, as contemporary Trinitarian theology rightly insists. The biblical idea of God as love means specifically that the triune God exists as a communion of eternal love between Father, Son, and Spirit.

Furthermore, “Trinity” introduces not only relationality (communion) into the life of God, but also history and time. God’s relation—his reaching out—to the world in incarnation, salvation, and consummation is not something external to the divine life. “God’s involvement in the course of world affairs is so intimate that the character of divinity itself is shaped by it,” says Lutheran theologian Ted Peters.17

Rule 2: The mode of the presence of the Spirit in the world is Trinitarian. There is an ancient rule, pejoratively labeled the “Augustinian rule of thumb,” according to which the inner works of the Trinity are separable and the outward works (ad extra) inseparable. (Expressed differently, when it comes to the works of the Trinity ad extra, we cannot distinguish the works of the three Persons from each other. They are joint works. In the inner life of the Trinity, however, we can distinguish the relations between Father, Son, and Spirit.) Notwithstanding the contemporary critique of the rule,18 it continues to serve as a guiding principle when speaking about the role of the Spirit in the world, even among religions.

In order to refer to the presence of the Spirit, whether as the divine breath of all living creatures, as a salvific gift in the life of believers and of the church, or as the agent of the eschatological consummation in the coming of the kingdom, one needs to speak of the Spirit of Yahweh, the Spirit of the Father of Jesus Christ.19 Pneumatological discourse unrelated to the Father and the Son may seem to promise more, yet it begins to lose its contours and often ends up being nothing other than a way to affirm a typically modernist idea of a “rough parity” of all religions.

The Trinity serves as a healthy criterion here. As Dupuis notes, the Trinity helps us avoid three typical interrelated errors.20 The first puts Christ and God in opposition, as if one could choose either a theocentric or a Christocentric option. The second error that the Trinity helps us avoid is either “regno-centrism” (the idea of the kingdom of God at the center) or “soteriocentrism” (salvation, rather than a Savior, at the center) as the focus at the expense of Christology, as, for example, Paul F. Knitter seems to be doing. The third error is to champion the kind of pneumatological approach that tends to diminish the role of Jesus Christ as more limited than that of the Spirit. Indeed, the basic fallacy of the first wave of pneumatological approaches to the theology of religions was this desire to “release” the Spirit from Christological contours. The Augustinian rule is not good news to that kind of a pneumatological theology of religions, which operates with a truncated doctrine of the Trinity. The freedom of the Spirit cannot be set in opposition to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, any more than the person and ministry of the Son can be opposed to the work of the Father.21

Such considerations require some answer to the all-important question of how we establish the Spirit-Christ, or Christ-Spirit, relationship. Our answer to this question will in turn affect how we conceive of the relationship between the church and the Spirit and, consequently, between the church and the kingdom. Let’s take one topic at a time.

Rule 3: Pneumatology and Christology make one divine economy. In the New Testament, Son and Spirit presuppose each other.22 The Spirit that the New Testament speaks of is the Spirit of Christ. The Gospels clearly show the influence of the Holy Spirit throughout the earthly life of Jesus, from his conception by the Spirit to his ministry through the power of the Spirit to his resurrection at the hands of God by the power of the same Spirit.23 Theologically expressed, Jesus is both the giver and the receiver of the Spirit. The Spirit’s task is to help us turn to Christ and, by doing so, to the Father.

Wherever the Spirit inspires the knowledge of God, whether within the sphere of the church or outside it, salvation brought about by the Spirit is referred to as the saving work of Christ, namely, his incarnation, death, and resurrection. As Dupuis says, there are not “two distinct channels [that of the Son and that of the Spirit] through which God’s saving presence reaches out to people in distinct economies of salvation,” but one.24 Making the relationship between Christ and the Spirit mutually presupposing does not in any way deny the universal, cosmic sphere of the ministry of the Spirit. Rather, it is a question of being able to recognize which Spirit, whose Spirit.

The integral relationship between Jesus Christ and the Spirit also introduces the cross into the equation, another topic routinely avoided in the theology of religions, presumably for the sake of not hindering dialogue. With reference to Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of the cross, Eugen Mattei of Fuller’s Center for Advanced Theological Studies comments succinctly in his recent Ph.D. dissertation: “The cross, therefore, where God himself was in Christ (2 Cor 5:19), is the place where God represents and reveals himself, and even more than that, it is the place where he identifies and defines himself.”25 In other words, the cross is not something external to the divine life of the Trinity but an identifying element. Yes, the cross is a scandalous event, but it also is an everlasting testimony to the willingness of the triune God not only to share in the suffering of the world but also to let suffering and pain become part of the divine life. The Spirit, at work in the world after the cross, is the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ.

Speaking of the universal presence of the Spirit as integrally related to the particularity of Jesus and his cross helps us qualify and critique the mantra that the Spirit represents universality, whereas the Son represents particularity. Of course this is a true statement—as far as it goes—but it cannot be taken as an absolute rule. Consider biblical passages such as the Prologue to the Gospel of John, which paints a picture of the Word in no less universal terms.26 If Christology is depicted in both particular and universal terms, what can be said about the Spirit in this respect? The Spirit speaks not only to universality but also of particularity; any talk about the Spirit in a Trinitarian context is always specific, even if universal in its scope. Otherwise, we lose all contours to distinguish whose Spirit we are considering. One also needs to be careful about using the term “universality” of the Spirit (so evident in much of Christian theology of religions that
is more liberal), for the simple reason that back at the beginnings of Christian theology, any kind of universal claim made by a small group of religious enthusiasts seemed to be quite scandalous (and thus a particular!) claim.27

Rule 4: The Spirit creates a community in the service of the kingdom. Here, going beyond the Spirit-Christ relation, we need to address also the church. How should we speak of this Spirit-Christ-church triad?28

One of the reasons that I find the otherwise helpful proposal of Jacques Dupuis somewhat truncated is that he tends to undermine the integral relationship between God and God’s kingdom, as if the latter would make Christian theology more exclusive. He also tends to resist the integral relationship between God and the church in the world. Unlike Dupuis and many others, Gavin D’Costa insists on the integral relationship between the presence of the Spirit and the Father and Son, which then translates into an integral relationship between the triune God and the church.

D’Costa contends that the Holy Spirit’s presence within other religions is both intrinsically Trinitarian and ecclesiological. It is Trinitarian in referring the Holy Spirit’s activity to the cross of Christ, the paschal mystery, and it is ecclesial in referring the paschal event to the Spirit’s constitutive, community-creating force.29 It is no accident that in the aftermath of the Easter event, when the Spirit was poured out at the Day of Pentecost, the church was formed, a church sent to the world. The very foundation of the church is Trinitarian: in the New Testament the church is called the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit.

The renewal of communion theology has helped us revive the understanding of the Christian God as relational, as love. Salvation is not individualistic (even though it is personal). To be saved means to be in communion. This connection of the Spirit with church communion does not entail domesticating the Spirit, who blows where he wills, but it reminds us that the Spirit is in the business of building the church of Christ on earth to further the coming of the kingdom of God. While the Spirit is not limited to the confines of the church—any more than knowledge of God is limited to the particularity of Christ—the Spirit always draws men and women to the communion with the Son, whose body the church is.

What, then, is the role of the kingdom of God, which is much larger than the church? The church is the sign of the coming of the kingdom of God, and it is being drawn into the eschatological movement through which God fulfills his purposes in the world. Having created the world, God cannot be God without his kingdom.30 The Trinity therefore rules out the kinds of kingdom-centered approaches in which the advancement of the kingdom is set in opposition to or divorced from the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Trinity also rules out the kinds of pneuma-centered approaches in which the “universal” ministry of the Spirit is divorced from Christological contours and is, therefore, treated as if it were unrelated to the church, the body of Christ.

Rule 5: The Spirit invites the church to “relational engagement with religions.”31 Having established the close connection between the Spirit and the church—as well as that between Spirit, church, and kingdom—one also must add that at the same time, the Spirit is constantly calling the church to what D’Costa calls a “relational engagement” with religions. The Trinity as communion allows room for both genuine diversity (otherwise we could not talk about the Trinity) and unity (otherwise we could not talk about the one God). Communion serves as the paradigm for relating to the religious Other, too. It is not about denying differences or eliminating distinctives, as is typical of various sorts of “rough parity”—type pluralisms; rather, communion is about encountering the Other in a mutually learning, yet challenging, atmosphere.32

The Christian, coming from a particular perspective, is both encouraged and entitled to witness to the triune God of the Bible and his saving will, yet is at the same time prepared to learn from the Other. This approach helps the Christian to get to know the Other and may also lead to the deepening of one’s own faith. D’Costa says pointedly: “The other is always interesting in their difference and may be the possible face of God, or the face of violence, greed, and death. Furthermore, the other may teach Christians to know and worship their own trinitarian God more truthfully and richly.” D’Costa thus believes that Trinitarian theology provides the “context for a critical, reverent, and open engagement with otherness, without any predictable outcome.”33

Seen from a Christian perspective, other religions are not salvific as such, yet they can help the Christian church to penetrate more deeply into the divine mystery. The acknowledgment of the gifts of God in other religions by virtue of the presence of the Spirit—as well as the critical discernment of these gifts by the power of the same Spirit34—means that there is a real Trinitarian basis to Christianity’s openness toward other religions. It also ties the church to the dialogue with the Other: wherever the presence of the Spirit—and thus the presence of God—is to be found, it bears some relation to the church. Thus, the discernment of the activity of the Holy Spirit within other religions must also bring the church more truthfully into the presence of the triune God. Again, citing D’Costa, “If the Spirit is at work in the religions, then the gifts of the Spirit need to be discovered, fostered, and received into the church. If the church fails to be receptive, it may be unwittingly practicing cultural and religious idolatry.” The church had better be ready for surprises, since there is no knowing a priori what beauty, truth, holiness, and other “gifts” may be waiting for the church.35

Applying the Rules

In this essay I have offered five tentative guidelines as to how to speak of the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit among religions; they are simply a beginning of a pneumatological theology of religions in a Trinitarian framework. Here let me ask the most obvious question: If the way to relate to other religions should be Trinitarian, how can we even begin to think of encountering monotheistic faiths such as Islam? Is not the Trinity the most unlikely candidate to consider?

I think we can learn a lot from the somewhat ironic conclusion made by the Roman Catholic Church in France, which has

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dialogued with Muslims for more than two decades: “In sum, it can be said—paradoxical as it may sound—that even though the proper theological foundation for the interfaith dialogue with Muslims is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, . . . the doctrine itself cannot be used in actual encounters with Muslims, since the Islamic faith denies it at the outset. . . . How this translates to the Trinitarian conviction, shared by all Christians . . . is one among the crucial theological questions to be pondered. Trinity pushes Christians to dialogue with other religions, especially with monotheistic ‘cousins,’ yet at the same time it also sets rules for Christian talk about God.”

While the Trinity serves as the theological structure for relating our faith to other faiths, it can hardly function as the prolegomenon (or first words) in many interfaith encounters. That which is most basic and most encompassing in importance is not always that which should be spoken first. This limitation, however, is not necessarily a weakness but rather an asset: the value of Trinitarian theology is never assessed in terms of tallying up references to the Trinity. The power and potential of a healthy Trinitarian approach lie in its capacity to provide Christian theology with guidelines for relating Spirit, Son, and Father to each other and thus for helping us to identify the Christian God as Father, Son, and Spirit among the gods of the religions. Whether explicitly mentioned or not, the Trinitarian structure of Christian theology—or lack thereof—always makes the difference!

Notes

1. This essay is a slightly revised version of my professorial inaugural lecture given at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, on April 26, 2005.
2. For basic concepts and issues, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Typologies are still in the making; the most widely used typology is that of exclusivism (to be saved, one needs to respond to the Gospel offered by Christian proclamation), inclusivism (while Christ is the only Savior, in order to be saved one does not need necessarily to have a faith response when that is not possible), and pluralism (all religions are basically equal ways of salvation). In my own book (following the Catholic Jacques Dupuis), I name the poles of this typology ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism, and Theocentrism. For a new and promising typology, see Paul F. Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religions (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002).
7. Raimundo Panikkar, The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973); this book is also titled The Trinity and the World Religions.
9. For an exposition and critical assessment, see ibid., chap. 3.
11. For an exposition and critical assessment, see my Trinity and Religious Pluralism, chap. 9. Despite my criticism of his proposal, I also think that Heim has significantly advanced the discussion. He avoids the typical fallacy of a “rough parity” pluralism by insisting on real differences among religions and being bold about setting forth his own proposal.
14. D’Costa bases his proposal, on the one hand, on a selective reading of the biblical data, especially the Paraclete passages of John 14 and 16, and, on the other hand, on Vatican II and subsequent papal pronouncements on religions. I think much better biblical grounds can be found to support the integral relationship between Spirit and church. In addition, for non-Catholics, reference to a particular church’s teaching documents hardly wins much hearing. See further, my Trinity and Religious Pluralism, pp. 76–79.
15. See further, Amos Yong, a Pentecostal, in his Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). Yong proposes three “axioms” for the development of a pneumatological theology of religions in a Trinitarian framework: first, God is universally present and active in the Spirit; second, God’s Spirit is the life-breath of the imago Dei in every human being and the presupposition of all human relationships and communities; third, the religions of the world, like all else that exists, are providentially sustained by the Spirit of God for divine purposes. These axioms, which are hardly debatable, beg for further elucidation and clarification.
18. Among others, Karl Rahner, R. W. Jenson, and the late Catholic Catherine Mowry LaCugna have expressed severe criticism of the rule. For example, Jenson’s main objection is that the idea of the indivisibility of outer works is understood in terms of the creative and saving works being indifferently the work of each person rather than in terms of being the joint work of Father, Son, and Spirit. This critique, however, is hardly convincing. Why should one understand (the second part of) Augustine’s rule in this way? Ironically, it was used by the Cappadocians to establish the unity of the Godhead in terms of the unity of operation.
19. An urgent task for contemporary pneumatology—one with significant implications for the theology of religions—is to establish the continuity of the work of the Spirit from creation to new creation. Wolfhart Pannenberg has done some important groundwork here. See further, my article “The Working of the Spirit in Creation and in the People of God: The Pneumatology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,” Pneuma 26, no. 1 (2004): 17–35. See also Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp. 36–42.
20. For details and documentation, see my Trinity and Religious Pluralism, pp. 50–52.
21. One way, popular in both patristic theology (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 4.4) and current theology (e.g., Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp. 43–44), is to speak of the Son and the Spirit as the “two hands” of God. While this image makes the point, it also supports the kind of subordinationism that contemporary Trinitarian theology wants to avoid. (In her God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991], pp. 24–29, Catherine Mowry LaCugna called this tendency “orthodox subordinationism”! I find the approach of Pannenberg healthier—and more biblical—in that there are mutually dependent relationships among Father, Son, and Spirit. For example, the Father cannot be the Father without the Son, who humbly differentiates himself from the Father, thus acknowledging the lordship of the Father over the kingdom.

22. Well aware that a strand of “historical Jesus scholarship” (e.g., J. D. Crossan) has been reluctant to make much of the connection of the (eschatological) Spirit to Jesus of Nazareth, I can safely go with the majority of contemporary biblical scholars (N. T. Wright, J. D. G. Dunn, et al.), who argue that it is absolutely integral to the identity and mission of Jesus that he was conscious of the presence of God’s Spirit in his life.


24. Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, p. 196.
26. See further, Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology, pp. 188–90.
28. See the important contribution by Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee, “The Spirit and Church,” Conrad Grebel Review 18, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 20–45.
29. For details and bibliographical references, see my Trinity and Religious Pluralism, pp. 69–72.
31. This phrase is a section title in D’Costa, Meeting of Religions, p. 109.
32. “God’s radical relativity ad extra is a mirror image of the same radicality ad intra: that is to say, the whole universe, as image or ‘vestige’ of the Trinity, is endowed with the character of radical relativity. . . . Things are but reciprocal constitutive relationships” (R. Panikkar and R. R. Barr, The Silence of God: An Answer of the Buddha [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989], p. 142).
33. D’Costa, Meeting of Religions, p. 9.
34. See further, Yong, Beyond the Impasse, chap. 6.
35. D’Costa, Meeting of Religions, pp. 115, 133.

“Me and God, We’d Be Mates”: Toward an Aussie Contextualized Gospel

Robert L. Gallagher

With boyish optimism and laconic wit, Paul Hogan swaggered through the Australian film Crocodile Dundee in good-humored naivété. In many ways, his behavior and worldview typify the self-perception of contemporary Australians. In fact, one specific scene in the movie may hold the key to unlocking the Australian heart toward God. When questioned as to whether he was afraid of death, Crocodile Dundee confidently declared, “Nah. I read the Bible once. You know, God and Jesus and all them apostles. They were all fishermen, just like me. Yep. Straight to heaven for Mick Dundee. Yep. Me and God, we’d be mates.” This mythology of mateship demonstrates a theological paradigm whereby the Gospel might be presents and received by a present-day Aussie society in spiritual decline.

A marked decline in church attendance in Australia over the last fifty years has been confirmed in an analysis done by Peter Kaldor and associates in Winds of Change.8 Although the number of unchurched people had increased, the majority of Australians still saw themselves as religious.5 Reasons for nonparticipation in church life were unrelated to beliefs or religious experience but pointed instead to the nature of the churches as institutions.5 Perhaps by understanding the reason behind this lack of response, the Christian church might relate better to the Australian population.

Separation of Church and Culture

There is no simple way to remedy the decreasing percentage of Australians attending church. Some church leaders have looked to society and found reasons for the decline in secular humanism, urbanization, and the increasing power of the state over the church.6 Regrettably, few investigators have looked within the church itself to find the solution. I believe that one of the church’s main challenges is the cultural divide between itself and the community it desires to serve. Too many churches do not include essential cultural concerns in their Christian faith. Church life, though, must be grounded in the experiences, attitudes, and reflections of its people if they are going to embrace the church. By bridging this divide, the church might see a reversal of present trends. Religion in Australia needs an Aussie accent, that is, an approach that presents a contextualized Gospel in harmony with the cultural elements.

Trying, instead, to duplicate the church life of another country shows a lack of understanding for the need to plant the Gospel story in Australian soil. Unfortunately, the majority of Christian traditions that have been brought to Australia from other countries have been modified only slightly, if at all, to fit the Australian context. Therefore, the Gospel has largely been received as a foreign message packaged in imported forms that appear to show little concern for reflecting the specific nature of the Australian community.8 The unique characteristics that Australian culture has developed as its own have little connection with the personality of Australian Christianity.
European expressions of worship have dictated the structure of the Australian church service throughout its history. Much like the European landscape, these forms have a sense of composed restraint and elegance, an ordered formality through practice and experience, as well as a balanced beauty in architecture—forms that are completely alien to the Australian bush.10 Australians characteristically yearn for an expression of worship that harmonizes with the spirit of the land and its people. An authentically Australian liturgy would value freedom, irregularity, and informality, as well as a celebration of earthiness, wide-open spaces, creative energy, and rugged beauty.

The Australian church has made little or no attempt at embracing the myth that makes the Australian national identity unique. Like that of any people group, the Australian ethos has sprung from its own unique history, in which the convict working class was responsible for the shaping of much of the culture.

The song “My Religion” suggested that mateship had become a deliberate substitute for religion.

