Orientalism, Occidentalistm, and Christian Mission

Christianity and Islam share much in common. Each is monotheistic, and each claims universality. Each fosters strong traditions of piety, social action, and justice. Each claims—with impressive, albeit selective, proofs—to be the religion of peace par excellence; yet the history of each attests to the sorry ease with which their holy books are invoked to legitimize or demand violent means to achieve divinely decreed ends. Each has recourse to a rich repository of self-flattering memories, providing followers with the means to excuse, reinterpret, or overlook evil perpetrated in the name of its deity.

It is not their similarities, however, but their apparent dis-similarities that concern most observers. Are Christian and Islamic differences merely cosmetic, or are they foundational, the manifestation of intrinsically antithetical cosmologies? Can we realistically look forward to anything more than the bloody specter of escalating, religiously inspired violence?

In Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies (Penguin Press, 2004), Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit show that Western Orientalism—the focus of Herb Swanson’s article—is mirrored in Eastern Occidentalistm. Its more extreme manifestation sees the West as utterly diseased and irredeemably corrupt, a deadly global pestilence. With greed, sensuality, and self-interest as its primary vices, the thinking goes, the West should not—indeed cannot—be saved, any more than can cancer or smallpox. If the patient is to be spared, the disease must be eradicated.

In her lead article, Heather Sharkey shows how Christian missionary activity has been portrayed in Arabic literature as a part of this deadly epidemic. Having for centuries benefited directly from Western intervention in the affairs of Muslim states, missionary benevolence is viewed as a kind of religious wedge, a tool to crack the cultural integrity of Muslim societies, making them fatally vulnerable to the Western blight.

In light of all this, is it time to give up the idea of Christian mission to Muslims? Not according to Colin Chapman, whose careful response is by no means a carte blanche approval of either past or current missionary practices.

While there can be no escaping the cultural and national identities intermingled in the “jar of clay” in which missionaries carry the treasure of the Gospel, they can work hard at practicing the skills that distinguish a human being from a corporation: genuine listening, empathetic accompanying, and patient suffering. Only by insistent attention to the primacy of personal relationships can we and they transcend the siren allure of Orientalism and Occidentalism, allowing the Gospel to be seen, then heard.
Arabic Antimissionary Treatises: Muslim Responses to Christian Evangelism in the Modern Middle East

Heather J. Sharkey

In the late twentieth century several Muslim Arab thinkers published treatises that labeled Christian missionary activities in the Middle East as part of a Western imperial crusade against Islam. Together, the polemical works of this nature constitute a distinct Arabic genre characterized by its antimissionalist, anti-imperial, postcolonial tone.

Despite variations in the social profiles, ideologies, and national origins of their authors, these Arabic treatises share important features. They assert close and enduring historical connections between a triad of tabshir, isti‘mar, and ishtiraq—that is, Christian evangelism, Western imperialism, and Orientalist scholarship on Islam and Muslims. They discuss Christian evangelical methods for the sake of either resisting or imitating them. Most have an activist strain, urging Arab readers to “wake up” and rally to action by blocking Christian evangelical inroads and Western cultural influences, pursuing global Islamic mission (da‘wa, literally a “call” or “invitation”), or rigorously supporting the values of Arab Islamic culture. Some of the more recent works are deeply xenophobic and insist that Christians and Muslims remain enemies and rivals, locked in a battle for global mastery and survival.

Why did this Arabic genre flourish so markedly in the second half of the twentieth century? And why did the Muslim authors of these works portray Christian evangelism as such a grave threat to Islam and Muslims, condemning even the social services that early twentieth-century missionaries provided to develop modern schools, ameliorate public health, extend mass literacy, and so on? The vehemence of these authors is all the more striking if one considers, first, that European and American missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gained few Muslim converts (enjoying far greater success in conversion, by contrast, among indigenous Middle Eastern Christians) and, second, that in the mid–twentieth century newly independent Middle Eastern governments suppressed most missionary activities (for example, by “nationalizing” or appropriating many mission-affiliated schools and universities and by barring missionaries from teaching Christianity to Muslim students). Viewed in this light, the authors’ insistence that there is a continuing foreign Christian threat may seem highly questionable.