Vance Palmer explained the need to incorporate Australian myth in Australian Christianity: “Men cannot feel really at home in any environment until they have transformed the natural shapes around them by infusing them with myth. . . . Myth making is an important means of communication, bringing people together, and giving isolated communities something to hold in common.”11

Some of the more obvious characteristics of the Australian myth include egalitarian collectivism, a rough-and-ready capacity for improvisation, a light-hearted intolerance of respectable or conventional manners, and an anti-authoritarian attitude. There is also a conviction that the working bushman is the “true Australian,” a view that includes the concept of mateship. This value has led to an egalitarian and familiar attitude toward God—one, however, that is not essentially sacrilegious.12

Traditions of Aussie Mateship

Mateship, the spirit of comradeship, originated as a response to the historic and geographic conditions of a harsh continent, where difficulties were shared and mutual dependence was needed. Between the years 1788 and 1868, over 160,000 convicts were transported from the British Isles to Australia. The chief trait among them was their strong feeling of group solidarity and loyalty. Amid the cruel environment of eighteenth-century prison life, egalitarian class solidarity was the one humane characteristic remaining, once “the system” had done its worst. This fraternity was not a voluntary union among brothers but a necessity for survival among exiles. The difficulties of prison life made the practice of a collectivist mateship essential.13

Over the years, as the convicts earned pardons, the majority stayed and settled in the country areas of eastern Australia. Again, the difficult conditions in the outback made mateship indispensable.14 The great distances, the loneliness, and the harshness of the climate provided opportunity for people to treat one another as family. In a spirit of Christian community, citizens offered what they had. The sharing of money, goods, and even secret aspirations were all a part of having a special “mate.” Even when wronged, mates would be prepared to make almost any sacrifice to help one another. By the 1880s the myth of mateship had become a powerful institution, and it was further implanted in the Australian tradition by the country’s involvement in two world wars.

In 1915 the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) was defeated in a bloody battle against the Turkish army at Anzac Cove on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey. The Australian legend of mateship was propelled into the twentieth century because of the courage and sacrifice that the young diggers displayed in such difficult circumstances.15 Of all the stories passed down from this time, the one with the most continuing power is that of the work of Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick, a twenty-two-year-old medical orderly who carried his wounded comrades to safety on the back of a donkey at great personal risk. He was killed within the first four weeks of the long campaign, but the sacrifice of this common soldier for his mates will always live in Australian history and touch the hearts of the Australian people.16

Religion of Mateship

The 1905 bush song “My Religion” expressed an attitude toward organized religion that had prevailed in Australia since the beginning of penal settlement.17 The song suggested that mateship had become a deliberate substitute for religion. A number of prominent historians have noted this idea that mateship became a replacement for God.18 Allan Grocott states, “The typical bushman did not ‘care a fig’ for theology, heaven or hell, or any of the consolations of the Christian religion; he was far more concerned with the pleasures of the flesh. His strength and comfort came from mateship.”19 For the majority of Australians, it would seem that the imported Christian message has always been unappealing and unacceptable. Historically, convicts and former convicts were both cynical and contemptuous toward clergy and churches.20 The early Anglican clergymen were chaplains to the convict settlements and were often seen as extensions of the penal system. Many of the ministers were also magistrates, such as Samuel Marsden, who had such a reputation for savagery that he was nicknamed the “flogging parson.”21 The resulting attitude toward the church and Christianity has been passed on from the convicts to the bushmen and on to the Anzac diggers. Even today the Australian church has a reputation for wowserism,22 emotional rigidity, and a killjoy attitude, that distances it from the everyday life of the people.23

Rather than viewing this negative image as unredeemable, sympathetic observers will find within the Australian tendency to demean the church and clergy an underlying yearning for personal identity and self-worth. Australians have channeled this deep desire in the direction of mateship and egalitarianism out of a historic reaction caused by years of suffering and rejection. Since the desire for intimacy and security is fertile ground for the Holy Spirit to work, there is value in planting the Gospel within the soil formed from the positive aspects of the myth of mateship. For God himself, as revealed in the narratives of Israel’s past, used these same universal desires to form a covenant with his people.

Covenant Making

For the Hebrew people, entering into covenant with another person was a solemn decision whereby two persons would form
a life contract. The following actions incorporate the essential forms of the covenant agreement.

- Between two men, the exchange of a coat signified that an individual was giving his life away to the other. The two were becoming one. (1 Sam. 18:3–4)
- The exchange of a belt, with a sword and dagger attached, was a figurative proclamation of guaranteed military support and protection in time of trouble. At any time, either party would defend the other to the death. (1 Sam. 18:3–4)
- Animals were split in two, and the separate parts were laid opposite one another. The two agreeing parties would then walk the bloody path between the pieces of the carcass, foreshadowing what the outcome would be if either person broke the contract. (Gen. 15:9–10, 17–18; Exod. 24:1–8; Jer. 34:18–19)
- Blessings and curses were exchanged, by which the representatives would speak the blessings of the covenant agreement that would hold if all the conditions were observed, as well as the curses upon the partner if the agreement was ever broken. (Deut. 28)
- The meal taken together in friendship sealed the covenant and often included the partaking of bread and wine. This action represented the life of the two partners becoming one with each other. (Gen. 26:30; Exod. 24:9–11)
- The planting of a memorial was the final symbolic act so that succeeding generations would be reminded of the covenant made. (Gen. 21:27–34)

Covenants were commonplace in the Book of Genesis. All three of Israel’s patriarchs made covenants with neighboring nations that incorporated various combinations of these steps. Yahweh used the covenant ceremony to reveal his character and purpose when he joined himself to the family of Abraham and the nation of Israel (Gen. 15; Exod. 19–24). His intention was to convey to Israel that they were one together with him in covenant unity. He was their God, and they were his people (Exod. 19:4–6).

These Hebraic covenantal images continued into the New Testament. During the Last Supper, Christ spoke these words: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20 TNIV). Many early church writers also used the ancient ritual of covenant to explain the work of the cross. It was Christ who cut a covenant with God on our behalf. Even though we were not historically present, God saw the believer in Christ Jesus, and through faith in him, we are now God’s holy nation (Exod. 19:6; Deut. 7:6; 1 Peter 2:9). In essence, this relationship is mateship with God.

**Covenant and Mateship Parallels**

If God could use an ancient ritual to convey his message to the nation of Israel, then God might also use the similar ritual of mateship to speak to Australians. The core of God’s message would remain intact: “I am your God, and you are my people” (Exod. 19:5–6; 1 Peter 2:9). Moreover, the crossover would not be difficult to grasp, for the legend of Australian mateship shares common motifs with the Hebraic covenant ritual. Within the Australian environment, dangers and hardships reinforced comradeship and loyalty between people, similar to the situation in ancient Israel. The history of both nations has led to the belief that loyalty to a mate or covenant partner is fundamental and that the ultimate sacrifice is offering one’s life for a friend (John 15:13).

In the legend of Australian mateship, there is also evidence of a redemptive analogy observed in the repeated themes of sacrifice and resurrection in Australia’s participation in the two world wars. There is a similarity in the symbolism between mateship and covenant, not only in basic concepts, but also in the outward forms. For instance, the meal motif of mateship is religiously enacted most afternoons after work as mates drink together. The exchange of “shouts,” coupled with conversations centering on sports and women, and the sarcastic skills of egalitarian leveling have all the rehearsed liturgy of ancient covenant. Not only is the covenant of mateship reenacted daily in the Australian pubs and clubs through the communal “grog on,” but there is also a distinct memorial to mateship.

Each year on Anzac Day, April 25, the nation pays respect to its fallen military. The day progresses with manifestations of the more negative aspects of mateship (participation in the illegal two-up game and beer-drinking marathons at the Return Servicemen’s League clubs). Yet in spite of the day’s activities, the central issue of mateship (and covenant) is commemorated by memorializing the Unknown Soldier, who sacrificed his life for a friend.

Other themes of the Hebraic covenant are more subtly intertwined in the Australian worldview of mateship. Exchanges of coat and belt are not visibly performed in ceremony but are enculturated in Aussie society. Though paradoxical in nature, encouragement of rugged independence comes from within the confines of the “intimidating unspoken rules of one’s peer group.” The ordinary person is held in esteem because his or her life belongs to the common good of the people. If one rises above that commonality for his or her own prestige, then the “tall poppy” will be cut down to the common level through isolation and sarcasm. The sin of the Australian culture is to rise above the mass and “forget your mates.”

**Australian mateship shares common motifs with the Hebraic covenant ritual.**

Techniques reinforce belief in group solidarity and mateship, and each nuance of social behavior contains deep within it the curses and blessings of mateship.

The similarities between the Hebraic covenant and Australian mateship suggest that mateship might indeed be a viable bridge between church and community. In other words, mateship could be useful in contextualizing the Gospel for Australians. Throughout Australian history, there has always been a remnant of Christian ministers who considered the culture when sharing the love of Christ. The early period of European settlement in Australia was sprinkled with preachers who broke through the anticlerical bias of the time. Pioneer clergymen of the 1830s and 1840s itinerated among the up-country pastoral workers, where outback conditions neutralized any special privileges of the clergy, thus making room for more open relationships. History reveals that the outback workers received these bush parsons and priests with warm hospitality because they “admired practical-minded men who could talk their language and speak from their heart.” This Gospel was acceptable to the pioneer Australians because of the quality of the bush clergy.
Models of Mateship Theology

Even today these ingredients of character are what the average citizen is looking for in religious communicators. John Smith, one of Australia’s leading evangelists, has the ability to incorporate both a down-to-earth approach and a passion to reach the unchurched with the message of Christian reconciliation. As founder and executive director of five successful youth outreach organizations, Smith enjoys the respect both of outlaw bikie gangs and of corporate Australia. He is committed to transforming the lives of youth and society’s outcasts with a strong voice for social justice, coupled with a capacity for practical action. As pioneer of the “Values for Life” school seminars, Smith has spoken to students in more than four thousand Australian high schools. In 1989 he was jailed and nearly executed in the Philippines for defending peasant people, and he has been an advocate for marginalized peoples in Mexico, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. To communicate the Christian message to a society that is drifting further from it, Smith gives a common person’s view of Christ. For him, Jesus mixed with average blokes, talking to farmers and fishermen and using stories that attracted the average person frequenting the pubs, beer gardens, and clubs. In rejecting the Christian subculture that alienates itself from those outside the church, Smith takes the Gospel to where the people live, telling passionate stories that are entertaining, engaging, and relevant in a manner that appeals to most Australians.

In considering the model of mateship, the following elements are important for deciding how to develop contextualized styles of evangelism that will make connections for those uncomfortable with traditional church practices. Realism in everyday life is a key component, since triumphal Christianity is out of place in Australian culture. Many Australians are strong skeptics, who see the idea of “the endless possibilities for life’s happiness in Christ” as completely unrealistic. The irrelevance of the church to everyday life is a common cry among the unchurched in Australia.

Compassion for ordinary people will gain respect. The Australian community will listen to those whose deeds speak louder than their words. Christians must demonstrate that they care about the concerns of ordinary people. In The Word Made Flesh, Ross Langmead comments that on sociological grounds incarnational mission is particularly relevant for modern-day Australian society. In his conclusion he suggests, “The feature of incarnational mission which speaks most effectively to [Australian] society is the integration of word and deed; in other words, the credibility earned for the gospel by its demonstration in transformed lives and engagement in all aspects of the wider community. The central theme of incarnational mission is embodiment, whether we express it in terms of ‘the Word taking flesh,’ christopraxis, costly discipleship, or allowing the gospel to be incarnated. The directions of this ‘bearing in our bodies the life of Christ’ are consistently towards public friendship, solidarity with the poor, compassion, and justice. Compared to merely verbal forms of evangelism, incarnational mission strives in the power of Christ for the embodied word (or Word)”.

For this reason, the Salvation Army, demonstrating “Christianity with its sleeves rolled up”; the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Peter Hollingworth (“bishop of the poor”); “Flynn of the Inland,” a Presbyterian minister who founded the first air ambulance service; and the late David Penman, Anglican archbishop of Melbourne, are a few of the more respected Christian leaders because they have defended the weak and lowly while challenging those in power. In contrast, American televangelists are not popular in Australia, since they are seen as trying to impose their Christian beliefs on a society that tends to be cynical of organized religion. It is difficult to convince average Australians of the truth of the Christian faith simply through argument. Because they think of themselves as a practical people, they concentrate on issues that require practical solutions. In a society of skilled “knockers” that is sensitive to hollow pretension, clergy first need to present themselves as “good blokes with the common touch” if they desire to have any chance of being heard.

Another element essential to an Aussie contextualized Gospel is humor in context, which is often missing from the church. In a way that exudes his concern for people, John Smith incorporates wit into his message and backs it up by his lifestyle. The warmth of Australian humor and naïveté is appreciated by an Australian audience, as was evidenced in Crocodile Dundee. Ordinary language coupled with humor is an absolute necessity. Using the language of the common people gives the Christian message relevance to Australians. High-church language only serves to alienate them from the message of Christ’s love.

Conclusion

The church in Australia will need to change its strategy if there is any real desire for it to reverse the present decline in attendance. To simply go on as an institution and maintain existing structures and operations for their own sake will not build bridges between the church and the community. Some of the reasons for the decline in church attendance may lie within Australian society, but the decline is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes. It is also possible that many churches have simply been insensitive to Australian culture, which can explain the persistent drift away from the institutionalized church.

Insofar as the church has presented Christianity in a form inappropriate for the Australian worldview, it has been difficult for ordinary persons to comprehend the message of Christ. Since World War II, Australians have increasingly struggled to identify their national character. In this process they have found little reason to pay attention to the church. Quite simply, they have found it easy to reject any form of Christianity that does not speak “Aussie” by addressing the problems of life in Australia.

How, then, are the Australian churches to contextualize the Gospel in Australian culture? If churches seek to move beyond their existing populace, they need to consider the nature of their community and its needs. The multicultural aspects of Australian society require the development of new visions that will allow new forms of ministry to emerge which will foster willingness to include people who have been excluded from the community. Perhaps the concept of mateship can provide the necessary means for achieving these goals.

The Australian culture is still developing its own recognizable identity. Australia’s history, people, and land are shaping a way of life that is distinctively Australian. Hidden within this struggle for national uniqueness is a search for meaning and purpose. At this critical juncture, the churches should join with the Australian people and help to shape their cultural distinctiveness. They must work together to produce an authentic Christianity genuine to Australia. A major part of this Aussie Christianity might best be expressed through the biblical motif of covenant/mateship. In light of this possibility, perhaps the ensuing missiological outcome will be many more Australians boldly declaring their present and living relationship with the Savior, “Me and Christ, we be mates!”

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Notes

1. **Crocodile Dundee**, directed by Peter Faiman, Australia, Paramount Pictures, 1986.

2. "Mate ship" is the equal and friendly fellowship that a person receives from a companion—a mate. This leads to comradely independence based on group solidarity. Myth, according to Harvie Conn, "functions on that deepest level of culture's structure," *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984], p. 326.


8. Not only has the Gospel been seen as a foreign message, but also its messengers were foreign. The majority of both the Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy were trained outside Australia until well into the twentieth century, with their leaders being chosen from European countries. One of the results of this foreignness was that it was only in 1981 that the Church of England in Australia changed its name to the Anglican Church of Australia.


10. "Bush" is the term used for the unsettled or sparsely settled areas of Australia.


14. "Outback" describes the regions most remote from the settled districts.

15. A "digger" is an Australian soldier of World War I or later.

16. Two glimpses of Private Simpson may be seen in Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli*, directed by Peter Faiman, Australia, Paramount Pictures, 1981.


20. Grocott described a caricature of a bush parson in ibid., p. 176.


27. A "shout" is a free drink or a free round of drinks. One's turn to buy drinks is expressed as "my shout."


29. "Two-up" is a gambling game based on spinning two pennies and wagering how they will fall.


31. A "tall poppy" is anyone who is eminent in any way.


33. Conn states that "theologizing . . . is created out of covenant commitment to the covenant God. Sovereign grace bestowed creates reciprocal responses of faith, love, and obedience" (*Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*, p. 233).


37. A "bloke" is an ordinary, everyday type of person.


42. A "knocker" is someone who is addicted to faultfinding and is constantly belittling what others praise.


45. According to Lesslie Newbigin, "The church as a truly universal supranational society is the bearer of the vision that alone can give to each nation a true unity of purpose" (* Foolishness to the Greeks* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], p. 123).
Timothy I of Baghdad, Catholicos of the East Syrian Church, 780–823: Still a Valuable Model

Frederick W. Norris

T

imothy I of Baghdad often remains an unknown figure in church history, yet during his time the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church was the most widely spread in the world, spanning from Cyprus to China. Its remarkable growth and tenacity occurred after 451, the year Nestorianism was outlawed as heresy in the Roman Empire. In every country it reached, the East Syrian Church pursued its missionary task as a minority religion without governmental establishment. One of its early missionaries in China, A-lo-pen, received attention from the ruler had Syriac Christian tracts translated into Chinese and kept them in the imperial library. His favor, however, amounted to no more than initial assistance. Yet in the eighth century, because East Syrians in Persia had neither been a constant irritant to Muslims nor been a part of the established Christian religion under the Byzantines, Timothy was able to persuade the caliph to allow him to repair churches and to send church planters to former “Christian” lands then under Muslim rule.

Most of us have never heard of Timothy I, for standard church history courses do not tell the story of his church. I had never heard of him, even though I was a history major in college and seminary. Even my Ph.D. studies in church history at Yale did not uncover him. He has, however, been mentioned in world mission histories and now appears in some histories of world Christianity. He seems to be of significance in various Christian curricula in India and China.

Timothy came to the capital city of Baghdad as the primary leader of the East Syrian Church less than two decades after the city had become the seat of the Muslim Abbasid dynasty in 762. A previous catholicos had moved the East Syrian Church’s patriarchate there from its earlier location in Seleucia-Ctesiphon because it seemed best to keep a close eye on the Abbasid court. Influential Christian physicians already served that royal household. When Timothy died in 823, Baghdad was not only the political capital of a vast Muslim empire but also a noted center for education, particularly in mathematics, and famous for producing a type of paper that was better than any the Chinese made.

Training and Church Offices

At the end of the fourth century, the Mediterranean may have been home to as many as thirty-four million Christians. But by the end of the eighth century, as a result of the Muslim conquests, Mediterranean Christianity may have shrunk to fewer than ten million persons with the loss of communities from Turkey around Palestine through North Africa to Spain. The East Syrian Church, however, by the late eighth century had planted congregations in Syria, Palestine, Asia Minor, Cyprus, and Egypt because the Byzantine laws against them were no longer in force following the Muslim conquest. Indeed, Muslims treated the East Syrian churches relatively well because they knew that the East Syrians were long-standing opponents of their Byzantine enemies. Christians east of Antioch stretched all the way to China and probably numbered more than ten million, most of them members of the East Syrian Church under the catholicos in Baghdad.

Timothy was a good fit for the cosmopolitan city. Born into a wealthy Christian family, he was sent by his uncle George, a bishop, for initial schooling in the Bible to the revered Rabban Mar Abraham the Expositor. Under him he learned the interpretive skills of leaders like Diodore of Tarsus (d. ca. 390) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. ca. 428). Later Timothy was introduced to Greek philosophy, more hermeneutics as well as theology, and probably some medicine at the “mother of patriarchs and bishops,” the famous Adiabene monastery Bet Abe (south of Mosul, Iraq). His studies there were pursued not only in his native tongue, Syriac, but also in Greek, as he mastered certain Greek classics and a number of Greek Christian writers. Furthermore, the monks responsible for his instruction saw to it that he acquired some fluency in Persian and Arabic. He knew much about Greek logic, as did many East Syrian Church leaders. His translation of Aristotle’s Topics into Arabic was considered superior work by one caliph. Timothy notes that he spent much energy and money getting a correct copy of Origen’s Hexapla so that he could have an accurate Old Testament text.

George taught Timothy the skills necessary for leadership and helped him get elected to the bishopric at Bet Bagäsh not far west of the river Zab (southeastern Turkey) when George retired from that position. Thus with family assistance Timothy became a bishop of an influential church. When the Baghdad patriarchate came open, Timothy had been a bishop for eight years. Besides his outstanding education and his uncle’s mentoring, he also knew how to play the ecclesiastical game. At the time of the election, he had heavy bags brought in, hinting that they were filled with gold. As Timothy had anticipated, certain bishops accustomed to simony voted for him in order to collect. To their surprise, the bags turned out to be full of stones. Not surprisingly, the disappointed bishops formed a party that for some time contested his election. His supporters dismissed Timothy’s fraud as no worse than tricks the biblical Jacob had pulled.