Nevertheless, a look at more than twenty Arabic antimissionalist treatises suggests provisional answers to the questions posed above about the genre’s popular appeal and its sources of anger or anguish. In short, these works may have struck a chord by acknowledging the humiliation that Western dominance has posed above about the genre’s popular appeal and its sources of anger or anguish. In short, these works may have struck a chord by acknowledging the humiliation that Western dominance has imposed on Arab Islamic culture. Some of the more recent works are deeply xenophobic and insist that Christians and Muslims remain enemies and rivals, locked in a battle for global mastery and survival.

Imperialism and Modern Christian Mission

To appreciate the causes for Arab Muslim distress in the face of modern Western imperialism, one must bear in mind that the early Islamic state was once a major imperial power in its own right. By the time Muhammad died in Arabia in A.D. 632, the earliest Muslims had consolidated their hold over the Arabian Peninsula and were poised to expand by conquest into the territories of the Byzantine and Sassanian (Persian) Empires. In the decades that followed, Arab Muslim armies enjoyed spectacular military success—by 711 they controlled a swath of territory extending from what is now Gibraltar and Morocco to the fringes of India and Uzbekistan. Muslim rulers in the growing Islamic empire drew upon guidelines from the Qur’an and from the practices of Muhammad and his early successors to devise the following policies toward the Christians and Jews who lived within their domains: as “People of the Book,” endowed with holy scriptures that recognized the one God, Christians and Jews were allowed to practice their religions freely as long as they acknowledged a subservient status. As dhimmis (protected peoples under social contract), Christians and Jews were obliged to pay a special poll tax (jizya) and to heed certain restrictions. For example, they could not disturb public tranquility with church bells, and they could not repair places of worship without Islamic state permission. Moreover, in compliance, first, with Islamic doctrine (which maintained that Muhammad had been the last in a long line of prophets, including Jesus, and that the Qur’an’s message superseded Judaism and Christianity) and, second, with the codes set by early Islamic jurists (who interpreted the Qur’an and the hadith, or traditions about Muhammad and his companions, in order to interpret Islamic law), the Islamic state allowed conversion into Islam but forbade conversion out of it. Those who were born Muslim or became Muslim had to stay Muslim, or else—if they tried to leave the fold and failed to recant—face a final sanction of death.

For centuries, under a succession of Islamic dynasties that ruled parts of the Middle East, these general principles toward non-Muslims and conversion prevailed. In the Ottoman Empire (the last of the great Islamic world empires, which for a time ruled the Arab world from what is now Algeria to Iraq as well as Turkey and much of southeastern Europe), matters started to change only in the nineteenth century, as Western economic, cultural, and political influence grew, and as Western ideas about nationalism, citizenship, and social equality challenged traditional notions about the social roles and rights of non-Muslims (as well as of Muslim women and non-elites). Educated Ottoman elites embraced many of these Western ideas. In two famous edicts issued in 1839 and 1856 (later rejected by a pro-Islamic sultan), the Ottoman state even proclaimed religious and social equality for all Ottoman subjects, Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

Among Muslim leaders and intellectuals, the growing pace and intensity of Western intervention became a cause for mounting concern as the nineteenth century ended. In 1798 Napoleon had conquered and briefly held Egypt; in 1830 French forces had invaded Algeria and stayed. In the next several decades, European colonialism gained more ground as Britain and France (and