Long before Timothy’s era, Persian Christians had suffered miserably during the reign of Constantine, who had written the shah a letter urging the Persian government to protect the Christians. Since Constantine had been at war with the Persians, their leaders saw Christians as traitors to the interests of their country. The persecution was remarkably vicious. When Timothy I became catholicos in 780, however, Byzantium was too weak to pose a threat, Persian Muslims had defeated the Zoroastrians, and the Christian minority was prospering. In a letter to a bishop in western Syria, Timothy praised the situation of nearly all Christians in his care because they were not politically preferred and were anything but established. Among them the great pearl of the faith had not been trampled in the mud as it had been in the West by first one emperor and then another, demanding the acceptance of what the ruler believed. The faith of the East Syrian Church had special authenticity because political leaders outside the communities, who sometimes tangled power before
them or threatened them with persecution, had not greatly influenced them. Timothy was worried about the political involvement of the Abbasid government in the selection of bishops and worked diligently to create proper canon law for those elections and other problems. What every Christian needed to do was follow the Fathers, who “suffered every danger for us so that we might receive their faith, their lived virtues, their customs and their manner of reasoning.”

International Mission Promoter

Timothy viewed his oversight of churches from the eastern Mediterranean to China as a remarkable opportunity for mission to non-Christians. More than any catholicos before or after him, he pursued the East Syrian monastic schools of Persia to train missionary monks. As he did, they learned Scripture, philosophy, theology, and medicine in Syriac, Greek, Arabic, and Persian. With that educational background, they were prepared to tackle other tongues and translate the Bible and important liturgical or theological texts into the heart language and the culture of the people whom they served. Under Timothy’s leadership, highly trained missionaries left Baghdad overland across the northern and southern silk routes, as well as by sea to India and China from the port of what is now Basra.

The catholicos also sent leaders southeast to the capital of Yemen in order to revitalize the church there. He reported that in what is now western Turkmenistan the khan of certain western Turks and nearly all his people became Christians. There were so many that the khan sought to have a metropolitan appointed rather than a mere bishop. Timothy was also responsible for evangelization work among the eastern Turks, who occupied land stretching east from the Aral Sea and the Iaxartes (now Syr Dar’ya) River into “the Mongolian steppes and the region north of Tien Shan.”

Timothy’s community included the painful and yet to them honorable memory of being branded enemies of the faith.

Interaction with Other Christian Groups

A second prong of what Timothy understood as his mission was to interact both harshly and graciously with other Christians who did not see the Gospel as he did. The heretical name “Nestorian” had been attached to his church. A number of histories, even some of the newer ones concerned with world Christianity, still use the name “Nestorian” to refer to this church. This designation as heretics was what forced some Syriac-speaking Christians out of the Roman Empire after the decision of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 against Nestorius (d. 451). The Second Council of Constantinople, in 553, declared that Theodore of Mopseustia (d. ca. 428) was heretical in his person and works, and that some of the writings of Theodoret of Cyrus (d. between 457 and 466) as well as Ibas of Edessa (d. 457) were heretical in their responses to Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444). That declaration pushed other East Syrian Christians across the line. Timothy’s community thus included the painful and yet to them honorable memory of being branded enemies of the faith.

As the most prominent leader of the East Syrian Church, Timothy did not abandon his tradition in an attempt to welcome other Christians. He held councils in Baghdad to codify the church’s canon law, and was himself a superb canonist. He insisted that the church’s doctrine was sound and in at least one place referred to his communion as the Orthodox Church. His portrayal of that faith, however, is fascinating. In the fifty-nine letters that we still have from him (there seem to have been at least two hundred epistles originally), he quotes Gregory of Nazianzus (“the Theologian,” d. 390), the father of Greek Orthodoxy, a bit more than he cites Nestorius. He argues that Gregory, in his work On the Son, defends an understanding of the union of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ that demonstrates the correctness of the traditional East Syrian view.

As a student of Gregory for over thirty-five years, I remember being astounded when I first read Timothy’s claim. In his edition of Gregory’s Five Theological Orations, Arthur Mason delicately warned that there were at least twelve passages in which Gregory appeared to be very Nestorian in assuming that there was a full human “person” in Jesus Christ. Actually, Nestorius, Gregory, and Timothy did not teach two separate persons. But some sections of the New Testament make one wonder whether it would be so bad to have Gregory and these other two as part of one’s heritage. When Jesus in Gethsemane prayed, “Not my will but yours be done,” who is speaking of his will as not that of the Father? When he cried from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” who was calling out to his God? Such questions have never been easy to answer.

Timothy prepared a work that concentrated directly on Gregory’s writings, either a translation of selected passages or a commentary on such pieces. Sadly, it has been lost—unless it lies...
hidden in Rome, Paris, some Iraqi monastery, or a library of the Thomas Christians in Kerala, India, where most of his other known manuscripts now reside.

The catholicos did not merely carry on conversations with the Chalcedonians in western Syria or those sprinkled throughout the eastern regions where his churches were present. He also wrote about them, often referring to them disdainfully as the Melkites (i.e., royalists, adherents of the Byzantine emperor). He also had called the Monophysite group “Jacobites,” a reference to their mangled but effective missionary Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578). Timothy disagreed with some of their important theological teachings and said so both within his own circles and in conversations with Muslims. As he once mentioned to the caliph, these Melkites and Jacobites, not the East Syrians, taught that God died in Jesus’ crucifixion. He even accused Bishop Severus of Antioch, a Monophysite, of the manner and kind of the union.” Deeply conflicted about natures itself is there quarrel or contest between us, but about the union [of the Savior as true God and true man. And not about the union of the East Syrians, taught that God died in Jesus’ crucifixion. He mentioned to the caliph, these Melkites and Jacobites, not the important theological teachings and said so both within his own circles and in conversations with Muslims. As he once mentioned to the caliph, these Melkites and Jacobites, not the East Syrians, taught that God died in Jesus’ crucifixion. He even accused Bishop Severus of Antioch, a Monophysite, of intentionally corrupting the biblical text.

Yet Timothy wanted to stay as close to these Christians as he thought possible. At least once he insisted that all three groups believed in one oōsia (essence) and three hypostases (persons) in the Trinity. They also “confess[ed] in the same manner our Savior as true God and true man. And not about the union [of the natures] itself is there quarrel or contest between us, but about the manner and kind of the union.” Deeply conflicted about relationships with Melkites and Jacobites, Timothy could both see and articulate significant themes that they shared with his communities.

**Positive View of Muhammad**

Finally, the catholicos not only was a mission administrator but also was an active missionary himself. In 781 Caliph al-Mahdi (775–85) invited Timothy to return to the court in order to discuss religion. Timothy evidently went under the protection of the muwilis, a type of decree that encouraged those invited to the palace to talk freely about whatever they knew of their religion and Islam without any threat of death. That institution was one of the pillars of the great Muslim university system that eventually emerged when Europeans had scarcely dreamed of such institutions.

Al-Mahdi had spoken with Timothy before. Now he wanted to understand more about the Christians. They debated for two days. The caliph already knew a great deal, but most of what he understood represented Muslim stereotypes of Christian doctrine. While listening to Timothy’s initial “complimentary address” about “God and his eternity,” he broke in and asked how such a wise person as the catholicos could worship a god who married a woman and had intercourse with her that produced a child. Surely such deeds were unthinkable of God. Timothy responded that the Holy Spirit had no genitals. The conception of Christ was not like that of a human.

The caliph also wondered how anyone could worship three gods. Certainly Father, Son, and Spirit were three and not one. Away with this three—worship the one true God! The catholicos responded respectfully with selected images. The sun is one and has its spherical shape, light, and heat. The three-denarii gold piece, a part of Muslim currency, was clearly one and three. In each case the oneness did not cancel the threeess.

Neither man convinced the other, but both probably understood a bit more after the dialogue. The catholicos conceded that if the Gospel had actually mentioned Muhammad as a prophet to come, then he and others would have accepted him. When al-Mahdi pressed Timothy on the second day for what he thought of Muhammad, the patriarch went further than he had gone during the first day. He had already said that Muhammad was not a prophet like Moses and that he was not the Holy Spirit incarnate, thus not the reality promised by Old and New Testament prophecy. Still the caliph found that a series of Timothy’s utterances would have been both true and well stated if he had accepted the Prophet. A large part of what al-Mahdi affirmed was the catholicos’s positive assessment of Muhammad, which I quote in full here.

Muhammad is worthy of all praise by all reasonable people, O my Sovereign. He walked in the path of the prophets and trod in the track of the lovers of God. All the prophets taught the doctrine of the one God, and since Muhammad taught the doctrine of the unity of God, he walked, therefore, in the path of the prophets. Further, all the prophets drove men away from bad works, and brought them nearer to good works, and since Muhammad drove his people away from bad works and brought them nearer to good ones, he walked, therefore, in the path of the prophets. Again, all the prophets separated men from idolatry and polytheism, and attached them to God and his worship. And since Muhammad separated his people from idolatry and polytheism and attached them to the worship and the knowledge of one God, beside whom there is no other God, it is obvious that he walked in the path of the prophets. Finally Muhammad taught about God, His Word and His Spirit, and since all the prophets had prophesied about God, His Word and His Spirit, Muhammad walked, therefore, in the path of the prophets.

The catholicos was mistaken in thinking that the Qur’an taught the oneness of God, His Word, and His Spirit. He interpreted one three-letter root in Arabic that appeared at the beginning of some suras as representing what Christians would call Trinitarian doctrine; he also noted that the Qur’an spoke of God

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**The catholicos conceded that if the Gospel had actually mentioned Muhammad as a prophet to come, then he and others would have accepted him.**

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in both the singular and the plural. Surely he would have thought less of Muhammad had he known that the Muslim prophet did not teach the Trinity. But his other points are sound.

Both Timothy and al-Mahdi were deeply wrong in their shared hatred of Jews. And the catholicos could be two-faced about Muslims, occasionally referring to them in his writings to Christians as “new Jews.” Timothy also had lesser failings. Though he was praised as a skilled writer who taught the arts through his epistles, he was not a very good preacher.

Yet as we look daily at Baghdad and try to think clearly about Muslims in Iraq or elsewhere, Timothy’s public assessment of Muhammad is a grand place to start. This significant Christian missionary insisted that Islam was neither primarily a Christian heresy nor totally a devilish abomination. In important ways Muhammad walked in the path of the prophets and trod in the track of the lovers of God. As the catholicos did, some of us see Muhammad neither as a prophet like Moses nor the Holy Spirit incarnate. Yet all Christians, even those persecuted by rabid
Muslims, should eventually acknowledge that all reasonable people should praise the Prophet for certain of his views and actions. At the same time we must reject the militant Islamists, as the bulk of Muslims themselves do.

**Timothy as Model**

Paying attention to Timothy I of Baghdad can help us in approaching other religions and questions of heresy. Christian faith is missionary. It is not wrong to educate missionaries well and urge them to stay true to the pearl of the faith. Paying attention to Timothy I of Baghdad can help us in ap­proaching other religions and questions of heresy. Christian faith is missionary. It is not wrong to educate missionaries well and urge them to stay true to the pearl of the faith. Paying attention to Timothy I of Baghdad can help us in ap­proaching other religions and questions of heresy.

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**Notes**


8. Thomas Hurst, “The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727–823): A Study in Christian-Muslim Controversy” (Ph.D. diss., Catholic Univ. of America, 1986), p. 86. Specialists on Origen seem not to know that Timothy would be able to find a Hexapla to have copied.


17. Ibid., p. 306.


27. Ibid., p. 155.


30. Ibid., pp. 69, 22, 23, 26. In the last three instances he speaks of the taste and smell with an apple, or the heat and light with the sun, as one would talk of the Son and the Holy Spirit with God.


Foreign Money for India: Antidependency and Anticonversion Perspectives

Frampton F. Fox

When William Carey wrote his Enquiry into the obligations of Christians, to use means for the conversion of the heathens (1792), he could not have imagined the modern phenomenon of fund-raising or the complexity of modern donor-recipient dynamics. In this article we consider one example of such complexity, namely, the increasingly tense relations that have developed during the past century between Western financial donors and recipients in India. Suspicions related to foreign donations take two forms: first, Western mission theorists have become concerned about creating financial dependency; second, non-Christian Indians have expressed skepticism about the conversion efforts of missionaries. The first and second parts of this article explore the historical background of these two concerns. The third part summarizes information obtained through first-hand ethnographic research, in which I investigated the attitudes of current Indian mission leaders toward these two concerns.1

Antidependency Mission Perspectives

In the past 150 years Western mission theorists have produced a substantial body of literature on indigeneity in which they argue that dependence on foreign money is detrimental to indigenous non-Western Christianity. As an alternative they promote the ideal of self-support. Typically, works advocating indigenous self-support—even when written by non-Western spokespersons—are grounded in three-self theory and in the writings of John Nevius.

Three-self principles. The three-self principles, which state that a church should be self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting, are associated today with the names of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Venn and Anderson independently arrived at similar positions, though the two men came from very different ecclesiastical traditions.2 They followed each other’s writings and, in the view of R. Pierce Beaver, unintentionally came to be seen as a united voice for three-self ideology.3

Not until later, however, did three-self ideals become mission dogma, with the goal of financial independence being perhaps the most problematic of the three. Though Venn and Anderson’s proposals had many supporters, crystallization of the concept of three-self church planting has been attributed to Robert Speer, who followed Anderson in leading the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission.4 Roland Allen made a major contribution toward legitimizing three-self theory by developing a biblical basis for indigenous church methodology.5 Allen’s critique of Western mission work, written for an audience of Christian leaders, was later picked up in India by the Niyogi Committee and used to support their financial criticisms of missionary “professionalism” and of the dependence of national believers on foreign money (3.3.24).6

The Nevius principles. Among the pioneers of indigenous theory, John Nevius is important for popularizing the concept of financial self-support. As a Presbyterian missionary with experience in China, Nevius could point to some success using indigenous church-planting methods. In 1890 he visited Korea, where his principles were adopted by missionaries and have contributed to the financial self-sufficiency of the Korean churches today. Nevius expounded his principles in a series of publications in 1885. A year later they were reissued as a book that enjoyed wide circulation among missionaries. Most notably, Nevius was outspoken in criticizing the “old method” of using foreign-supported native workers to plant indigenous churches. Instead, he proposed that native workers should remain in their regular jobs while they served as evangelists. He urged that local evangelists should live as normal, self-supporting citizens rather than as agents in the pay of foreigners, a practice that frequently involved sending them to strange places and separating them from their customary contacts and local resources. Nevius stressed that a core value of the new system is the requirement of self-support from the beginning of a mission effort: “The Old System strives by the use of foreign funds to foster and stimulate the growth of the native churches in the first stage of their development, and then gradually to discontinue the use of such funds; while those who adopt the New System think that the desired object may be best attained by applying principles of independence and self-reliance from the beginning.”7

A careful reading of Nevius reveals that he was not entirely opposed to use of outside funds for carrying out mission work. He did believe, however, that “the injudicious use of money and agencies depending on money have retarded and crippled our work and produced a less self-reliant and stalwart type of Christian than we otherwise should have had.”8

Other proponents of self-support. Leading up to and following Indian independence in 1947, notable Indian Christian leaders spoke in favor of financial self-support. For example, V. S. Azariah, who in 1912 became the Anglican Communion’s first Indian bishop, was a noted pioneer of indigeneity. Although Azariah may have been motivated more by contacts with foreign missionaries than by knowledge of his Indian congregations and their needs, he is to be credited with founding two of the first Indian mission organizations, which were based on the motto “Indian men, Indian money, and Indian management.”9 R. C. Das (1887–1976) was another Indian Christian spokesman who had deep convictions about avoiding financial dependency. Das

Frampton F. Fox has lived outside the United States for most of the past twenty years and presently travels in Southeast Asia, lecturing and researching on intercultural issues. He is the author of Down to Earth: A Biblical Theology of Missions (MEB, 1998).
Concerns revolving around the issue of financial dependency continue to influence the dynamics between Western donors and Indian recipients.

Anticonversion Documents

In addition to this tradition of antidependency literature, the twentieth century also saw the development of a body of anticonversion writings by Indian authors. Sebastian Kim has surveyed the extensive current and past literature related to the modern debate on conversion in India. We focus here on selected documents within this ongoing debate that express anticonversion positions in terms of monetary and financial issues.

The Niyogi Report. When the Indian constitution was inaugurated in January 1950, existing anticonversion laws in the state of Madhya Pradesh were suspended; as a result, foreign missionary activities increased. Not long after this change, Indian non-Christians began to complain about the “proselytization” methods that missionaries used, and missionaries registered complaints that converts were being harassed by non-Christians. In April 1954 the state government formed a committee to look into the activities of missionaries, headed by M. Bhawani Shankar Niyogi, a retired chief justice. This investigation resulted in The Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Inquiry Committee, commonly referred to as the Niyogi Report. Published in 1956, this massive research effort comprises two volumes and 969 pages; it was based upon 385 questionnaires and 11,360 interviews and took place in 77 different locales. The concerns the report dealt with had a financial cast, which is evident from one of its introductory sections: “It was represented to Government from time to time that the conversion of illiterate aboriginals and other backward people was effected by the Christian Missionaries either forcibly or through fraud or temptations of monetary gain, and the Government were informed that the feelings of non-Christians were being offended by conversions brought about by such methods” (1.1.2).

The section of the report entitled “Foreign Money” details the amount of mission funds contributed by ten donor nations. Though the amount going specifically to Madhya Pradesh was not known, the committee showed in detail that many organizations working in the state were receiving considerable amounts of foreign funds. The report offers conclusions such as the following: “Large amounts were received for evangelistic work in Surguja after it was thrown open for Missionary enterprise as a result of promulgation of the Constitution in January 1950” (3.3.9). Elsewhere the report was more inflammatory: “How this programme of mass proselytization was inspired and financed by foreigners would be clear from the following extract . . .” (3.3.12). Rather than focusing on its original research, this section of the Niyogi Report quotes extensively from many different written sources to bolster its conclusion that “foreign money has played a great part, from the very beginning of the Missionary enterprise in India, in securing proselytes from the poor classes” (3.3.19). In this context the works of three-self pioneer Roland Allen are quoted several times to highlight the overdependence of both foreign missionaries and Christian nationals on Western donations (3.3.21, 24). The section on foreign money concludes, “It is thus indisputably clear that financial assistance from abroad has been expanded in [a] far more liberal manner than even before the Constitution of India was promulgated, and that it is mainly with this help that Mission organisations are carrying on proselytisation amongst back ward [sic] tribes, especially in areas freshly opened” (3.3.22).

Financial donations were not the only concern of the Niyogi Report. The report also criticizes various types of Christian social service as being means of “inducement” toward conversion. The report states, “We have not found it possible to accept the contention that the immediate material prosperity of these converted leaders bore casual [sic] relation to their conversions. It is true that material inducements are not offered in all cases directly[,] but by a systematic parading of their wealth and power,
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grants of liberal loans, preferential treatment to Christians in hospitals and schools and various other methods of propaganda, a general impression is created in the minds of simple aboriginals that the only way to escape from penury is to embrace Christianity” (3.3.63).

In the chapter stating its conclusions, the Niyogi Committee reveals suspicions of a grand scheme of Western neocolonization using missionary personnel, money, and conversions. This conspiracy theory is reflected in language such as the following: “Evangelization in India appears to be a part of the uniform world policy to revive Christendom for reestablishing western supremacy and is not prompted by spiritual motives” (4.1.7).

Referring to literature on indigeneity, the committee notes, “It is said that the Churches in India are independent. It, however, came to our notice that the foreign Missionaries were still closely associated with the Churches and exercised influence through the purse” (4.2.56). The report pointedly states that to speak of one who receives money from a foreign donor as an “equal partner” with that foreigner “is a contradiction in terms,” and it likens the relationship to subsidy agreements that the British Raj had imposed (4.2.56). According to the committee, foreign aid was a means for the West to exercise control in India: “The mere withdrawal of the foreign personnel and the transfer of properties without cutting off the supplies of money received from abroad will always continue to keep the Indian churches under foreign control and direction” (4.2.73).