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Italy, in Libya) invaded, occupied, annexed, or imposed protectorates over Arab territories, or signed treaties with local potentates to secure trading monopolies and diplomatic control. In this manner, by the eve of World War I all of North Africa plus Aden and the Gulf states had fallen under European rule. The process continued after World War I, when France and Britain dismantled the Ottoman Empire, which had sided with Germany during the war. In the Arabic-speaking, former Ottoman territories of the Fertile Crescent, France and Britain imposed new internal boundaries and claimed control (through League of Nations-approved “mandates”) over what is now known as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza. The British decision in 1918 to support the establishment of a Jewish homeland in the Palestine mandate, a territory inhabited by an overwhelming Arab (Muslim and Christian) majority, had dramatic long-term consequences for the Middle East and its peoples. To this day, most Arabs look upon the foundation of Israel in 1948 and the dispersion of the territory’s Arabic-speaking majority (those who became known as the Palestinians) as one of the greatest injustices perpetrated by the Western imperial powers in the modern era.

Missionaries fit into this story of imperialism because they benefited directly from the expansion of Western influence in the Middle East. American and British Protestant missionaries arrived in what is now Lebanon in the early 1820s and moved into Asia Minor, the Fertile Crescent, and North Africa in subsequent decades. As Westerners in Ottoman domains, they enjoyed access to a set of special legal rights and exemptions, known as the Capitulations, which afforded something akin to diplomatic immunity; they also enjoyed the protection of their countries’ consuls, who used political and economic leverage to defend missionary co-nationalists. These privileges became especially valuable in the late nineteenth century, when Anglo-American Protestants, buoyed by enthusiasm for the idea of rapid worldwide evangelization, moved away from their early focus on Eastern Christians to emphasize work among Muslims. Thus, under the aegis of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western imperialism, missionaries were able to do what had once been unthinkable in Islamic state domains: to attempt openly to convert Muslims to Christianity. Missionaries’ ability to evangelize violated the centuries-long status quo by which Muslim rulers had tolerated the presence of Christians as long as they recognized and respected Islamic hegemony. Missionary evangelism also served as a stark reminder of the political and military impotence of the Islamic world in the face of Western imperialism.

The task of Muslim conversion was far from easy, despite the committed efforts of Christian evangelists, largely because missionaries enjoyed freedoms that local Muslims lacked. That is, prospective Muslim converts faced stiff social sanctions from families and communities, including assault and kidnapping; the prospect of disinheriting, divorce, and ostracism; even the possibility of death (“honor killing”). Missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lamented that these threats deterred most Muslims from Christian conversion. Contrary to missionaries’ hopes, therefore, conversion out of Islam never became a mass movement, even in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when the social, political, and economic climate of colonialism was most conducive to Christian evangelism.

By the 1920s, as anticolonial nationalist movements grew stronger in countries like Egypt, and as Muslim Arabs deplored the ways in which the European powers had dismembered the Ottoman Empire, Islamic movements took root. In 1928 an
Egyptian schoolteacher named Hasan al-Banna founded an organization called the Muslim Brotherhood, which was to have a transformative effect on global Islamic activism (for example, by eventually spawning groups like the militant Palestinian Hamas). One of the early concerns of the Muslim Brotherhood was to counteract Christian missionary activities in Egypt. Banna and his associates achieved their goal, in part, by replicating Christian evangelicalism in the form of Islamic da’wah and by establishing missionary-style social service networks (schools, clinics, sports clubs) as a method of public outreach. Banna also called for the stricter assertion of Islamic laws and mores: only by being better Muslims and by returning to the rigors of early Islam, he argued, could modern Islamic societies recover the strength to stand up to Western imperialism. These ideas about reconciling tradition and modernity while applying Islam to government and social behavior are at the core of what social scientists today call Islamism and the Islamist movement.

Banna and his peers founded the Muslim Brotherhood at a time when the Egyptian Arabic press was printing sensational accounts about Christian missionaries, repeatedly alleging that missionaries had kidnapped, brainwashed, or abused Muslim schoolchildren in order to convert them. The authors of postcolonial antimissionary treatises frequently allude to these alleged atrocities (which they accept as fact) to make a point about missionary wiles and perfidy.