Reactions to this report were defensive on both sides. Christians of that time, particularly Roman Catholics, saw the study as a biased attempt to control Christian mission activity. To counteract the damage done by the findings, the Christian community expressed its concerns through a variety of sympathetic publications and by submission of documents to official forums. On the other side of the debate, the governments of various Indian states reacted by using the report’s recommendations to frame legislation prohibiting or restricting religious conversion.

Anticonversion laws. Anticonversion legislation in various Indian states incorporates the language of financial suspicion, using terminology almost identical to what appears in the Niyogi Report. For example, the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 begins, “An Act to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto.” In this act, inducement is defined as “any offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind[,] and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise.” The Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Indigenous Faith Act (1978) uses similar wording. In its 1968 anticonversion bill, the state of Madhya Pradesh uses the same introductory wording as the bill from Orissa, but with a note mentioning the large-scale conversion of marginalized peoples. The note alleges that “the illiteracy and poverty of the people is exploited and promises of monetary, medical and other aid are given to allure them to renounce their religion and adopt another religion. The Bill seeks to prohibit such conversions by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means.” The term “allurement” is defined as any “offer or temptation in the form of (i) any gift or gratification either in cash or kind; (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise.” These examples are typical of the legislative reaction to the conversion concerns during the 1960s and 1970s.

Beyond the legislative and legal systems, anticonversion critics continue to use the inflow of foreign money to question the methods of those doing mission work and the motivation of those who convert. This perspective also forms a component of the antidependency argument, in that it is proposed that the presence of foreign funds pollutes and invalidates the authenticity of local witness.

The Tehelka exposé. The concerns of the Niyogi Report live on in contemporary India. The February 7, 2004, edition of the Indian newspaper Tehelka carried several feature articles allegedly revealing a decade-old master plan according to which “American evangelical agencies have established in India an enormous, well-coordinated and strategised religious conversion plan.” The articles claim that foreign-supported mission organizations are “based on a military model with the intent to invade, occupy, control, or subjugate its population.” None less than American president George Bush, the articles alleged, was behind this conspiracy, which depended on “the persuasive power of the dollar.” Such allegations bring to mind the words of John Nevius, who, referring to China, warned that foreign money would be misunderstood as “a covert scheme for buying adherents with a view to political movements inimical to the state.” The Tehelka exposé demonstrates the continuing concern about foreign Christian donations being part of an overarching imperialist conspiracy to exercise control in India.

Responses of Indian Mission Leaders

What do today’s Indian mission leaders think about foreign money? Do they share the concerns of antidependency and anticonversion writers? In an effort to learn the opinions of those most closely affected by foreign donations, I conducted ethnographic interviews with sixty-six leaders representing fifty Indian Protestant mission organizations. These leaders responded to both antidependency and anticonversion arguments.

With regard to concerns about dependency, their responses were surprisingly uniform. Whether leaders were top-level or middle-level, and whether the organizations benefited from Western funding or not, there was a clear consensus that foreign funding could be beneficial. These leaders were not oblivious to potential pitfalls; many related stories of abuse and deception. They nevertheless were unanimous in their belief that funds from abroad can complement an otherwise indigenous ministry. One stated, “We have managed our organization for the last 114 years with our own money . . . but we are grateful to the missionaries and their contribution. Provided it is properly utilized, it is good.” The respondents cited many examples of positive cases in which funds were used with integrity and for the good of the church and society.

Although mission leaders responded positively to the idea of receiving foreign funds, they did so with different degrees of enthusiasm. Their observations can be divided into four categories, from least to most supportive of use of foreign funds. The first group said that self-support is an ideal but one that is
unrealistic for India. For example, in commenting on Azariah’s motto “Indian men, Indian money, Indian management,” one leader said, “That is a good statement, but as far as the Indian church is concerned . . . this cannot be done by the churches in India as it is financially.”

The second group represented organizations that had begun with the goal of using only Indian support but had changed through the years. Some of these leaders said that the drive for indigenous support was linked with the era of emerging Indian nationalism. One said, “Now things are different . . . You know, self-governed, self-propagating, self-supporting is entirely—well, not very biblical. There is interdependence.”

A third group, larger in size, is well represented by the statement that “foreign fund[ing] is healthy if it is used properly.” This group had no objection in principle to foreign donations but was concerned only that misuse of funds and dependency be avoided.

The fourth group consisted of leaders who were decidedly in favor of foreign funding and who seemed at times annoyed by the suggestion, especially by Indian spokespersons, that outside support might be damaging and should be stopped. A number of these leaders argued theoretically that being one body requires a commonality of resources. In the words of one leader, “God’s work must be done by God’s money. God’s money comes from God’s people. And God’s people are everywhere.” Though some in this group agreed that self-support is ideal, they balanced this ideal with the biblical responsibility that members of the body of Christ have to share their wealth. They also suggested that with increasing economic globalization, national identity is being complemented by and relativized by an emerging global identity. Their observation suggests a perception that exactly where funds originate is less significant than formerly thought. In summary, all four groups agreed that foreign money can be used in beneficial ways by Christian missions in India and need not create destructive forms of dependency.

These leaders also offered responses to anticonversionist arguments against foreign support, stating that foreign contributions have a valid role to play. Their response is captured well in the comment, “They receive too.” In other words, non-Christians also receive foreign funds for religious, social, and political purposes, and therefore they have no right to criticize foreign contributions to Christian organizations. As one of the surveyed leaders put it, “The whole nation survives on foreign contributions.” Many asserted that both Hindu and Muslim organizations within India depend heavily on overseas funding. “The quantum of money being received by non-Christian agencies will be more than the quantum of money received by Christian agencies in India,” said one leader. Some quoted evidence that the top two or three receivers of foreign funds in India are Hindu organizations. This assertion was supported by the Tehelka report, which listed Sai Baba’s Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust as the largest recipient of foreign funds.

The mission leaders showed an understanding of anticonversion arguments. They knew that non-Christians use the existence of foreign donations to brand Christianity as an alien religion, attributing motivation for conversion and ministry to foreign income and labeling Christian workers as agents of the West. One leader stated that “when a Hindu looks at a Christian, he thinks you are getting foreign money to convert.” The mission leaders also showed that they were familiar with the suspicions voiced in anticonversion literature of ulterior, imperialistic motivations on the part of foreign donors. One leader, the CEO of an organization, said, speaking for the critics, “So, the Westerners are giving their money to change our people.” But other leaders spelled out the critic’s mistaken thinking: “They misinterpret [outside contributions as part of] a large Western design to capture parts of this country with their monetary strength.” Another said, “People are even saying openly, Those days it was the British who enslaved us; now it’s the Americans who [are] trying to enslave us. . . . Oh, it is sure proof that they are out to dominate us. To destroy our culture and make us slaves of their countries.” Foreign mission donations are perceived as a colonial attempt to Christianize India. Some leaders categorized such statements as propaganda, while others blamed such thinking on envy and the fact that these critics “do not understand Christian principles.”

Conclusion

To recapitulate, Indian mission leaders were decidedly positive about the use of foreign money for missions in India, in spite of the tensions caused by antidependency and anticonversion arguments. This openness was qualified by concerns that funds should be properly given, properly received, and properly administered in order to avoid destructive forms of dependency.

Positive statements affirming the propriety of accepting and using gifts from abroad were offered by organizations that were not seeking and employing foreign funds, as well as by agencies that were raising and depending upon foreign support. These leaders saw Christian advocates of avoiding dependency through adoption of a policy of total self-support as idealistic but unrealistic. Non-Christian opponents of foreign support for mission outreach within India were accused of demonizing foreign subsidy for its propaganda effect in the conversion debate.

If there is a dominant lesson to be learned from these tensions, it is that, rather than responding defensively, both mission donors and recipients of mission funds should find reason in antidependency and anticonversion arguments for deeper self-reflection. Deeper reflection need not result in closing either the ears or the purse, but instead it should lead to reforms in the process by which funds are raised, disbursed, and used for mission outreach. In this way criticisms raised by both antidependency and anticonversion proponents may be addressed. Such reforms might include exploring new models of koinοnία with different blends of donor-recipient control and with new accountability structures which foster integrity without sacrificing the dignity of either partner. Critics may be silenced by seeing Christian sharing extended through dignity-instilling cultural forms which give and receive in ways less threatening to both local Christian identity and to non-Christian sentiments.
Notes
8. Ibid., p. 91.
15. Now more than a decade old, the debate over sending money and nationals rather than Western missionaries has been featured in Mission Frontiers; see especially the issues of September–October, 1994, and November–December, 2005.
20. Ibid., p. 211.
23. Ibid., p. 10.

Catholic Church Growing Everywhere—Except in Europe

Roger Schroeder, S.V.D.

Fides, a news agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, presented data on the current situation of the Roman Catholic Church on the occasion of World Mission Sunday, October 23, 2005. The information was drawn from the 2003 Statistical Yearbook of the Church. During 2003 the number of baptized Catholics increased by more than 15 million, or 0.3 percent, to a total of over 1.085 billion, which was 17.23 percent of the world population. Catholics grew numerically in Oceania by 0.37 percent, Africa by 0.34 percent, the Americas by 0.17 percent, and Asia by 0.03 percent. The only decrease was in Europe (-0.31 percent). While a further breakdown—for example, according to North and South (Latin) America—would be helpful, the current categories point to interesting general trends. In 1920 Hilaire Belloc made the following claim regarding the Catholic Church: “The Church is Europe; and Europe is The Church.” The statistics above point to two major general shifts since Belloc’s statement—a post-Christian Europe and a non-Western Christian majority. Regarding the latter, the 2003 data verify the well-acknowledged shift in the numerical growth of Catholics in the global South—and, one could add, Christians in general. Philip Jenkins projects that “by 2025, Africans and Latin Americans combined will make up about 60 percent of Catholics, and that number should reach 66 percent before 2050.”

Regarding Europe, not only are the numbers of baptized Catholics decreasing—to say nothing about the extremely low percentage of regular church participation—but it is also the only place where the number of priests is dropping as well. Not surprisingly, Europe also continues to see a decrease in the number of women and men religious. In contrast, the total number of permanent deacons and catechists grew in Europe (by 0.33 and 15,672, respectively), an increase that was second only to that experienced in the Americas in both categories. This growth seems to be representative of a positive development in forms of ministry and mission for married persons and laity; second, it offsets to some degree the numerical decline in clergy and religious.

From a missiological perspective, John Paul II in his 1990 encyclical Redemptoris missio referred to the mission response in
a situation like post-Christian Europe as a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization” (par. 33). What particular form will mission take in this postmodern context? For example, the German Catholic Bishops Conference has designed a plan entitled “A Church in Mission” that emphasizes the necessary role of the witness of life, the witness of the word (which includes liturgy, Bible sharing, pilgrimages, and use of the media/Internet), and Christian community. The church is challenged to approach yet another culture—Western postmodernism—in its history of crossing boundaries.

The 2003 statistics for the Catholic Church reveal other trends. The number of priests increased in every region of the world, with the exception of Europe (-1,897), most notably in Africa (+1,145) and Asia (+1,010). However, the total number of priests (405,450) increased by only 392, and the total number of major seminarians (studying philosophy and theology) decreased by 826, with the only increases in Asia (+686) and Oceania (+9). Because of the greater overall percentage of increase in the number of Catholics in relation to the overall slight increase in the number of priests, the number of Catholics per priest in the world increased by 35, now standing at 2,677 to 1. According to continents, there was an increase in this ratio in the Americas (+51), Africa (+29), Oceania (+13), and Europe (+12), while Asia remained the same. Therefore, the decline in the number of priests in Europe is proportionally even greater than its decreasing number of Catholics. Asia, the continent with the smallest percentage of increase in Catholics and the second greatest increase in the number of priests, maintained the same Catholics-per-priest ratio. Also, Asia had by far the largest increase in the number of major seminarians in 2003, which seems to indicate that this tendency may continue in the immediate future. In the rest of the world, however, the ratio of Catholics per priest is increasing, most strikingly in the Americas. This trend will probably continue, at least in the short-term, except possibly in Asia, because of the current overall decline of the number of major seminarians and the overall numerical increase of Catholics. Even Africa, with the greatest increase in the number of priests, could not “keep up” with its tremendous growth in the number of Catholics (and Christians in general). Oceania has a similar pattern, but to a lesser degree and on a much smaller demographic scale.

The total increase in the number of priests reflects an increase of diocesan priests by 707 and a decrease in the number of religious priests by 315, with Asia (+447) showing the only increase in the latter. Brothers decreased slightly by 208 to 54,620, with increases in Asia (+327) and Africa (+231), and decreases in Europe (-309), the Americas (-394), and Oceania (-63). Women religious declined in number even more sharply, while the geographic areas of increase and decrease were the same. Their total number stood at 776,269 (a decline of 6,663 from the previous year), with increases again in Asia (+3,445) and Africa (+2,429), and decreases in Europe (-9,397), the Americas (-2,843), and Oceania (-297). The overall number of religious priests, brothers, and particularly sisters has thus declined. Will this trend continue? Will other forms of Christian life and service emerge? Asia is the only region to experience a strong and consistent increase in all three groups of religious, while Africa noted a numerical increase in brothers and sisters, but not religious priests. The large decrease of women religious in Europe contributed greatly to the overall numerical drop. The Americas and Oceania, however, likewise saw a decrease in the numbers of religious priests, brothers, and sisters, but an increase in the number of diocesan priests.

In terms of the statistics for nonordained and nonreligious, the number of lay missionaries grew dramatically by 28,586, to a total of 172,331. While this increase occurred in all geographic areas, the Americas experienced the sharpest increase (+21,815), for a total of 156,461. In addition, the numerical growth of catechists in every region—an increase by 80,222, to a total of 2,847,673—was again by far most significant in the Americas (+53,675). The overall decline in the number of religious and the overall increase of lay missionaries and catechists, particularly in the Americas, indicates that lay Catholics are more involved both as catechists and in officially recognized roles in mission that were traditionally done by religious. Also, the Americas are statistically experiencing the “shortage of priests” most acutely.

A review of these statistics indicates that the Catholic Church is declining numerically in Europe and growing everywhere else. Other shifts, varying according to context, have occurred regarding mission and ministry and regarding clergy, religious, and lay people.
My Pilgrimage in Mission

Roger S. Greenway

My pilgrimage in mission began against my will, for I did not want to become a missionary. On a certain Sunday in September 1954, if anyone had told me that by the end of the evening service I would be planning to head to the mission field, I would have responded, “You are out of your mind!” But it did happen, and I can remember the exact moment. We were singing the chorus of “Living for Jesus”:

O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me.
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne.
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

As never before, Christ’s sufferings on my behalf became the motivating power in my life. Christ spoke, and I knew beyond a doubt that he was calling me to become a missionary. Half a century has passed since then, and here for the first time I am sharing openly what occurred that night. In the conservative Reformed tradition that I grew up in, there was no place for dreams, visions, and voices from above. That night I told no one of what had happened except my wife, Edna. We talked, prayed, and cried for hours, and by morning we were united in the decision: it would be overseas missions for us, for the long term, and for life if possible.

Edna and I were born during the Great Depression of the 1930s. We were both “preacher’s kids,” raised in parsonages in New Jersey and Michigan, and early in life we learned from our ministry-focused parents to put spiritual values ahead of material goals. We had missionaries in our family trees, but I personally had mixed feelings about missionaries. Some of them seemed a bit strange, driven by a passion I couldn’t relate to. Some missionaries that visited our church were poor speakers, and that disgusted me. Maybe these early perceptions related to advice I received from our four-month-old daughter, Kathy, sailed from New York City on the Queen Mary en route to Colombo, Sri Lanka. My assignment was to be the missionary pastor to the Nugegoda Parish of the Dutch Reformed Church on the island, a denomination that was established in Sri Lanka in 1642. During our years in Sri Lanka our family expanded with the birth of two children, William and Daniel, both of whom were born in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka Years: Spirits and Miracles

After finishing seminary and spending a semester at the Kennedy School of Missions in Hartford, Connecticut, Edna and I, along with our four-month-old daughter, Kathy, sailed from New York City on the Queen Mary en route to Colombo, Sri Lanka. My assignment was to be the missionary pastor to the Nugegoda Parish of the Dutch Reformed Church on the island, a denomination that was established in Sri Lanka in 1642. During our years in Sri Lanka our family expanded with the birth of two children, and I learned important lessons about pastoring tradition-bound churches and trying to interest them in mission. I learned that pastors who are committed to reaching the lost have numerous opportunities to do evangelism, even in their regular duties of preaching, teaching, and visiting homes. But these pastors will also invariably meet resistance from church members who do not share their interest in outreach.

When we arrived, Sri Lanka had recently become independent from England, and a Buddhist revival was in full swing. This revival was combined with aggressive nationalism and heavy socialism. Christian schools had been the churches’ bulwarks since colonial days, and in one fell swoop the government took them away. Christians now felt discriminated against in many areas of society, and some emigrated to other countries. For us, Sri Lanka was a type of “crash course” in Christian witness and survival in a pluralistic and increasingly hostile environment.

Life and ministry in Sri Lanka also taught me lessons about prayer, miracles, and spiritual warfare beyond anything I had learned or seen in North America. I learned that there was in fact
an unseen world of active demonic spirits that kept people in idolatry, attacked believers in Christ, and in a host of ways opposed the spread of the Gospel. My preaching during the first year did not have the effect I looked for because I did not understand the spiritual context of the congregations I served. The church members I preached to were much more knowledgeable about the unseen world than I was, and I needed to take more seriously the worldview of the Bible and the passages dealing with demons and the power of Jesus Christ to overcome them. The following story illustrates this point.

The Nugegoda Parish consisted of three congregations: one that spoke English (most of its members Christians of long standing), another that spoke Tamil (all of its members converts from Hinduism), and a third that used Sinhalese (mostly new converts from Buddhism). The “mother” of the Tamil group went by the name “Mary.” The story of her conversion and later influence illustrates the kind of lessons in contextualization I needed to learn both as a pastor and as a missionary.

Mary belonged to a colony of Hindu Dalits, or “untouchables,” who lived near the church. They made their living by doing the most menial work, and because of their low status, they were not allowed to enter Hindu temples. There was not a Christian among them until Mary appeared and miracles began happening. Mary was barren, a horrible condition in the eyes of her people, and one Sunday her husband threw her out. In desperation, she did a totally unexpected thing. She entered the Nugegoda Reformed Church in the middle of a Tamil worship service, walked down the center aisle, and fell on her knees beneath the pulpit, weeping. The pastor came down from the pulpit and got down on his knees beside her. When she told him her problem, he prayed that God would heal her from barrenness and bless her with a son.

God answered the pastor’s prayer, and more. The woman soon discovered she was pregnant. She became a Christian, and when she was baptized, she chose the name “Mary.” She became pregnant every year and gave birth to one son after another. Her Hindu neighbors always predicted that the next child would be an idiot or would have three legs and no hands. But each new baby was healthier than the one before. Mary never stopped praising God, and one by one her neighbors followed her example and became Christians.

A Lesson in Contextualization

In 1961 my father visited us in Sri Lanka, and I took him around to meet the Tamil believers. At Mary’s home, just as we were about to leave, she produced a small bottle of oil and asked my father to bless it. My father froze. Although he pastored a large church in North America and over the years had run across all kinds of situations, he was not prepared for this request. With a bewildered look on his face he asked me what to do. “Pray that whoever is anointed with the oil be blessed in whatever way the person needs,” I replied. So he prayed, with a theological lump in his throat, I am sure. A few weeks later Mary showed up at church with a woman who had just been released from an insane asylum. Mary had gone to the asylum, anointed the woman with the oil my father had prayed over, and within a few days the woman was completely normal and had been released. She wore a smile from ear to ear and announced to everyone that she wanted to become a Christian. After a period of instruction, I baptized her.

Early experiences such as these taught me important lessons about the connection between faith, prayer, and miracles. Semi-nary had not prepared me in this area, nor had the church of my childhood. Yet the lessons I learned in Sri Lanka influence my missiology to this day. I believe that the “signs and wonders” crowd goes too far by virtually reducing mission strategy to figuring out how to defeat territorial spirits. But let no one tell me that demons are not real, or that praying for the miraculous is futile, or that ministry on the frontier between Christian faith and idolatry is not spiritual warfare. I have only to remember Mary and her bottle of oil, and the Tamil “untouchables” who regarded this woman as their spiritual mother and followed her to Christ. Mary taught me lessons in contextualization that I have not forgotten.

A Strategic Mistake

Looking back on my years of ministry among the Tamils, I regret making a strategic mistake. The small community of Tamils near our church had ties with similar groups all over the city and beyond. With some encouragement, the Christward movement that began with Mary’s conversion might have spread to other places. As far as I know, this did not happen, and I regret not seizing the opportunity that was before me. At that stage of my missionary pilgrimage I had not yet developed “church growth eyes,” nor was I fully aware of the potential of people-group linkages for spreading the Gospel.

A happier note regarding my involvement in Tamil ministry was the help I gave to Samuel Daniel, a gifted Tamil Christian in Madras, India. Together we launched a literature ministry called the Faith, Prayer, and Tract League of India, which continues to this day. Its first publications were only in Tamil, but later it branched out to other languages. Only in heaven will we know how many Indian people have been won to Christ and how many churches started through this ministry.

Our years in Sri Lanka served to deepen me spiritually. A friend introduced me to the devotional writings of Andrew Murray, a missionary statesman of an earlier time from South Africa. Murray opened my eyes to biblical teachings about absolute surrender to Christ, intercessory prayer as missionary action, the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, and the power of the Bible, when clearly preached, to change lives. I had some lines written by Andrew Murray framed and have kept them above my desk to this day, for they express the goal of my life: “Brother! Seek to be a man of God! Let God in the Morning Watch be all to thee. Let God during the day be all to thee. And let thy life be devoted to one thing, to bring men to God, and God to men, so that in His Church and in the world, God may have the place due to Him.”

Mexico: A Rural Seminary in a Megacity

In 1963 our mission board transferred us to Mexico City, the capital of Mexico. At that time Mexico City had a population of approximately five million and was growing fast. My main
assignment was to teach church history and evangelism at the Juan Calvino Presbyterian seminary. The school's location suggested that it served the city, but in fact its orientation was largely rural. Most of the students came from rural areas, and fieldwork assignments were almost entirely in villages. On Friday afternoons seminarians and faculty members boarded vans and buses to travel to distant rural communities for weekend ministries.

Demographically, this approach did not make sense, with the country's population predominantly moving from rural to urban areas. The seminary enjoyed a strategic location in one of the world's biggest cities, with enormous potential for church planting. But denominational leaders clung to the notion that real mission work took place in distant villages, on the sides of mountains and across rivers, even though more lost people might be found in one city neighborhood than in a whole range of small villages. In their minds, "real" missionaries went to villages, even if en route to the villages they passed buses jammed with rural people moving to the city.

For a few years I went along with the prevailing notion. I spent many weekends high in the mountains working among people that spoke the Mazahua language. I teamed up with a Wycliffe Bible translator, Donald Stewart, who was working on the Mazahua translation of the New Testament. In Mazahua villages like Rancho Viejo, Miahuatlán, Santa Cruz Viejo, Ayalita, and other small towns in between we visited homes, read Scripture, preached, and started churches. I kept horses in the last village reachable by motor vehicle. A pattern emerged in the way the Gospel spread from village to village, which prompted Alan Tippett, an Australian anthropologist teaching at the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, California, to come to Mexico and accompany me for a week to analyze what we had observed. I enjoyed village work, but something inside told me that strategically we were making a mistake.

Urban Ministry and a Church-Planting Institute

On one of his speaking trips to Mexico City, church-growth strategist Donald A. McGavran listened to my stories about planting churches among the Mazahuas. He heard my questions concerning the wisdom of emphasizing rural mission at a time of rapid urbanization. On the last day of his visit, McGavran asked me to drive him out to the fringes of Mexico City to show him where the newcomers, the "squatters," settled.

It was in one of those areas, on a dirt street swarming with flies and kids, that McGavran turned to me and said, "Roger, it's great what you are doing in the mountains. But in the future, the frontier of missions will lie in the city. I challenge you to direct your efforts here and make your goal the multiplication of urban churches." I took up McGavran's challenge, and that began a new chapter in my missionary pilgrimage. Names of Mexico City neighborhoods like San Francisco, Ramos Millán, A. López Mateos, Arenal, Providencia, and dozens of others began to appear in my mission journal. In Sri Lanka I had engaged in pastoral urban mission without much of a plan or sense of direction. But now I had a clear vision, specific goals, and the outline of a strategy to achieve them.

I was blessed with a close friend in Mexico, a Presbyterian minister by the name of Efren Haro Robles. In his "previous ministry," as he expressed it, he had been a Catholic priest, and he understood Mexican culture inside and out. Together we planned an institute that would focus on training urban evangelists and church planters. With the support of my mission board, we launched the Mexican Christian Institute in 1967. I continued teaching part-time at the seminary, but my major attention was focused on the new institute, particularly its evangelistic outreach. The school offered basic courses in Bible knowledge, Christian doctrine, church organization, and practical evangelism. We told the students frankly that no one would receive a diploma without first planting a church. This demand made some drop out, but most continued. In the first four years of the institute's existence, more than fifty house churches were planted. Some of them dissolved for various reasons, but half of them developed into established congregations and spawned other churches. Today, many of them are occupying their third or fourth building. The story of the institute and the urban church planting strategy we followed is told in my first book, An Urban Strategy for Latin America (Baker, 1973).

Once the institute was running smoothly, I left Mexico for doctoral studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, studying under Calvin Guy. I obtained my doctorate at the same time my wife received her master's degree in Spanish literature from Texas Christian University, also in Fort Worth. Shortly thereafter, Christian Reformed World Missions appointed me to be its Latin America director. The position involved traveling regularly to visit missionaries and churches in South and Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. In between trips, I was at mission headquarters in Grand Rapids or out speaking on mission in churches and schools. My record book shows that I have preached over 4,000 times, in 38 different countries.

Family Matters

For Edna and me the missionary journey has always been a family affair. We went out in 1959 with an infant, two children were born to us in Sri Lanka and one more in Mexico, and we adopted a nine-year-old orphan in Mexico City. We avoided sending our children to boarding schools, using local schools or home schooling instead, and in one case we started a private school. After I moved into mission administration and traveled more frequently, Edna carried a load of responsibilities with the children. Yet she also completed her Ph.D. in adult education and became a tenured faculty member at Calvin College, Grand Rapids. At various times she taught courses at seminaries in North America and overseas, and she served as a consultant to...
seminaries that were revising their curricula. I thank God for Edna’s help and support. Mission for us has been a team project from the outset.

Our children went with us as we moved from one country to another and adjusted to major cultural changes. The hardest adjustment for them was coming to North America, but after a few bumps they came through it reasonably well. From early childhood, the children took an interest in mission work, whether it was folding tracts on the living room floor, going with Dad from door to door, or translating for short-termers. I was always thankful that when I had to be away, I knew the children understood and accepted the mission I was on.

All my children married Christians. One daughter and her family have been missionaries for fifteen years in the Dominican Republic. Our older son serves with Young Life, and our younger son is a pastor. Our adopted daughter is married to a Mexican evangelist and teaches school. Our youngest daughter is a schoolteacher, manages a farm, has four children, and her husband is a leader in their church. Altogether, they’ve given us eighteen grandchildren, which means a lot of birthdays to remember and praying to do.

Our advice to young families contemplating missionary service and wondering whether it will have negative effects on their children is this: trust God, make your family relations as loving and secure as you can, and help your children to identify with your mission. When the mission is made a family affair, it’s really a lot of fun.

Philadelphia and Urban Mission

In 1982 Harvie Conn, a friend from my college days, convinced me to accept an appointment to teach in the new doctoral program in urban mission at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. It was an exciting new venture. Most of the classes were held at the Center for Urban Theological Studies (CUTS), in the heart of multiracial, inner-city Philadelphia. Edna and I bought a row house not far from CUTS, and she too did some teaching. CUTS, in that day, was one of the most creative institutions in the world for training inner-city church leaders in a thoroughly contextual way. It was a marvelous laboratory for all kinds of urban ministries, and it was a privilege to be part of it. Unfortunately, as so often happens, the original vision faded with the passing of the founders. But thankfully, it continues to play a role as an inner-city Christian college.

Soon after moving to Philadelphia I started the journal Urban Mission with financial support from Westminster Seminary. The bias in mission against things urban was so strong at that time that the friendly editor of a leading evangelical magazine advised me not to use the word “urban” in the title. But I was stubborn enough to do it anyway, and the word has gained a better status since then. Urban Mission came on the market at a time when many evangelical agencies preferred to avoid cities. Harvie Conn and I believed that the mission world needed a new urban advocate, and that was what the journal became. After publishing Urban Mission for six years, I turned it over to Harvie, and the journal continued under his editorship until shortly before his death in 1999. The journal folded because of lack of funding, and I regret its demise. With more than half the world’s unsaved and unchurched people residing in cities, mission still needs a journal that is evangelical, scholarly, and focused on cities.


My Hardest Task

In 1986 the synod of my denomination appointed me to the hardest task in my life. Two separate mission agencies had developed in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), both working overseas and competing for support. Both sent out missionaries, but they were trained differently, used different vocabulary, had different goals, and often did not get along together. The one focused on relief and development, and the other on evangelism and planting churches. The problem of properly relating word and deed, evangelism and social service, in mission is an old one, easily resolved in the classroom but not so well on the field. The CRC had made the mistake of giving the two emphases separate organizational structures, separate support systems, and different management styles, and it ended up with two opposing camps and messy disagreements.

My assignment from the synod was to put an end to the friction and work out a better relationship between the two agencies. It was expected that we could build a missiological platform on which both agencies would feel comfortable. To this end a new “super” board was established, called Christian Reformed World Ministries, and I was appointed its executive director.

During the next four years, I traveled a great deal, to Asia, Africa, and Latin America, wherever my church was working and trouble was brewing. In each place I tried to identify the friction points, understand the personalities involved, and as best I could pour oil on troubled waters. Most important, I tried to change the thinking of some of the missionaries and develop a consensus that the two streams of mission ought to be complementary to one another. Collaboration was the key, not competition and criticism, and synergism was the goal.

I would say that I succeeded to a degree. The major “fires” were put out, better understanding was established, and at the highest level the two agencies began doing more of their planning together. Monitoring continued to be needed, however. My position on the issues involved is best expressed in my small book Together Again: The Kinship of Word and Deed (MARC, 1998). Eventually the board that I served on was phased out, and I moved back to my alma mater, Calvin Theological Seminary, where I taught global mission until my retirement in 2001. It has been quite a journey and, thank God, a joyous one.
The Legacy of Elizabeth Fairburn Colenso

Catherine R. Ross

“T"his is the story of a woman, sincere, humble, unselfish and generous. One who lived for others and never spared herself in any way.”4" Thus began the account of Elizabeth Fairburn Colenso’s life by her granddaughter Francis Swabey. Elizabeth herself, as a young woman, once wrote, “We have no abiding city … we are but strangers and pilgrims on earth,”5 lines that anticipated much of the heartache of her long life of faithful service.

Elizabeth was born into the Fairburn family at Kerikeri, New Zealand, in August 1821. Her parents, William Fairburn and Sarah (née Tuckwell), came to New Zealand as Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries in 1819, where they spent the rest of their lives. William was a carpenter and a catechist for the CMS, and Sarah taught at mission schools, brought up the family, and endured the frequent absences of her husband. In 1834 Elizabeth’s family moved to a new CMS station at Puriri, and Elizabeth was left behind in the household of Henry and Marianne Williams to continue her schooling at the mission school in Paihia. She was indeed “a complete child of the mission.”6

In 1843 she married William Colenso, a printer working for the CMS printer, and moved to St. John’s College at Waimate for eighteen months. In 1844 the young couple established a new mission station at Waitangi, Ahuriri, where Elizabeth lived for nearly ten years. She then left her husband to return to her father’s home at Otahuhu before joining the Benjamin Ashwells as a teacher at the CMS mission station at Taupiri in 1854. Seven years later she journeyed to England with her two children. After five years there she returned to New Zealand, eventually settling in Paihia with her daughter. In 1875, when she was fifty-four, Elizabeth’s family moved to a new CMS station at Puriri, and five years there she returned to New Zealand, eventually settling in Paihia with her daughter. In 1875, when she was fifty-four, Elizabeth was left behind in the household of Henry and Marianne Williams to continue her schooling at the mission school in Paihia. She was indeed “a complete child of the mission.”7

During this time their first child, Fanny, was born on February 1, 1844, while William was away on a journey for the bishop. Later that year William was ordained deacon, and they moved to the remote and inhospitable region of Ahuriri.

Ahuriri Years: Domestic Routine, Mission Work

The Colensos’ arrival in Ahuriri on December 28, 1844, did not bode well. As Elizabeth noted in her “Recollections,” “Upon arrival there, we found a native built raupo whare [a kind of grass hut], without floor, doors or windows, with a square hole cut in the roof for a chimney, and the earthen floor covered with mud and dirt. As a gale was coming on, our belongings were piled up under the verandah, and as it was late, we slept among the packages.”8

Elizabeth worked tirelessly at the Girls and Infants Schools, which were built across the river. She was a resourceful woman. “As soon as lessons were begun, Elizabeth had to paddle across every day to teach her classes.”9 She was often busy overseeing the mission station, as William was away traveling so much. His area of responsibility was huge, covering almost one quarter of the total area of North Island.

Like many other missionary wives of this era, Elizabeth experienced the isolation and loneliness of being the only white woman in the district. This was certainly a concern for Elizabeth as she approached the end of her second pregnancy. She had received an invitation from Jane Williams to go to Turanga for the birth, and so she and William journeyed the 130 miles to Turanga by foot in midwinter! It was a difficult and dangerous journey, as William observed: “I shuddered sometimes to see the places which Mrs Colenso had to climb up and down—more than doubly hazardous in the present wet winter season.”10

Ridley Latimer (Latty) was safely delivered on September 23, 1845. According to William, Elizabeth wrote to him after the birth of Ridley, declaring “that it would not be her fault if anything of that nature ever again occurred.” He continued, “So, from that time, or even long before, we never again cohabited
together as man and wife.” William claimed that they had “but little if any love for each other, and our new mode of living did not cause such a feeling to spring or grow.” He claimed that his happiness was in his work and that Elizabeth was “far happier when I was away from the Station travelling.” Elizabeth’s marriage had evidently failed in terms of finding love and true companionship, but she continued with her busy life of managing the mission station in William’s absences, teaching, and bringing up her children.

Ahuriri Years: Estrangement and Exodus

William was certainly not an easy person to live with. His complex personality and the prolonged absences, both while away traveling and in his study in the garden while at home, made their marriage relationship difficult to sustain. William wrote in his autobiography, “From that time on [after the birth of Ridley in 1845] we dwelt as brother and sister . . . we never loved each other.” Although William had claimed to be happy with this arrangement, in 1848 he began an affair with Ripeka, Elizabeth’s housegirl. Elizabeth did not discover this affair until mid-1851, when Ripeka had a baby son, Wi, by William. Two weeks after the birth Ripeka confessed everything to Elizabeth. It seems that William really did love Ripeka, and he strongly resisted her subsequent marriage to Hamuera, another servant in the house. Ripeka and Hamuera came and went several times over the next two years, on each occasion leaving Wi, as William refused to let him go away with Ripeka. Finally in November 1852 Ripeka and Hamuera left for the last time, attempting to secretly take Wi with them, but William heard the cry that “Wi was being smuggled into the canoe and refused to let him leave. “I rushed from the study, jumped on board, and demanded from R. my child; she gave you [here written to Wi] into my hands and I bore you off into the house; madly followed by the Maoris of the canoe.”

Now Elizabeth found herself without Ripeka to assist in the house and as sole caregiver for the child of her husband’s mistress. She performed this duty admirably. William affirmed to Wi that “Mrs Colenso kindly and lovingly took you up and well performed a mother’s part towards you in every respect by day and night.” Elizabeth also continued as usual with her mission duties.

Eventually in 1852 Elizabeth’s brother John Fairburn arrived to take her two children, Fanny and Ridley Latimer, to Auckland, ostensibly to learn English. John also brought back with him a letter of confession from William to Bishop Selwyn. Disaster followed tragedy, and in January 1853 a fire destroyed the family home, followed two months later by a severe flood. Their story almost has the sense of a Shakespearean drama with natural disasters and the disruption of creation mirroring the disruption of human relationships and the breakup of the mission station. Elizabeth remained, sleeping in the study and continuing with the school, which had not been destroyed. Two months later Bishop Selwyn arrived with a letter of suspension for William and instructions for Wi to be returned to his mother and her people. William categorically refused to agree to this arrangement, and after a protracted and heated argument in the cold schoolroom, “a fantastic compromise” was reached whereby Elizabeth would leave William to return to her family in Auckland, taking Wi with her. So finally, on August 30, 1853, Elizabeth left Ahuriri for Auckland.

Elizabeth’s exodus from Ahuriri with little Wi provides us with the most fascinating and personally revealing correspondence from Elizabeth that survives. Initially her letters seemed to be full of concern for William and related in detail how Wi was coping with the journey and the new things he was learning. However, once she arrived in Auckland, the tone of her letters changed dramatically. Now she refers to Wi in the third person as “the child” and explains, “My father most positively refused to receive him into his house.” Her final letter to William throbs with the intense agony and deep pain of her years of living with him. She accuses him of “ten years intense misery and suffering on my part, solely and most deliberately caused by you.” She claims that she looked after Wi only because William demanded it, and she writes that “the ‘spell’ whichbound me to you was broken” and that she left “so weary and worn and spirit-crushed.” She tells him she does not want “a farthing or a farthing’s worth from him” and concludes, “I do not wish to have any further communication with you.”

What brought about this change in attitude toward William from the affectionate letters written during her journey to these sad and acerbic epistles written from the safety of Auckland? What caused her to abandon little Wi, whom she apparently loved? Was it her family and the CMS establishment exerting pressure and reminding her of “the Cause”? The answer is unknown, but Elizabeth remained firm and never saw William again.

Waikato Years: Healing of Memories

In 1854, a year after her arrival in Auckland, Elizabeth joined the Ashwells’ mission station at Taupiri, Waikato. According to her daughter, Elizabeth “was appointed by the Church Missionary Society to help in the Rev. B Y Ashwell’s school at Taupiri.” If this information is correct, it was a highly unusual decision—the CMS appointed a married woman, let alone a separated married woman, to a position by herself without her family. Perhaps the Ashwells invited her to join them, as they knew it would be the kind of work she loved and a place where she could recuperate after the trauma of the previous years. Benjamin Ashwell was grateful for her assistance and praised her highly.

Elizabeth spent seven years in the Waikato, which was likely a time of healing and peace for her. She could continue with the work she loved, no longer burdened with an unhappy marriage and strained relationships all around her, and her financial independence meant that she need have no further contact with William.

English Years: Service and Satisfaction

In January 1861 Elizabeth, Fanny, and Latty sailed to England on the ship Boneriges. During the five years she spent there, Elizabeth managed to forge a respectable place for herself in English
society. She was a devoted church worker and had many references in her diaries to church attendance and to teaching Sunday school. Elizabeth had a heart for the poor, and frequent diary entries refer to her visits to Union Row (e.g., “We then went down to Union Row and saw several of the poor people—gave 3 or 4 of them a trifle”).

Along with many other Christian women of that era who saw what havoc and destruction alcohol brought into people’s lives, Elizabeth was a committed temperance supporter. She maintained her interest in teaching and in schools and attended a meeting convened by Lord Ebury of the Ragged Schools at the end of June in 1864.