Yet in the view of several of these authors, the worst, most dangerous, and most chronically debilitating aspect of Christian evangelism for Islamic society was not the loss of a few Muslims through conversion to Christianity, however reprehensible this may have seemed to them, but rather missionaries’ denigration or defamation (tashwih) of Islam and their promotion of Western culture. The authors repeatedly stress the ways in which missionaries and Westerners at large planted doubts in the minds of Muslims—and particularly in the minds of children—about the capacity of Islamic society for social progress, development, and relevance in the modern world. Informing their views is an acute awareness that the Islamic world had fallen on hard times. Centuries before, the Islamic empire had enjoyed a golden age of technological and scientific sophistication, military strength, and cultural dynamism. But in the twentieth century the West was more powerful and dangerous agents of Western imperialism and that missionary institutions (schools, hospitals, bookstores, etc.) were tools for the Western assertion of political and economic hegemony (saylana) over the Middle East. They maintained that religious motives were secondary or even a cover for missionaries who, as products of the materialistic West, were likely to worship steel, gold, and oil more than God. They described missionaries as latter-day Crusaders, “distinguished by their intense animosity toward Arab Muslims, and by their apparent animosity toward the people of different Christian sects as well.” They applied these arguments to Protestants and Catholics and to American, British, French, and Italian missionary groups; they even applied them to the Soviets, whose leaders, they claimed, promoted missionary activities in the Middle East despite their regime’s official atheism. Khalidi and Farrukh concluded their book by asserting that Western Christian evangelism still threatened Eastern peoples with cultural destruction.

Four main factors explain the impact and appeal of Khalidi and Farrukh’s book. First, it had a clear and transportable thesis—the idea that missionaries were culturally pernicious agents of Western imperialism who endangered Arabic-Islamic culture. Second, it drew upon a wide array of English- and French-language missionary sources, including nineteenth- and twentieth-century biographies, reports, journals, and conference proceedings. This use of sources gave the book academic heft and appealed especially to Arab readers who did not know European languages. Third, it took what one might call an ideologically centrist or inclusive position that allowed for multiple readings. Even Arab Christians could theoretically relate to its ideas, given that the authors dedicated the book equally to Muslim and Christian Arab youths (thereby signaling that their opposition to Western imperialism and evangelism did not extend to Christianity or to all Christians). Finally, the book made its debut at an important historical moment in the Middle East, when the region was in the throes of decolonization, when the cold war and Arab-Israeli conflict loomed large, and when the political mood was right for critical reappraisals of colonialism.

Khalidi and Farrukh’s arguments resonated with Arab readers because they were familiar. Since the 1920s Muslim nationalists and Islamist activists in Egypt—the cultural and intellectual capital of the Arab world—had been excoriating Christian missionaries as colonial agents. Khalidi and Farrukh addressed these long-standing grievances, bolstered their polemic with research grounded in the missionaries’ own writings, and cast them into a book that went on to inspire other Muslim Arab writers to elaborate on antimissional, anti-imperialist themes.

Recurring Charges Against the Missionaries

Arabic antimissional treatises share the assumption that Christian evangelism and Western imperialism have been inextricably linked in the modern era, and that the Christianity promoted by foreign missionaries was a Western cultural product. According to this view, missionaries sought not only to turn Muslims into Christians but also to import alien values that would acculturate Muslims to Western ways—for example, by dulling religion with secularism or promoting unfettered interaction between men and women. To accentuate the Westernness of missionary

Their polemic was bolstered by research in the missionaries’ own writings.

“Evangelism and Imperialism in the Arab World”

The pathbreaking book in the genre of Arabic antimissional writings was al-Tabshir wa’l-isti’mar fi al-bilad al-arabiyya (Evangelism and Imperialism in the Arab World), published in Beirut in 1953. Its authors were Mustafa Khalidi, a former professor of obstetrics at the American University of Beirut and the head of the Lebanese national school of nursing, and ‘Umar Farrukh, a specialist in early Islamic history, classical Arabic poetry, and Sufism. Their book on evangelism was so popular that at least six subsequent Arabic editions appeared over the next thirty years; it was also translated into Russian (1961), Persian (1968), and Turkish (1968 and 1991). It went on to influence Arabic writers whose ideologies ranged across the spectrum from secular Arab socialism to militant Islamism; it shaped the ideas of polemists and academics alike.

Khalidi and Farrukh argued that Christian missionaries were the most powerful and dangerous agents of Western imperialism and that missionary institutions (schools, hospitals, bookstores, etc.) were tools for the Western assertion of political and economic hegemony (saylana) over the Middle East. They maintained that religious motives were secondary or even a cover for missionaries who, as products of the materialistic West, were likely to worship steel, gold, and oil more than God. They described missionaries as latter-day Crusaders, “distinguished by their intense animosity toward Arab Muslims, and by their apparent animosity toward the people of different Christian sects as well.” They applied these arguments to Protestants and Catholics and to American, British, French, and Italian missionary groups; they even applied them to the Soviets, whose leaders, they claimed, promoted missionary activities in the Middle East despite their regime’s official atheism. Khalidi and Farrukh concluded their book by asserting that Western Christian evangelism still threatened Eastern peoples with cultural destruction.

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Christianity, and to preserve, remember, or idealize the harmonious coexistence that had traditionally characterized relations between Muslims and indigenous Christians, one author suggests that the religion of the missionaries should be called salibiyya, “Crusaderism,” rather than nashiyya, Christianity.9 Still other authors signal their disdain for foreign missionaries and their local supporters by using the vaguely derogatory term nasara rather than nashiyyun for Christians, and munassirin (“Christianizers”) rather than nubashirin (spreaders of [God’s] news to humankind) for Christian missionaries.

Crusader themes figure strongly in these treatises. A standard refrain is that nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionaries were direct heirs of the Crusaders who rampaged the eastern Mediterranean zones of the Islamic world from the late eleventh through the mid-thirteenth centuries. Having failed to defeat the Islamic world militarily, the argument goes, Christians switched tactics and turned toward evangelism, aiming instead to achieve political goals through the conquest of souls.10 Antimissionary writers argue, too, that as a series of Christian culture wars against Islam, the Crusades continued into the late twentieth century under various guises. They point to the growth of evangelical radio networks and broadcasting media, beamed to Muslim Middle Eastern audiences from countries like Cyprus. Several censure international schools, whether church-affiliated or nonsectarian, as centers of missionary-style Westernization and of what one could perhaps call Islamic deculturation.11 One secular leftist (Arab nationalist) writer claims that the CIA included many missionary operatives who were trained in the art of inciting discord. Meanwhile, the more extreme Islamist authors accuse foreign nongovernment organizations, including charities like Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), of having missionary connections; one author even condemns the United Nations as a “Crusader Jewish organization” and the World Health Organization as a front for Christian evangelism.12 A couple of Islamists also express contempt for Western-initiated human rights initiatives for freedom of religion and conscience, regarding them as part of a long-standing missionary plot to undo Islam by enshrining rights for Christian proselytism and Muslim out-conversion. One even claims that missionaries have encouraged family planning programs to limit the growth of Muslim populations.

Several antimissionary writers accuse missionaries of having tried to undermine the Arabic language—a language that they identify as the cornerstone of Arab identity and as the God-chosen medium for the Qur’an. Reflecting a view widely shared among Arab Muslims of diverse political and religious orientations, these authors object, in particular, to the way in which some early twentieth-century missionaries developed printed materials for educational purposes by using simplified Arabic colloquials (that is, local spoken dialects) in lieu of the high literary language (al-fusla) that educated Arabs have historically employed as the vehicle for formal Arabic reading and writing.13 They describe missionary efforts to cultivate locally variant dialects for publishing purposes as part of a colonial ruse to divide the Arab peoples, in this case by constructing communications barriers among them.14