Elizabeth’s work with the Bible was the most common theme throughout the diaries at this period. A constant refrain was, “Received, corrected and posted proof sheets.” Elizabeth was working on revising portions of the Old Testament in the Maori language with George Maunsell, who sent her the proofs. In June 1864 she noted, “Corrected and posted proof sheets have got as far as the 106 Psalm.” And in September that same year she recorded, “Corrected and posted proof sheets.”

Elizabeth was requested by the Colonial Office to act as their interpreter and to perform various other services. She was always interested in New Zealand affairs and was keen to help.

On October 20, 1866, with news that the New Zealand Wars were over, Elizabeth left England to return to New Zealand with Fanny, then twenty-two years old. These had been satisfying years for Elizabeth. She was able to be involved with the work she loved—continuing contact with Maori, showing compassion and practical assistance to the poor and marginalized, and ongoing revision of the Bible and translation work.

Return, Resettling, and Renewed Challenges

In 1867 Elizabeth and Fanny arrived in Auckland. Before they had even docked, a boat arrived offshore from Devonport with an urgent message for Elizabeth: Mrs. Ashwell was dying and wanted to see Elizabeth immediately. Mrs. Ashwell did die, after which Benjamin Ashwell asked Elizabeth and Fanny to look after his house while he returned to England with his daughter. No doubt Elizabeth was glad to render this service to friends who had so willingly received her after her separation from William.

Ongoing contact with Maori, showing compassion and practical assistance to the poor and marginalized, and ongoing revision of the Bible and translation work took up a lot of her time while she was in England but must have given her much satisfaction.

The major part of her “Recollections” is devoted to a visit to Queen Victoria with a group of Maori brought over to England from New Zealand by an entrepreneur named Mr. Jenkins. Elizabeth was requested by the Colonial Office to act as their interpreter and to perform various other services. She was always interested in New Zealand affairs and was keen to help.

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of English settlers within walking distance used to attend. I also
attended many works into Mota, the common language of the
Maori like a native, and learnt the Mota language at the age of 56
and became most proficient in it.33 Elizabeth stayed at Norfolk
Island until 1898, when she returned to New Zealand to live out
her remaining years with her daughter and family.

Conclusion
Elizabeth’s unusual circumstances make her different from most
missionary wives of her era. She was indeed a remarkable
woman whose life exhibited a devotion to the evangelical mis-
sonary cause from childhood. Like some other missionary wives
of the nineteenth century, she may have married William as a
means to pursue her own missionary vocation, a vocation pos-
sible only for married women at this time. She continued her
commitment to the cause of mission during her difficult years of
marriage at Ahuriri and beyond. For many, such a tragic experi-
ence would have resulted in withdrawal into a quiet life, but
Elizabeth found solace and satisfaction in further service. This
feature makes her legacy so remarkable. Despite the distressing
circumstances of a loveless marriage and a subsequent painful
separation, she was still able to pursue her missionary vocation
and service in many different contexts. It is also noteworthy that
the CMS allowed a separated woman to work at their mission
stations. She was the first separated woman to do so in New
Zealand.

From the perspective of New Zealand history, it is important
gladly went, being work which I liked.”32 Elizabeth sailed for
Norfolk Island in February 1876. She loved devoting herself to
the work of the mission there, teaching, sewing clothes for the
pupils, nursing both Europeans and Melanesians, and writing
many letters of thanks to supporters of the mission. She trans-
lated many works into Mota, the common language of the
Melanesian Mission. Her granddaughter commented, “She spoke
Maori like a native, and learnt the Mota language at the age of 56
and became most proficient in it.”33 Elizabeth stayed at Norfolk
Island until 1898, when she returned to New Zealand to live out
her remaining years with her daughter and family.

Despite a loveless marriage
and a painful separation,
she was able to pursue her
missionary vocation in
many different contexts.

The Mission Society—A World Wesleyan Partnership was the
former IAMS president.

Lalsangkima Pachuau has been appointed associate pro-
fessor of history and theology of mission by Asbury Theologi-
cal Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, effective July 1, 2006. He is
editor of Mission Studies, the journal of the International Asso-
ciation for Mission Studies. A minister of the Presbyterian
Church of India (Mizo Synod), Pachuau was associate profes-
sor of mission and ecumenics at the United Theological Col-
lege, Bangalore, India. He is author of Ethnic Identity and
Christianity (Peter Lang, 2002) and editor of Ecumenical
Missiology (United Theological College, 2002). He replaces
Howard Snyder, professor of history and theology of mission
since 1996, who has retired.

Died. Arnulf Camps, O.F.M., 81, a Dutch Roman Catho-
lic missiologist, March 5, 2006. Born in Eindhoven, Nether-
lands, February 1, 1925, he entered the Franciscan Order in
1943. As professor of missiology at the Catholic University of
Nijmegen (now called Radboud University of Nijmegen), 1963 to 1990, Camps supervised thirty dissertations and more than one hundred master’s theses. He pub-
lished eight monographs, edited seven volumes, and wrote
more than 340 articles. An adviser to the Pontifical Council for
Interreligious Dialogue, he was president of the board (1981–
91) of the Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ec-
umenical Research, Utrecht, Netherlands. He was a cofounder
of the International Association for Mission Studies and served
as IAMS president (1974–78).

Died. Wenzao Han, 83, Protestant church leader in China,
February 3, 2006, in Nanjing. Born in Shanghai in 1923, he was
vice director of the Institute of Religion of Nanjing University
and, from 1982 to 2001, vice president of Nanjing Union
Theological Seminary. In 1980 Han was also appointed vice
general secretary of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic
Movement Committee. He worked closely with K. H. Ting in
establishing the Amity Foundation in 1985 as an organization
that would enable international ecumenical sharing of the
resources of Christians together with Chinese Christians to
join in the construction of China and its social welfare. They
arranged a joint venture with the United Bible Societies to
establish the Amity Printing Company and commence large-
scale printing and distribution of Bibles in mainland China.
Han served as executive vice president of the board of direc-
tors and general secretary for the Amity Foundation from 1985
to 2002 and was president of the China Christian Council from
1997 to 2002, when he retired.

Died. Diana Witts, 69, former general secretary of the
Church Mission Society (CMS). March 19, 2006, at home in
Kew, Surrey, England. The first woman to hold the post, Witts
led the CMS through an exciting period of its history. Under
her leadership (1996–2000), CMS marked its bicentenary in
global mission and clarified its commitment to evangelistic
mission. Never claiming to be a missiologist, Witts nonethe-
less had a profound grasp of the implications of the cross of
Christ on her own life, and for humanity in general. Teaching
at the Scottish public school Gordonstoun (their first female
teacher), serving the Masai of Kenya, traveling in war-torn
Congo and Sudan, and in leadership at CMS, she was coura-
geous in her judgments and generous in her relationships.
After retirement, Witts continued to travel and teach until
struck down by cancer. In 2005 she published Springs of Hope,
her autobiography.
to bring Elizabeth out from under the shadow of her husband, who was later dismissed from the CMS, but whose name and work is probably still better known than that of his wife's. From the perspective of women's studies, she is noteworthy for transcending boundaries and crossing over into the public male sphere with her involvement in Bible translation and advocacy for the Maori. From the perspective of mission studies, she is remarkable as a woman who dedicated her life to cross-cultural service, even as a “second career missionary” in her later years.

From a pastoral and contemporary perspective, Elizabeth is an example showing us that despite tragic personal circumstances, we can still be useful in God’s service, overcoming our own broken worlds.

Elizabeth was never intimidated by a challenge and was determined to live a useful life of service to the end. She was a strong woman, courageous in the face of adversity and determined to carry on with the work she loved. In her long and full life, she was a pilgrim to the end.

Notes
2. Elizabeth Colenso to Charlotte Brown, Waimate, August 30, 1843, A. N. Brown Papers, 1828–1887, MS 0756, Reel 6, Folder 74 (WTU).
4. F. and S. Mathew, “The Founding of New Zealand 1841-4-,” in Research Files, ed. P. A. Sargison (WTU, 1840), Tuesday, May 12, 1840, p. 140.
7. Ibid., p. 31.
8. Elizabeth Colenso, “Recollections of Mrs Elizabeth Colenso 89-241-4,” in Research Files, ed. P. A. Sargison (WTU, 1899).
12. Ibid., or some variation of it, occurred more than twenty-five times in her diaries over this period.
13. Ibid., Friday, December 19, 1862.
14. Ibid., Tuesday, June 28, 1864.
16. There is a series of nine letters written over a period of three months, August–October 1853, while she was traveling to Auckland, with three further letters from Auckland written between December 1853 and May 1854.
17. William Colenso, “Letters from his wife, Elizabeth 88-103-1/22” (WTU, 1843–1899), Otahuhu, December 19, 1853. After her father refused to admit Wi into the family home, he went to board with a European family and then with a Maori family in the Bay of Islands.
18. Ibid., Otahuhu, May 27, 1854.
20. The CMS minutes for this period, however, make no reference to this arrangement as an oddity. She is mentioned only indirectly as part of William’s “family” offered a passage to England or elsewhere.
21. Elizabeth Colenso, “Diaries MS 0557-MS0563” (WTU, 1862–76). See, for example, diary entries for Sundays December 28, 1862, and January 4 and 18, 1863.
22. Ibid., September 21 and 28, 1864.
25. Latty remained behind to study at St. John’s College, Cambridge.
26. Ibid., September 21 and 28, 1864.
29. Elizabeth Colenso, “Recollections of her eldest granddaughter, Frances Elizabeth Swabey” 89-241-4,” in Research Files, ed. P. A. Sargison (WTU, 1899).
32. Ibid.
33. “Mrs Elizabeth Colenso, Recollections of her eldest granddaughter, Frances Elizabeth Swabey” 89-241-4,” in Research Files, ed. P. A. Sargison (WTU, 1899).

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Manuscript Records
The Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, contains the following items relating to Elizabeth Fairburn Colenso:

- Colenso, Elizabeth. “Correspondence.” MS-Papers-1070, 1836–81.
- “Recollections of Mrs Elizabeth Colenso.” Research Files, ed. P. A. Sargison, 89-241-4, 1899.

Works About Elizabeth Fairburn Colenso

John Vernon Taylor (1914–2001) was the son of J. R. S. Taylor, a scholar at Cambridge, where John was born on September 11, 1914. John’s father gained a first-class degree in classics, served on the staff of Ridley Hall (1910–17), and eventually became headmaster of St. Lawrence School, RamsGate, a boys’ boarding school on the south coast of England. John later wrote that at the school he remembered meeting Christian visitors from around the world—Indians, Chinese, and Africans—who stimulated his imagination toward future service in the mission field. His father became principal of Wycliffe Hall in Oxford, like Ridley Hall a leading Anglican college for training for the ordained ministry, and John studied there from 1936, when his father was head of the college. The father later became an Anglican bishop, a vocation in which John followed him after curacies at All Souls, Langham Place (1938–40), in London and at St. Helen’s Lancashire (1940–43). Between these two curacies John married his lifelong partner Peggy, who had been a student at the Royal School of Music in London. John later was a missionary in Uganda, with spells as both Africa secretary and general secretary of the Church Mission(ary) Society (CMS). In 1975 he became bishop of Winchester.

A recent thesis rightly described John Taylor as “priest and prophet . . . also a poet.” Taylor, who had an artistic temperament, composed poetry (e.g., A Christmas Sequence and Other Poems [1989]), produced an African passion play when he was principal of a theological college in Uganda, and directed Jonathan Harvey’s religious opera Passion and Resurrection in Winchester Cathedral as bishop. His chief means of expression, however, were his books and writings, such as his CMS newsletters. He was a writer of high caliber, with a wide range of interests, including missionary theology, Christian doctrine, biblical theology, and studies leaning on anthropology and sociology in their analysis of African life and the life of African churches. When in 1963 he became general secretary of CMS, a society founded by Charles Simeon, John Venn, and William Wilberforce, Taylor entered into a long and distinguished inheritance of Anglican Evangelical leaders. It included the great nineteenth-century secretaries Josiah Pratt (1802–24) and Henry Venn, the younger (1841–72), whose work was recorded memorably by historian and missionary administrator Eugene Stock in his three-volume History of the Church Missionary Society (1899).

In the twentieth century CMS was also served by some remarkable figures. Max Warren, general secretary from 1942 to 1963, had an influence equivalent to that of Henry Venn. In the 1940s Warren was approached by Taylor, then a young Cambridge graduate who had studied English literature and history at Cambridge, as well as theology at Oxford. Taylor told Warren that he believed that he had a call to the mission field but was unsure of it. Warren told him that there was a place for a man with his qualifications in Uganda, as principal of the main training center for Anglican clergy for the Church of Uganda, at Bishop Tucker College, near Kampala. Taylor accepted the challenge and became one of the most sensitive interpreters of things African to fellow Europeans of the twentieth century. After ten years at Bishop Tucker College (1944–54), he served with the International Missionary Council (IMC) as a research worker in Africa (1954–59), then was based in London as Africa secretary of CMS (1959–63), before succeeding Max Warren as general secretary (1963–75). He continued to write as bishop (1975–85) and, from 1985, in retirement in Oxford.

Taylor’s writings fall into three identifiable groups, broadly sequential: (1) his books on Africa; (2) his writings while general secretary of CMS, a period that included his newsletters, which, like Warren’s, were and are a considerable theological and missiological resource; and (3) his volumes on Christian doctrine, of which the most widely read was probably The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission (1972). During his time as bishop of Winchester, Taylor became chairman of the Church of England’s Doctrine Commission.

Africa

Other Europeans have been sensitive interpreters of African traditions and religion, among them Edwin Smith, born in Africa of Methodist missionary parents, who gained an international reputation as an anthropologist; Geoffrey Parrinder, author of African Traditional Religions (1954); and the Belgian Placide Tempels, author of La Philosophie Bantoue (1945). Nevertheless, Taylor’s Primal Vision was recognized as very important in this field and is so still. In this section, I will concentrate on it among his African works, but not before noting in passing various contrasts, tensions, and dichotomies in the other books also, to which I return in the conclusion of this article.

Taylor’s first book, Christianity and Politics in Africa (1957), was a plea for Christians to engage with political realities. He showed how ardent Christians—for example, those touched by the East African revival of the 1930s that was still a strong force when he wrote—could view political life as corrupting, besmirching the purity of the soul, staining the Christian believer. He recognized that the urge to create an alternative and purer society had roots in the New Testament, but for Taylor this impulse was not the whole truth. He was able to balance the account of the revival brethren by pointing to two prime ministers of the kingdoms of Uganda who in 1954 were members of the revival brethren. Here was a spiritual-material, spiritual-political tension, something he also found in the followers of the prophetess Alice Lenshina in the Lumpa Church, which he investigated during his research for the IMC in Christians in the Copperbelt (modern Zambia) of 1961. He wrote that this church “exhibits an emphatic otherworldliness.”

In his other piece of research for the IMC, The Growth of the Church in Buganda (1958), a church-growth book before the topic became popular, Taylor noticed the tension between African and European worldviews, a topic to which he returned in the Primal Vision. While the African aimed to live in harmony with nature, the European aimed to control and dominate it; while the African was in touch with his or her instincts, the European suffered from “spiritual sickness of the heart, which reveals itself in the division of the sacred from the secular, of the cerebral from the instinctive,” a breaking of a harmony that “the wisdom of Africa has not


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yet thrown away.” In a phrase coined by T. S. Eliot, Africans were among those who could still “think their feelings and feel their thoughts,” something many Europeans had lost.

The title The Primal Vision (1967) suggests a clarity of perception on these and other matters that is present in many societies, not just African ones, where there is an integrated view of life and the cosmos—in our terms, a holistic view. This perspective refuses to see people as isolated individuals but, in contrast to Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am,” affirms, “I participate, therefore I am.” John Mbiti made the same point in saying, “I am because we are.” Taylor quoted Father Tempels on the Bantu: “[They] cannot conceive a man as an individual existing by himself, unrelated to the animate and inanimate forces surrounding him. It is not sufficient to say he is a social being; he feels himself a vital force in actual intimate and permanent rapport with the other forces—a vital force both influenced by and influencing them.” Taylor wrote: “A man’s well-being consists in keeping in harmony with the cosmic totality.” When that harmony is broken and has to be restored, then divination is called for to discern how restoration may take place.

In an earlier book Taylor had wondered whether the High God had ever really figured in African traditional religion among the Buganda until introduced by Islam. There, as well as in Primal Vision, he saw the divinization of dead kings and heroes as the real link with the unseen world, a feature common in primal societies. In Primal Vision, however, Taylor seems to have come to a point where, despite his awareness of the ethnological debate on the issue of the High God, he found it “impossible to dispute a universal recognition of and desire for the Ultimate God,” shown not least in songs, proverbs, and riddles, which “reveal the deep sense of a pervading presence” of the God who is met everywhere and who fills all in all.

Nevertheless, Taylor believed that even with this awareness, people tended to push the High God back, far out of reach, so that this God is considered only when the ancestors have failed. Much more real in daily life is interaction with the unseen world in dreams, or fear induced by the ill will of fellow human beings, easily associated with witchcraft. Taylor emphasizes that in many African societies it is to this kind of paralyzing fear, the dark side of African life, that the Gospel can bring liberating joy, a contrast from the Western version of freedom from sin. The breaking up of social harmony by antagonisms or evil intent, social and spiritual, causes dysfunction and death. “The good news,” he wrote, “consists first in the fact that the domination of this gentle Lord is total. There are no strangers and no realms of terror that lie beyond his sovereignty.” Christ as light is the antidote to the heart of darkness.

**Church Missionary Society**

In discussing Taylor’s final major books, I shall dwell less on his time as general secretary of CMS, partly because I wrote an article in an earlier issue of the IBMR on his newsletters of 1963–75. The newsletters reveal his strong condemnation of the Vietnam War, which he called “shameful and futile,” and an emphasis on small groups and missionary cells to provide dynamism. The history of CMS itself, with its beginnings in a group of enthusiasts, reveals this emphasis, which Taylor referred to as “God’s arithmetic”—whether with Gideon in Judges 7 or in small groups in Uganda that Terry Waite, later a famous hostage in Beirut, was training to help the church forward. Taylor wrote, “If we want men of stature, we should remember that they have always grown better in coteries of friends than in structures of efficiency.” Whether in the organizational sphere or the economic, Taylor was clearly attracted by the “small is beautiful” message of E. F. Schumacher, also writing at this time. Small groups can be “cells of defiance,” a chapter title in a later book, against prevailing powers and cultural pressures; the small, the personal, and the spontaneous should be valued over against mere size of organization. Mission should not be seen as only numerical growth. Rather, it is about the quality of life and its victory over evil. “Numerical growth,” Taylor wrote, “is not unimportant, for it is often an indication of the obedience or disobedience of the church... but God’s arithmetic is more with representative numbers, the few who stood in for the many.”

The tension of the few and the many, the small cell’s dynamism against the large organization, can be added to other tensions in his thinking. At Uppsala in 1968, when mainstream thinking of the World Council of Churches was moving in the direction of social revolution as the way for mission and when conservative evangelical participants like Donald McGavran and John Stott were pleading for the traditional emphasis on the unevangelized and their conversion, Taylor stood between these “verticalists,” with their stress on God’s dealing with the unconverted through the Gospel of salvation, and the “horizontalists,” who looked for a salvation mediated through revolutionary social movements. In Norman Goodall’s report of the Uppsala Assembly, Taylor was described (as also D. T. Niles) as anxious to hold together “the gospel of personal conversion and the gospel of social responsibility,” which threatened to fly apart in the debate. Taylor, participating in the section “Renewal and Mission,” found himself acting as a reconciling figure between the two strands. In an earlier book, For All the World (1966), he showed his firm commitment to what he called the threefold cord of mission: proclamation, witness, and service—“neither confusing them nor excluding any one of them because the three must be intertwined in mission.” Equally, his disillusionment with the old-style social gospel of the 1930s is clear in this book—that is, any idea that we can build the kingdom by human effort rather than receiving it as God’s gift.