Antimissionary writers also assert that missionaries fomented sectarian tensions and kindled Muslim-Christian strife. This argument is neither new nor controversial: academic historians, Middle Eastern Christians, and even missiologists and missionaries have agreed that missionaries in certain contexts (for example, in Lebanon and Sudan) exacerbated local ethnic or communal tensions, while allowing their own national and denominational distinctions to produce rivalries between missions.15 Others have also acknowledged that local Christians sometimes enjoyed professional, economic, or educational privileges through their missionary connections—privileges that may have stoked Muslim resentments in the long run.16 Yet, rather than seeing the divisive influences of missionaries as the result of inadvertent or unconscious behaviors, the writers of antimissionary treatises assume ill-intent and accuse missionaries of pursuing a colonial agenda of divide and rule.

Many authors of antimissionary treatises also accuse missionaries of having been complicit in the establishment of Israel and in the uprooting of Palestinians—developments that these authors regard as grievous historical wrongdoings. They suggest that missionaries gave strong moral support to Zionists as they worked to establish a Jewish homeland in what had been, before 1918, an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. Arguments on this score are vague and assume congruity between twentieth-century missionary attitudes and British and American government policies. (Note, however, that mission archives do not support this reading—records show, for example, that American Presbyterian missionaries in Egypt were harsh critics of U.S. government policies toward Israel after 1948, policies that in their view ignored the plight of the Palestinians.)17 In some cases antimissionary writers also imply a connection between the original Christian Crusader wars and the creation of modern Israel—two enterprises that, in their view, wrested Jerusalem from Muslim rule and created colonial enclaves in the Holy Land.

Finally, antimissionary writers charge missionaries with promoting Orientalism (ishtiraq)—a set of pernicious stereotypes, often propagated through the medium of Western scholarship, that portray Muslims and Arabs as backward, irrational, and perverted. Like evangelism, they suggest, Orientalism aimed to achieve a spiritual-cum-political conquest by shaking the confidence of Arab Muslims and thereby facilitating Western control.18

**Conclusion: Trends of the 1980s and 1990s**

In the twenty-five years that followed the publication of Khalidi and Farrukh’s book, Arabic antimissionary treatises intermittently appeared. Judging from American research library acquisitions, however, the genre experienced an upsurge in the 1980s and 1990s among Islamists who displayed a stridently anti-Christian—and not merely antimissionary—tone. Whereas Khalidi and Farrukh in mid-century had restricted their criticism to foreign missionaries and Western Christianity, members of this Islamist cadre now showed a greater readiness to criticize Middle Eastern Christians, such as the Egyptian Copts, by suggesting that they had become arrogant and had forgotten their proper place as dhimmi—tolerated, protected, but socially subordinate peoples living at the sufferance of Islamic states. The most xenophobic writing came from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states (the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar), where writers issued policy suggestions. Xenophobes urged
governments in the region, for example, to close or crack down on Christian churches (which served foreigners and could therefore function as centers for spying), curtail international schools, impose heavier censorship on Western media imports, and, as far as possible, bar the hiring of non-Muslim workers (notably, South Indian and Filipino Christians), who might try to engage in covert evangelism. Muslims must not wait, warned one writer, until upstart Christians rang church bells in their midst or subjected Muslims to humiliations like the jizya, the poll-tax once levied on Christians and Jews. The anti-Christian sentiment of these writers was an outgrowth of their anti-Westernism. Their rejection of the West, which they presented as dehumanized, soulless, materialistic, and morally corrupt, amounted to what some observers now call “Occidentalism”—a pattern of pernicious stereotyping which is the inverse of the Orientalism that antimissionary writers have approached Western Christianity with a deep and abiding mistrust. In some ways, their hatred was rooted in fear that they might lose themselves to the West through a subtle cultural transformation that could prey upon their doubts and perhaps even “convert” them unawares.

Notes
1. One scholar summarizes Islam’s stance towards apostasy (ridda) and the apostate (murtadd) thus: “in the Qur’an, the apostate is threatened with punishment in the next world only, but in Tradition [hadith], the Prophet is said to have prescribed the death penalty as punishment for apostasy.” The jurists are unanimous that death is the penalty for apostasy but differ over “whether the apostate should be given an opportunity to repent.” E. van Donzel, Islamic Desk Reference (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 36. An important new work on these issues in early Islamic history is Yohanan Friedmann, Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003); note that he discusses apostasy in pp. 121–59. See also C. Cahen, “Dhimma,” in Encyclopedia of Islam, new ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 2:227–31.
6. One can locate these editions and translations in the RLIN or WorldCat databases, which cover the holdings of American research libraries.
7. An example of an Arabic academic study of this kind is a work on nineteenth-century French colonial missions in Algeria by Khadjia Biqash, al-Harak al-tabshiriyya al-faransiyya fi al-Jaza’ir, 1830–1871 (The French Evangelical Movement in Algeria, 1830–1871) (Algiers: Matba’at Dahlab, 1992). Some of her words sound like a direct quotation from Khalidi and Farrukh; she asserts in her introduction, “There is no doubt that the real and primary motive . . . of evangelism is the termination of non-Christian religions in order to effect the subjugation [isti’bad] of their followers. Indeed, the battle between evangelists and non-Christian religions is not a battle of religion, but rather a battle in the path of political and economic domination” (p. 5). This book appears to have originated in a university dissertation.
10. In fact, by emphasizing the Crusader dimensions of the modern evangelical movement, these Muslim authors are to some extent echoing sentiments voiced by early twentieth-century Anglo-American Protestant missionaries, many of whom called themselves modern Crusaders or described their mission as a crusade for social progress. Heather J. Sharkey, “A New Crusade or an Old One?” ISIM Newsletter (Leiden: International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World), no. 12 (June 2003): 48–49, available online through the publications link at http://www.isim.nl.
11. Located in Cairo, Khartoum, Abu Dhabi, and other major Middle Eastern cities, such schools cater to foreign expatriates and to local Muslim and non-Muslim elites.
12. This particular author, whose rhetoric places him on the extreme Islamist fringe, also made what appears to be an allusion to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City; he wrote that the “Christianizers . . . made a great mistake because Islam is a tall building which no one can destroy.” Mustafa Fawzi ‘Abd al-Latif Ghaazal, al-Hujj al-wa’l-Asbab al-Munbarrafa fi al-da’wa ila al-tabshir (Ruses and Corrupt Methods in the Call to Evangelism) (n.p.: Matab bi’l-Majmu’at al-Tamiyya, [late 1990s]).
13. Missionaries had two goals in devising Arabic colloquial publications—to build rudimentary literacy among rural-dwellers and the urban lower classes (i.e., those who had not had the privilege of extended academic educations), and in some cases to provide translations of the Bible in the vernacular (in this case, in the Arabic language that people actually spoke, as opposed to the lofty fusha of scholars).
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16. Regarding Egypt, for example, see Saad Eddin Ibrahim et al., The Copts of Egypt (London: Minority Rights Group, 1996).

17. Presbyterian Historical Society (Philadelphia), UPCNA RG 209-4-20: Helen J. Martin Papers, Martin to Kelsey, Cairo, July 20, 1948; Martin to Reed, Cairo, May 22, 1948; E. E. Elder to President Truman, May 21, 1948.

18. Some writers identify particular missionary-scholars who doubled as Orientalists, frequently naming, for example, Samuel M. Zwemer, W. H. T. Gairdner, and Kenneth Cragg. The ideas of Edward W. Said, whose academic treatise Orientalism (published in English in 1978 and issued in Arabic translation in 1981) considered Western portrayals of the East as functioning in the service of empire, may have influenced many antimissionary writers, though they do not necessarily cite his work in their bibliographies.

19. See Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies (New York: Penguin, 2004). These authors define Occidentalism as the “dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies” which reduces the West “to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unf feeling parasites” (pp. 5, 10).