Taylor’s newsletters, as also his First Lambeth Interfaith Lecture (1977), addressed interfaith issues and disagreed with John Hick as to the possibility of religious common ground and so a common speech religiously, which made it very difficult to generalize. Taylor wanted both to hold fast to the uniqueness and universality of Christ and to remain open and sensitive to others and to the Holy Spirit, so that “pluralism” became an opportunity for God to bring about what Taylor liked to term “exchange”; for, he wrote, every religion is “a people’s particular tradition of response to the reality which the Holy Spirit of God has set before their eyes.”

Finally, in this period we must note a prophetic book written in 1975 just before Taylor became a bishop. Entitled Enough Is Enough, it drew on his CMS experiences around the world. For Western Europeans or North Americans, this book makes for
very uncomfortable reading. It is a searing indictment of excess by the wealthy developed communities at the expense of poorer nations in terms of pollution of the planet, the exploitation of natural resources, and the false values of advertising. It is a cry to set limits, to reverence life, and to attend to the biblical emphasis on the personal. If he were asked “Enough for what?” his reply would be “Enough for the personal.”

Doctrinal Writing, 1972–2001

Strictly, Taylor’s 1972 book on the Holy Spirit belongs to his time at CMS, but I am handling it here with his other doctrinal writings. In 1975 he became bishop of Winchester and, in time, chairman of the Church of England’s Doctrine Commission. This responsibility produced a report, Believing in the Church, under his chairmanship in 1981. In his introduction Taylor wrote of the excessive individualism of modern understanding of religious belief and its privatization. By contrast, he wanted to emphasize that Christian believing and that of other communities, including, for instance, scientific researchers, was “mainly belonging.” He quoted a book by the scientist John Ziman called Public Knowledge (1968) on “the social dimension of science” (part of its subtitle) about this aspect. Research scientists were also part of a community: the community of science.

We turn to Taylor’s own major books on the Godhead: The Go-Between God (1972) and The Christlike God (1992). The former went through thirteen impressions between 1972 and 1989, which suggests that it touched a theological nerve. In it Taylor presents a view of the Holy Spirit as one who primarily creates an intense awareness of God, of Christ, of one another, and as one who also creates a deep communion. As the “in-between God,” who creates awareness and communion, he is the one who opens eyes to reality, but of whom we are often not directly aware because he is “in-between,” creating awareness of the other rather than drawing attention to himself. Insofar as we see the Spirit revealed supremely in the life of Jesus Christ, he is shown to be the one who demands choice, as Jesus did of those around him; he also inspires sacrifice and self-oblation. Taylor does not apply this point only to persons. He followed Sir Alister Hardy, who, as a scientist, spoke in his Gifford Lectures of an element of choice even in inanimate chains of being in the universe. Taylor developed this point in describing the created universe as a whole being drawn toward a “greater complexity and sensitiveness.”

The creative spirit is pressing the whole order of being in the twin directions of choice and life through death. In relation to the church, Taylor quoted Bonhoeffer in saying that “the Church is nothing but a section of humanity in which Christ has really taken form,” the arena where the Spirit creates “a new degree of communal awareness of the reality of Jesus Christ” as well as a “new sensitiveness toward other people.” Pentecostals had been right to stress that the Holy Spirit “transforms and intensifies the quality of human life,” but Taylor thinks that this movement is chiefly to be realized in small groups, the “little congregations” characterized by the four aspects of reflection, service, worship, and evangelism. The two or three gathered together will realize this mutual awareness and communion, which is the gift of the Spirit, and they will have his openness to one another and to the world in need. This “one another” (Greek alla•th8•s) is emphasized again and again in the New Testament in such texts as “bear one another’s burdens” and is a sign of the Spirit binding together those like Peter and Cornelius, who do not naturally belong together. Like Sir Arthur Eddington, Taylor wants to stress the “and” in the assertion that “one and one makes two”—here is the essential link between the one and the other, the “and” where the Go-Between God is to be found. The bond, which he calls “the current of communication,” is both personal and invisible. Christians naturally call this “Go-Between” the Holy Spirit.

Between this fine book and his final major publication, Taylor wrote a shorter book, Kingdom Come (1989). Here he has good things to say about the kingdom of God and its right understanding. He reveals himself as a very competent biblical theologian.

Taylor’s final book was The Christlike God, whose title was prompted by Michael Ramsey’s aphorism “God is Christlike, and in him is nothing unChristlike at all.” Taylor brought together his knowledge of patristic writings, Aristotle and Greek philosophy, and Thomas Aquinas with his wide reading in Old Testament scholarship and in modern systematics like Hans Küng and Karl Rahner. Many other writers were called in, from William Wordsworth to Emily Brontë to Charles Williams, in order to answer the question, “Why do so few really ask questions about the nature of God?” Taylor started from a simple question of a child, “Is God always with us?” “Yes, he is always there.” “Doesn’t he ever go to see the Murphys?” Taylor went on to expressions of the awareness of God in poets like Edith Sittwell and Edwin Muir and by a number of individuals who had communicated their experiences of God to Sir Alister Hardy’s research team, when the doors of perception had been opened and an intense awareness of God had resulted. Taylor contrasted the God of the covenant with common misunderstandings of God in the European tradition, which viewed God as a simple monad (pp. 119–24), as unchangeable (pp. 124–29), or as unaffected and impassible (pp. 135–39). In Taylor’s view, it was better to speak of God’s absolute freedom to be what he is or, with Austin Farrer, to speak of him in terms of the almightiness of love (p. 140). Taylor faced head-on the issues of theodicy raised by the Holocaust, the Gulag, Dachau, and Auschwitz, and the divine responsibility (pp. 198–205), presenting a vision of God who “still believes the outcome will outweigh the immense waste and agony” and who calls us to believe in his staggering, costly venture, even while there is little evidence of its ever succeeding. He quoted a comment of Andrew Elphinstone about the cross as love making amends to those who feel that they cannot forgive God for all their pains. The theodicy offered took the deep pain of the world with seriousness but also warned that human shrinking from pain can mask a deliberate preference for being only half alive. As in the book on the Holy Spirit, the call to sacrifice—what Taylor calls here “the cross at the heart of creation”—is the price of full human potentiality, as modeled in Jesus Christ. This book is a tougher read than The Go-Between God, but it contains many good things, a remarkable product of Taylor’s late seventies. The chapter “God Saw that It Was Good: The Cost of Creation” is particularly worthy of note.

Conclusion

In a series of addresses given in 1986 at the University of Oxford, published as A Matter of Life and Death (1986), Taylor gave expression to a theme that those who knew him well tell us was a constant refrain. “Most people” he would say, “are content to remain only half alive.” God is not “hugely concerned as to whether we are religious or not. What matters to God, and matters supremely, is whether we are alive or not. If your religion brings you more fully to life, God will be in it; but if your religion inhibits your capacity for life or makes you run away from it, you
may be sure God is against it, just as Jesus was.”29 Part of being alive for Taylor was grappling with tensions. In the opening of his book on the Buganda, he quoted a Roman Catholic missiologist who had contrasted the Protestant Alexander Mackay’s view of conversion as a “psychological act of trust” with the Catholic emphasis on “the inauguration of the candidate in the visible church.” Taylor would surely have said both-and to this tension of an individual act of faith and the “corporate believing” noted above. Again, in his early book on politics in Africa, Taylor was not decrying the need for the fervent spirituality of the revival brethren in East Africa but calling on such Christians to combine devotion with an attitude to politics that did not see it as staining the soul. In Primal Vision he wanted to combine the European stress on the cerebral with the African recognition of the instinctive; at CMS he emphasized the voluntary, the spontaneous, the small against size, organization, and structures, without discounting the need for the latter but preferring the development of persons over structures of efficiency. In WCC circles he espoused equally the cause of the social movement urged by some “horizontalists” and the emphasis on conversion and evangelism of the unacheved upheld by the “verticalists.”

In his books on doctrine Taylor wanted to combine structured understanding with Christian experience,30 perhaps the secret of the enormous success of The Go-Between God, which also came out at a time of widespread interest in the Holy Spirit. His grappling with tensions was noticed in an appreciation after his death by his successor at CMS, Simon Barrington-Ward.31 Max Warren, his predecessor at CMS, wrote of Taylor to his daughter in a letter of April 26, 1973, “He is head and shoulders spiritually and mentally above any of his contemporaries and is one of the few Anglicans with a capacity for seeing six feet in front of his nose and then a little more. What is more, he doesn’t possess the peculiar Anglican ecclesiastical squint which gets virtually every important issue out of focus.”32 It has to be hoped that, as this article is written by a fellow Anglican, such impairment of vision has been avoided and that a fair portrait has emerged of Taylor as man and missiologist of stature in the twentieth century. He died in Oxford on January 30, 2001.

Notes

19. Taylor, For All the World, pp. 41, 85, 88.
24. Ibid., pp. 107, 201.
25. Ibid., pp. 199, 148.
26. Ibid., p. 17.
28. Ibid., pp. 205, 204, 201, 203.

Selected Bibliography

Works by John V. Taylor


Works About John V. Taylor


Book Reviews

A People’s History of Christianity.
Vol. 1: Christian Origins; vol. 2: Late Ancient Christianity.


These first two volumes of a projected seven-volume series promote what we could call subsurface approaches to long-studied phenomena. Volumes 3–5 are scheduled for later in 2006, with no date set for the final pair, which is to conclude with “Twentieth-Century Global.” One would have welcomed more concern for “global” from the earliest period. Neither of the first two volumes looks beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire, though the second stretches chronologically beyond traditional dates for the empire. Though defined as “Late Ancient,” the second volume probes back into “origins,” with frequent consideration of New Testament data, so that some redundancy occurs within and between volumes.

Following Walter Bauer’s well-stated proposition (1934) that heresy preceded orthodoxy (and continued unofficially side by side thereafter), this series documents a side of Christianity obtained when one evaluates source materials from the viewpoint of so-called ordinary persons. Their circumstances and situations can be gleaned from perspectives that literate elites commonly present relative to their own values at the expense of these “others,” who, as servants or slaves, worked to provide economic privileges for their “betters.”

Unfortunately, volume 1 gives the impression that none have been over this ground before. Volume 2 is aware (though it is hidden within endnotes) that this methodology emerged from studies begun within the French Annales school before World War II. Parallel multivolume works—such as A History of Private Life (5 vols., 1987), A History of Women in the West (5 vols., 1992), or Witchcraft and Magic in Europe (6 vols., 1999–2002)—apply comparable methods and frequently use identical data, even if they are employed for alternate purposes. Whenever one group affirms “a new kind of history” where one is encouraged to “read between the lines” or “against the grain,” one can be well assured that another fashion has emerged, perhaps, optimally, with new data. Admittedly, “gentlemen historians” deserve the critique of women (actually five of the twelve authors in vol. 1 are women, and nine of thirteen in vol. 2) and other liberation authors!

Peculiarly, the editor of volume 1 sets a tone with his introduction, as well as by his initial chapter, wherein his sense of “early Jesus movements” becomes the edifice around which the volume revolves. The introduction hints at evidence that the relatively few endnotes require the serious reader to pursue the editor’s own bibliography rather than being guided into evidence directly. By contrast, the introduction to volume 2 is a well-stated summary of the series’ intent, more connected to the content of its quite diverse contributions.

The twelve topics of volume 1 from its twelve biblical contributors, like those of the second in the more unsystematic mode appropriate to eleven topics provided by thirteen patristics contributors, are worthy of consideration—but from a perspective wherein one affirms that Christianity never had one center. Rather, with due translation, it was free to move into other locales. Something else besides constituents and attitudes pervaded the “households” that initially emerged and was still present, to the consternation of authorities, as “late ancient,” with its “imperial” church, passed beyond the bounds of these volumes. Due regard for “families,” “children’s play” (even at hierarchical behavior), “poverty,” and the contrast of “rural” with “urban” provides a serious base for reevaluating roles of water (beyond baptism) and food (beyond Eucharist) within ritual, both private and communal.

These volumes, apparently intended as textbooks, are innovative for twenty-first-century reevaluations of ancient Christian sources. Both, however, lack a history of the study of those same sources throughout the modern period, during which many were rediscovered. Both have chapter endnotes but prefer limited “further reading” lists in the chapters to full bibliographies in each volume. The indexes are usable but incomplete. Even the frequent sidebars and illustrations go without significant reference to them in the text until midway in volume 2. One wonders for whom these works were actually prepared, since “ordinary persons” might know little of the underlying scholarship assumed!

—Clyde Curry Smith

Clyde Curry Smith, Professor Emeritus of Ancient History and Religions, University of Wisconsin–River Falls, is a contributor to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (www.DACB.com).

Heart for the Gospel, Heart for the World.


This is a thorough study of J. H. Bavinck, influential Dutch missiologist during the middle decades of the twentieth century. From 1938 until his death in 1964, Bavinck occupied two different professorships in mission studies and practical theology—first at Kampen Seminary, and then at the Free University in Amsterdam. This book is a serviceable translation into English of the author’s doctoral dissertation at the University of Utrecht.

The book is organized in two parts.
The remaining eight chapters are a systematic investigation of Bavinck’s theological perspectives and the way these shape his theology of mission. Visser credits Bavinck with being the first to work out a systematic missiology within a Reformed framework. A crucial influence on J. H. Bavinck was Hendrik Kraemer, whom he met through the Student Christian Movement while still a university student. They worked together in Indonesia, sharing a concern about mission methods and strategies in light of the growing Indonesian nationalist movement. Both would become advocates of Indonesian independence. It is interesting to observe the degree to which the religions dominate Bavinck’s missiology.

One of Bavinck’s most important legacies was the doctoral students he mentored, including Johannes Blauw and Johannes Verkuyl. This book is a fine contribution to the history of missiology.

—Wilbert R. Shenk

Wilbert R. Shenk, a contributing editor and Senior Professor of Mission History and Contemporary Culture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, served in Indonesia from 1955 to 1959.

Taking the Jesus Road: The Ministry of the Reformed Church in America Among Native Americans.


LeRoy Koopman’s Taking the Jesus Road is a well-documented account of the work of the Reformed Church in Native American communities for over a hundred years. A very thorough account of every Native American ministry and associated work of the church, every minister and lay worker, both Native and non-Native, this volume is one of the most recent of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. An appendix listing all Native American ministries and personnel, with their locations and years served, numerous photos throughout, and careful scholarship in readable prose make this book a valuable resource for both church and academy.

Koopman analyzes the very mixed legacy of American Indian mission work without glossing over the many inconsistencies, failures, and disappointments. However, he also clearly illustrates the accomplishments, dedication, and faithfulness of Natives and non-Natives involved in the establishment of six viable Reformed Indian congregations. As Koopman notes, the story told is both “inspirational and sobering” (p. ix).

Following a fairly balanced overview of the history of policies and attitudes governing Native American relations, Koopman provides a chronological account of the mission work at each of the Reformed Church mission sites. These are fleshed out with details gleaned from mission reports, letters, church publications, and some personal interviews by the author with both Native and non-Native personnel. For example, the chapter on the Winnebago Reformed Church begins with tribal history before mission activity, which began with the Presbyterians in 1889 and was transferred to the Reformed Church in 1908. It covers the illustrious careers of missionary and Winnebago pastors, elders, and teachers, including the celebrated Winnebago pastor Henry Roe Cloud. The mission is noted for its dedicated and long-serving missionaries, among them G. A. Watermulder (thirty-four years) and children’s worker Bernice Tegeler, who retired in 1990 after forty-six years and who is still doing ministry in Winnebago. The chapter ends by noting the 2004 graduation of Winnebago Brenda Snowball from the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. Like the book’s conclusion, the chapter ends with a word of hope for a ministry that, if not broad, has run deep within these Native American communities, where faithful ministry has been practiced by Reformed Church leaders and members on the “Jesus Road” for more than a century.

—Bonnie Sue Lewis

Bonnie Sue Lewis, author of Creating Christian Indians: Native Clergy in the Presbyterian Church (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2003), is Associate Professor of Mission and Native American Christianity at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.


This slim volume is a very useful item to have handy when doing anything related to contemporary China. This is the second edition (the first was 1999). The new edition is able to draw upon a great deal of statistical data derived from the last Chinese census and from annual publications by international agencies and the Chinese government such as China Statistical Yearbook. The authors are social scientists with a clear fondness for quantification: Stephanie Donald is at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia; Robert Benewick is in the Department of International Relations, University of Sussex, U.K.

The book consists of thirty-five two-page articles, all on two facing pages. Only about 10 percent of the space allotted to each article is devoted to prose; the rest is taken up by fascinating computer-generated maps, diagrams, and brightly colored tables, all packed with information. The thirty-five articles are organized under six “chapters,” each of which has from three to nine of the two-page articles just described, and each of which has an introductory one-page essay. The chapters are “China in the World” (dealing with international affairs) and five dealing with internal affairs: “China’s People,” “The Economy” (with nine articles), “The Party-State,” “Living in China” (also with nine articles, including “Religion”), and “The Environment.” Then there are ten pages of tables with even more data arrayed by province. There is little on religion, almost nothing on Christianity, but one can readily find
precise data on cigarette consumption by province and age group, Internet use, changes in diet over time, detailed diagrams of the party and government structures, indexes of air pollution, and so forth. One actually gets a feel for the great diversity of China from this volume; for that reason it is worth buying. Recommended.

—Daniel H. Bays

Daniel H. Bays, Professor of History and Director of Asian Studies at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, was at the University of Kansas for almost thirty years. He writes extensively on the history of Chinese Christianity, from the missionary period to the present.

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The Vitality of Karamojong Religion: Dying Tradition or Living Faith?


Indigenous religious traditions are still alive in many parts of the globe. In spite of the disruption of their traditional worldviews, many indigenous peoples still maintain a sacred path that is different from those of other religious traditions. In many contexts, indigenous people have contended with conversion pressure from other religions, globalization, colonization, and postmodernity. This book deals with the traditional religion of the Karamojong people of Uganda. Using oral traditions, extensive ethnographic research, and historical and anthropological approaches, Knighton describes a religious life that is rich in symbols, rituals, sacred places, sacred practices, metaphors, and experience of the numinous. In a field often plagued by such problems as blatant stereotypes, sentimentalism, essentialism, and facile generalizations, Knighton presents a balanced analysis of Karamojong religion. This indigenous religious tradition has proven to be resilient and resistant to external forces. Knighton writes that the traditional culture of the Karamojong people dates back only to the 1830s, when diverse ethnic groups and practices were permanently amalgamated. Since then, the traditional culture has been very adroit at responding to the vagaries of historical change.

No religious tradition is static. The Karamojong people have been able to respond to the challenges of modernity through their own creative sensibilities and impulses. Internal changes and metamorphoses within Karamojong religion are integral parts of the tradition itself; they are not generated because of

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Speaking of the “collusion” of missionary and Christian messages in local contexts. The proliferation of mission print materials in England, to become a tool to disciple (pub. 1678), a text with powerful impact and reprinted Bunyan’s by tracing how missionaries translated of missionary texts. Isobel Hofmeyr produced by missionaries during the postcolonial analysis of literature scholarship. Cox concludes with a postcolonial narrative of recent mission (Kipling, Forester, etc.), and the onslaught of globalization and post-modernity. Gerhardus Cornelius Oosthuizen once remarked that there is a big chasm between the Western worldview and the African traditional perspective. In order to overcome this methodological impasse, one needs to be rigorous and sympathetic. Knighton clearly fulfills these two requirements.

This is an important book. I applaud the author’s sympathetic, detailed, and critical study of Karamojong religion. This monograph will be very useful for scholars in anthropology, religious studies, history, cultural studies, and mission studies.

—Akintunde E. Akinade

Akintunde E. Akinade, from Nigeria, teaches world religions as Associate Professor of Religion at High Point University in High Point, North Carolina.

Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality, Missions.


Mixed Messages is a collection of commissioned essays, seven of which analyze publications of Protestant missionaries in various parts of the British colonial empire, and five of which look at Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu missions and at international relations as a form of mission activity. Jeffrey Cox defines the conceptual frameworks of the volume in his review of the providentialist narrative that guided early British mission agency, the imperial narrative of British Empire (Kipling, Forester, etc.), and the postcolonial narrative of recent mission scholarship. Cox concludes with a postcolonial analysis of literature produced by missionaries during the imperial era.

The next five essays focus on analysis of missionary texts. Isobel Hofmeyr demonstrates the symbolic impact of texts by tracing how missionaries translated and reprinted Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress (pub. 1678), a text with powerful impact in England, to become a tool to disciple new believers in Madagascar. In a similar genre, Norman Etherington documents the proliferation of mission print materials and how Africans utilized hymns, clothing, and pictures to convey African and Christian messages in local contexts. Speaking of the “collision” of missionary texts and the adventure genre popular between 1860 and 1920, Gareth Griffiths argues that missionary publishers adapted the heroic warrior and hunter for the mobilization of missionaries throughout the British Empire.

Eliza Kent shifts attention from print to material culture, examining the controversy over the missionary practice of urging low-caste women in South India to cover their breasts. Sampson, noting missionary metaphors for Australia as “wilderness” and New Zealand as “beautiful cultivated lands,” describes alternative missionary tourist interpretations of the landscape in which John Williams was martyred in Erromanga, New Hebrides, in 1840.

The concluding essay in part I reviews how the education partnership of the Church Missionary Society and the Canadian government served as an instrument for reforming the “marginal.” While Jamie Scott highlights the abuses, distortions, and destructive forces of this education, he also notes the paradox that some survived and emerged to become leaders of the native peoples.

In part 2, essays on Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu mission in the West are predictably more sympathetic than the first eight essays in the volume, which focus on Christianity in the colonial empire. Marshall Beier, applying a postcolonial critique to the democratic peace mission of Western political states, argues that the body of theory on international relations is a form of religion and that the academic and public officials who seek to advance it constitute a missionary movement. In the final essay Peter van der Veer, reflecting on how all of the world religions have been subject to the global power and transformations of modernity, concludes that Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism of the twenty-first century are “almost unrecognizable if one were to look at any of these developments from the viewpoint of someone in the eighteenth century” (p. 231).

This volume does indeed convey mixed messages. The authors critically expose the cultural biases of missionaries, the collusion of the mission enterprise with economic and political agendas of the British Empire, and the distortions of the message that occur through these collusions. Yet each essay also makes some attempt to show how national Christians have taken the texts, materials, and messages of their missionary counterparts, adapted them, transformed them, and created new messages that are both indigenous and Christian.

—Sherwood Lingenfelter

Sherwood Lingenfelter is Professor of Anthropology and Provost at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. He has done ethnographic research in Micronesia, Brazil, and West Africa.

The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology.


Amos Yong is emerging as one of the most significant theologians to come out of classic Pentecostalism. His previous publications—Discerning the Spirit(s) (Sheffield, Eng., 2000) and Beyond the Impasse (Grand Rapids, 2003), both dealing with his specialty, theology of religions—have won him critical acclaim. The present book is certainly his finest and most comprehensive to date. In this ambitious work he expands his horizons to embrace several major themes in systematic and philosophical theology, seeking always to relate a Pentecostal theology to the global context. In this effort he is certainly no narrow Pentecostal fundamentalist—some Pentecostals and evangelicals would find him too inclusive in his sweep. Neither does Yong represent global Pentecostal theology in any “traditional” or normative sense; his ideas are fresh and creative, at times even startling and controversial,
belying his appointment in a conservative American Christian university.

Yong’s eight substantial chapters are arranged around the Acts 2 (Joel) text from which the book title is derived. His attempt to provide a “world Pentecostal theology” succeeds in showing the wide diversity of Pentecostalism, but his introduction does not include the white North American and European Pentecostalism part of the equation—even though by his own admission his experience is limited to the American context. A brief analysis of the enormous influence of Western Pentecostalism on global Pentecostal theology might have been illuminating, for in these days of increasing “Americanization” and the hegemonic role of the United States in international affairs, such questions cannot be avoided in a globalizing movement like Pentecostalism. In subsequent chapters, however, Yong mostly uses Western Pentecostal sources, perhaps a hidden contradiction. Nevertheless, the book succeeds because it is highly original and articulate. We are presented here with meticulous footnotes and a vast array of literature references—Yong appears to be familiar with most of the literature in his broad subject. The book immediately becomes an invaluable reference work for students of theology as a whole and of Pentecostal theology in particular; it deserves to be on the bookshelf of every missiologist.

—Allan Anderson

Allan Anderson, formerly a Pentecostal minister in South Africa, is Professor of Global Pentecostal Studies at the University of Birmingham (England) and author and editor of eight books on Pentecostalism.

Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society.


The exodus of Palestinian Christians from their homeland is by now well known. The most common explanation for this flight is the effects of the Israeli occupation, and there can be no doubt that, regardless of one’s views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it causes great suffering to Palestinians and is a factor in driving those who can do so to leave.

Christians, however, are also fleeing other countries in the eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, so we need to look for wider reasons. In this study, Justus Reid Weiner provides a heartbreaking look at one major reason: the growing persecution of Christians within the Palestinian areas. The study is dedicated to Ahmad El-Achwal, a convert from Islam to Christianity who lived in the Askar Refugee Camp. He was imprisoned, beaten, and tortured by the Palestinian Authority and was eventually murdered outside his home in 2004.

The background to this increased persecution is the growth of radical forms of Islam among the Palestinians, which is manifested in the increasing power of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and also in the PLO’s attempts to claim an Islamic mantle in order to combat the appeal of these other groups. Islamic law, Shari’a, is playing an increasingly important role—in a general form in the draft Palestinian constitution, and in a radical form through its imposition by Islamist militias—in which the penalty for converting from Islam is death, and non-Muslims must be subordinate to Muslims. Recently, Hamas leaders have spoken of reviving the jizya...
tax, a special tax on non-Muslims for “protection” by Muslims.

The author also provides a careful discussion of why the persecution of Christians remains underreported, including by the U.S. State Department. In the current politicized atmosphere, Weiner’s study will be subject to dismissal because he is based in Israel, and it may be treated as yet one more volley in a propaganda war. But as one who has labored through contradictory reports and claims about the situation of Palestinian Christians, I can say that this is the most detailed and persuasive study I have read. It deserves to be read by anyone concerned with religious minorities in the Middle East.

—Paul Marshall


The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations.


This is a quirky sort of book. One would expect that, given its title, we would hear about the vernacular Bibles that served as instruments of control and liberation in modern European empires. Not so. The author tells us at the outset that the Bible in question is the King James Version, the reigning English translation from the seventeenth century until well into the twentieth. It is the Englishman’s Bible he is talking about, the Bible of the Englishmen and the colonial elites who had mastered the lingua franca of the British Empire. As he says early on, he does not intend to be comprehensive but to “offer a hermeneutical sanctuary to those marginalized and maligned discourses” (p. 8).

Sugirtharajah offers a selective but interesting smorgasbord of biblical interpreters, most of whom were directly involved in the missionary enterprise, either as purveyors or as receivers of the message. The exceptions are Thomas Jefferson and the preachers at the great day of humiliation in September 1857, in the wake of the Indian Mutiny. The variety of interpretation of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, brings to mind the Shakespearian adage that the devil can quote Scripture to his purpose.

Sugirtharajah ascribes no diabolical intention to the authors discussed, but it is intriguing to find the Bible employed both to condemn and to condone African marriage and Indian religion. As the author is careful to point out, past interpretation should give pause to those who would use the Bible to build new empires.

—Geoffrey Johnston

Geoffrey Johnston is the author most recently of Missionaries for the Record: Letters from Overseas to the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1846–1960 (Guardian Books, 2005).


Uchimura Kanzo is one of Japan’s most famous Protestant Christians, and certainly its most intensively studied. He belonged to one of several small groups of talented, young ex-samurai who found a
new focus of loyalty in the Christian God while studying Western learning during the unsettled times that followed the Meiji Revolution of 1868. All these men experienced conflict between their identity as loyal Japanese and their allegiance to a God who was too closely associated with the Western powers that threatened Japan’s national pride. Some became leaders of “Western-style” denominations, fighting successfully to obtain independence from foreign missionary boards. Uchimura Kanzo, however, rejected denominations and all formal church organizations as Western accretions. Instead, he pursued the ideal of *mukyokai*, or “we-need-no-church principle” (p. 149), accumulating a large number of loyal disciples, ranging from members of the intellectual elite to unknown farmers. He is famous for the pursuit of this ideal and for his prophetic criticisms of Japanese foreign policy, starting with his disappointment at the demands made of China in 1895, after the Sino-Japanese War.

This long-awaited critical biography of Uchimura, by John Howes, professor emeritus of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia, represents over fifty years of dedicated study by the author. It is based on a first draft completed in 1982. Understandably, no real attempt has been made to incorporate the oceans of research since then, but the work is still unique in its overall coverage of Uchimura’s life and writings. The book is skillfully structured, enabling Howes to link his sensitive analysis of Uchimura’s intellectual development to the major events in his life and in the world around him. However, closer comparison between Uchimura and other Japanese Christian leaders of the time would have revealed that they shared his high evaluation of Japan’s spiritual roots but had a more positive attitude toward Western-educated Japanese women.

—Helen Ballhatchet

Helen Ballhatchet, Professor in the Faculty of Economics, Keio University, Tokyo, has published studies of the intellectual history of Meiji Japan and the history of Christianity in East Asia.

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Mission history commonly entails encountering personal names—in diaries, for example—that are hard to identify, even with formidable electronic search engines. The value of Stephen North’s hefty book (which is now bound, having first appeared in a three-ring binder) lies in the exhaustive search that he has made for information about the Europeans living in or passing through what became Uganda, Kenya, and Zanzibar. The period covered extends between 1888 and 1905, when control of British East Africa passed from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office. North presents over 4,000 alphabetized personal entries and 800 photos, listing information such as nationality, important dates, and the occupations of colonial officials, explorers, merchants, settlers, soldiers, and missionaries.

The introduction includes brief essays describing the sources consulted and the organizations with which the European visitors to Africa were associated (e.g., Royal Navy, Catholic missions, Uganda Railway). While a timeline might better introduce the period’s history, these pieces have important (and often humorous)
information. (I noted one inaccuracy: the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa arrived in Zanzibar in 1864, not in the 1880s.)

The heart of North’s work is the entries. Ascertaining their accuracy would require months. My quick perusal suggests that North has been assiduous; none of those whom I sought (names arising from my work on Zanzibar-centered Catholic mission history) were missing or misrepresented. If one has the name of a European in the region during the period considered and seeks biographical details, then this is a fine resource.

Given North’s prodigious efforts, however, the book’s organizational limits are unfortunate. Its lack of an index makes cross-referencing difficult. One cannot easily use it to discover, for example, all the Italians in the region, or all the Methodist missionaries. This work thus begs to be computerized, to make these kinds of questions easier to pursue.

—Paul V. Kollman

Paul V. Kollman teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana. He is the author of The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa (Orbis Books, 2005).

An Evangelical Saga: Baptists and Their Precursors in Latin America.


The author of An Evangelical Saga was a respected Southern Baptist missionary in Argentina for seventeen years, and then professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, for twenty-six years. One section of the book is a translation and updating of the third and last volume of a history of Baptists that Anderson published in Spanish. For some of the Latin American countries Anderson carried on research in primary sources; it is fascinating to learn that he knew personally many of the Baptist leaders or authors he quotes.

As the title of the book says clearly, the author is especially interested in Baptist missionary work in Latin America, to which he dedicates chapters 6–11 of the book. The first five chapters contain a valuable summary of the work of pioneers of Protestant mission from a variety of denominations. Especially valuable in this introductory section is the author’s methodological approach, distinguishing the influence of those he calls “providential precursors” and the work of those he calls “intentional pioneers.” In this section about Baptist work the book is stronger in the chapters about Mexico, Brazil, and especially the Southern Cone of South America, the region where the author worked as a missionary. The fact that some of the church historians quoted, such as Pablo Deiros from Argentina (p. 602) and Arturo Nacho from Bolivia (p. 321), were students under Anderson is a tribute to his work as historian and theological educator. It also demonstrates what a loss has come to Latin America with changes in Southern Baptist missionary policy that led them to completely abandon theological education.

Readers interested in research will no doubt want to examine the many boxes of source material that the author has

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New from OMSC Publications—a 128-page book of paintings by He Qi, a noted contemporary Chinese Christian artist. A professor at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and the current Paul T. Lauby artist in residence at OMSC, He Qi hopes to help change the “foreign image” of Christianity in China through his art and, at the same time, to supplement Chinese art the way Buddhist art did in ancient times. His art has been featured on the BBC and in Asian Week, Far Eastern Economic Review, and Christianity Today.

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Encounters and Dialogues: Changing Perspectives on Chinese-Western Exchanges from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries.


This edited volume grew out of a conference held in Beijing and organized by the Ricci Institute of the University of San Francisco, long a patron of scholarship on Christianity in China. The contributors to the volume from the Western side are leading scholars in the field, and their articles are of a consistently high caliber. Six of the seventeen chapters are written in Chinese by Chinese scholars; one of these articles, looking at the impact of lineage society on missionary efforts, is especially noteworthy.

The title of the conference, while understandable, given the venue, might have constrained the discussion, since most of these early exchanges were initiated by Catholic missionaries. The focus here is thus more on missionaries bringing their culture to the Chinese, rather than on Chinese bringing their culture to Westerners, or even on the culture of Chinese Christians themselves.

Happily, these scholars have overcome the limits of this perspective, largely because their missionary subjects themselves were not bound by such limits. Indeed, the breadth of the selected topics clearly demonstrates that the religion propagated by these missionaries was not some private faith, concerned only with personal piety. Rather, theirs was a Christianity that expressed itself in a full range of cultural activity, from staffing the Directorate of Astronomy in Beijing to adapting Western perspective to Chinese painting.

It is this Christianity, fully expressed in Chinese culture, that attracted Chinese converts and encouraged them in their own efforts to create a culture at once fully Chinese and fully Christian.

—Thomas H. Reilly

Thomas H. Reilly, Associate Professor of Chinese History and Asian Studies at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California, served as a missionary in Taiwan from 1984 to 1988.

She Has Done a Beautiful Thing for Me: Portraits of Christian Women in Asia.


In the foreword, Andrew Walls describes this book as a “rich offering;” it brings into focus the contributions and beautiful things done for God by just a sampling of women in Asia. Anne Kwantes, born to missionary parents in Indonesia and reared in the Netherlands and Canada,


Cross Culture and Faith records the transformation of James Mellon Menzies from a Canadian missionary to China to an archaeologist of ancient Chinese civilization. Menzies went to China to evangelize the Chinese but was eventually converted by the Chinese culture. The book demonstrates how, through Menzies’s experience, the Chinese oracle bones came to be known in the West as a key symbol of ancient Chinese cultural achievement.

Although Menzies shared with other missionaries a similar Christian aspiration when he first went to China, he had a very remarkable ending, transforming himself into a true China scholar. Initially he was an engineering student, but evangelism eventually captured his heart. Inspired by the Student Volunteer Movement at the turn of the twentieth century, Menzies went to China hoping to use his mission to help combat rural poverty. While in China, however, he became a collector of ancient Shang artifacts, which led him to develop a scholarly interest in the study of the oracle bones. (These were animal bones used in divination, on the surface of which were writings in an early Chinese script.)

In his capacities as both a missionary and an archaeologist, Menzies demonstrated his understanding of the Chinese cause. While conducting his mission work, he refused to label the Chinese converts as rice Christians. He argued: “They may have come for the rice, but despite their initial motivation, they were confirmed in their faith as their spiritual life evolved” (p. 96). Later, as an archaeologist, Menzies maintained the same sympathetic attitude toward the Chinese. He collected the ancient Chinese artifacts for his own personal benefit but not for any public display, because he believed that the Chinese should have the first right to do so.

The most interesting part of this book is its revelation of an intellectual-property dispute between James Menzies and Bishop White, his doctoral adviser, whom Menzies felt had stolen his academic research on Shang bronze culture.

Although Menzies found “grace” in ancient Chinese civilization, he became a lost man to his own Canadian society. This book vividly captures the irony of the life of James Menzies.

—Li Li

Li Li, Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies Coordinator at Salem State College, Salem, Massachusetts, is the author of Mission in Suzhou: Sophie Lange and Wei Ling Girl’s Academy, 1907–1950 (Univ. Press of the South, 1999).
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November 27–December 1
Gospel Witness Among Muslims.
Dr. Phil Parshall, for twenty years director of SIM’s Asian Research Center, Manila, Philippines, and Dr. Greg Livingstone, founder of Frontiers, co-lead this seminar. From lifetimes of mission innovation, these two senior leaders look at pressing issues in outreach to Muslims. Cosponsored by Black Rock Congregational Church (Fairfield, Connecticut), Christar, Christian Reformed World Missions, and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod World Mission. Eight sessions. $145

December 4–8
Jerusalem, the Palestinian Conflict, and Christian Mission.
Mr. Colin Chapman, senior mission scholar in residence, lecturer in Islamic studies at the Near Eastern School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon (1999–2003), and author of Whose Holy City? Jerusalem and the Future of Peace in the Middle East (2005), focuses on Jerusalem in the Bible and in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, bringing Scripture and theology together with history and politics. Cosponsored by the Episcopal Church/Anglican and Global Relations, First Presbyterian Church (New Haven), Mennonite Central Committee, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (Riverside, Connecticut), and United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. Eight sessions. $145
Book Notes

Ahonen, Risto A. Translated by Michael Cox and John Mills. 

Alvarsson, Jan-Åke, ed. 
The Missionary Process. 

Buell, Denise Kimber. 
Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity. 

Coleman, John A., and William F. Ryan, eds. 
Globalization and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope. 

Crouse, Eric R. 

Egnell, Helene. 
Other Voices: A Study of Christian Feminist Approaches to Religious Plurality East and West. 

Fitch, David E. 
The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies. 

Garvey, John. 
Seeds of the Word: Orthodox Thinking on Other Religions. 

Grenham, Thomas G. 
The Unknown God: Religious and Theological Interculturation. 

Jeanrond, Werner G., and Asaŝulv Lande, eds. 
The Concept of God in Global Dialogue. 

Knitter, Paul F., ed. 

Koshy, Ninan, ed. 
Hong Kong: World Student Christian Federation, Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, 

Kuhn, Wagner. 
Christian Relief and Development: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives of the Holistic Gospel. 

Marynovych, Myroslav. 
An Ecumenist Analyzes the History and Prospects of Religion in the Ukraine. 

Ryman, Björn, with Aila Lauha, Gunnar Heine, and Peter Lodberg. 
Nordic Folk Churches: A Contemporary Church History. 

In Coming Issues

Contextualizing Universal Values: A Method for Christian Mission 
Frances S. Adeney

The Church in North Korea: Retrospect and Prospect 
Hyun-Sik Kim

Catholic Missionaries and Civil Power in Africa, 1878–1914 
Aylward Shorter, M.Afr.

Spreading Fires: The Globalization of Pentecostalism in the Twentieth Century 
Allan Anderson

Predecessors to the Formation of the World Student Christian Federation 
Johanna M. Selles

Violence and Mission 
Alan Kreider

Ecumenical Theological Education in Latin America, 1916-2005 
Sherron Kay George

Pre-Revolution Russian Mission to Central Asia: A Contextualized Legacy 
David M. Johnstone

In our Series on the Legacy of Outstanding Missionary Figures of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, articles about 
Thomas Barclay 
George Bowen 
Hélène de Chappotin 
Elizabeth Fairburn Colenso 
Pa Yohanna Gowon 
Carl Fredrik Hallencreutz 
Hannah Kilham 
Hilda Lazarus 
Rudolf Lechner 
George Leslie Mackay 
Lessie Newbiggin 
Constance Padwick 
Peter Parker 
James Howell Pyke 
Pandita Ramabai 
Elizabeth Russell 
Bakhit Singh 
James Stephen 
Philip B. Sullivan 
James M. Thoburn 
M. M. Thomas 
Harold W. Turner 
Johannes Verkuyl 
William Vories