Arabic Antimissionary Treatises: A Select Annotated Bibliography

Heather J. Sharkey

The works listed in this bibliography illustrate themes common to Arabic antimissionary treatises. While the Muslim authors of all these works condemn Christian evangelism as a tool of Western imperialism, they differ in political outlook. Some are Arab nationalists—socialist-leaning secularists who extol the unity of Arab peoples and the cultural accomplishments of Islamic civilization; others are Islamists, those who call for the enforcement of Islamic government, law, and custom in the modern world. These volumes, which can be found in American research libraries, represent only a fraction of the Arabic treatises written on this topic.


The writer was an Egyptian Protestant (Presbyterian) pastor who converted to Islam in 1959 and later was appointed to the government’s High Council for Religious Affairs. Once a Christian evangelist to Muslims, he now became a Muslim evangelist to Christians. He argues that Anglo-American missionaries were duplicitous imperial agents and beneficiaries and that they played a role in inciting communal discord. He published other books on similar themes, including al-Ish'tiraq wa’l-tabshir wa-silatuhum bil-imbiriliyya al-‘alamiyya (Orientalism and Evangelism and Their Connection to Global Imperialism) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Wa’i al-‘Arabi, 1973), 199 pages.


The author, who taught Islamic studies at al-Imam Muhammad ibn Sa’ud Islamic University in Saudi Arabia, emphasizes the Christian threat to Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula and characterizes modern evangelism as a latter-day Crusade. He accuses missionaries of seeking to destroy Islam by planting doubts among Muslims, promoting Zionism in Palestine, abducting children to gain converts, inciting sectarian hatred in Muslim countries, and spying on local communities. He advises Gulf state governments to dissolve Christian churches, urges imams to speak out against Christianity in mosque sermons, promotes the pursuit of worldwide Islamic mission, and discourages Muslim families from visiting Western countries, except when strictly necessary (e.g., when seeking advanced medical care).


Writing at the peak of the Nasser era, this Egyptian author aimed to present an intellectual history of the Muslim world from North Africa to Southeast Asia, showing how the conditions of British, French, and Dutch imperialism and the activities of Orientalist scholars and Christian missionaries galvanized Muslim thinkers in the process of modern Islamic reform. He maintains that missionaries sought to transform (if not directly convert) Muslims by weakening Muslim values and morale and by asserting the incompatibility of Islam with modern civilization. He presented similar ideas in a short English-language work published as Mohammad El Bahay, The Attitude of Missionaries and Orientalists Towards Islam (Cairo: United Arab Republic, Government Printing Office, 1963), 43 pages.


The author traces Christian evangelism to the military failures of the original Crusader wars, and argues that Christian missionaries are neo-Crusaders bent on destroying Islam and conquering the world. He surveys colonial-era missionary work throughout the Middle East, discusses the various missionary conferences of the early twentieth century (beginning with Edinburgh 1910), considers the roles of missionary statesmen such as Samuel M. Zwemer (1867–1952), and considers patterns of Christian global evangelism from West Africa to Indonesia. He praises the efforts of the Egyptian government and other Muslim states to eliminate missionary activities after decolonization.

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In the view of this writer, the “evil powers” include a trio of Orientalism, Christian evangelism, and Western imperialism, or alternately, of Crusaderism, Communism, and Zionism. He claims that these powers want to destroy Islam because they know that the Arabic Qur’an stands as a monument to truth. He recounts a long history of foreign imperial assaults against Islam, from the Crusader wars and Mongol conquests, to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Regarding the Iran-Iraq war, which was raging as he wrote, he claims that the West was fanning the war’s flames in order to divide fellow Muslims (Iranians and Iraqis) from each other. He calls for the reassertion of Islamic values, for example, by banning co-ed schools, and urges worldwide Islamic mission, particularly for African “pagans” (waθthaniyyin), American “coloreds” (mulawwanin), and “Hindus and outcastes in the depths of India” (al-munbudhiyyin wa-l-hindukiyin fi a’maq al-hind).


This book presents a litany of Christian schemes to undermine Muslims, with many examples coming from early twentieth-century Egypt and Sudan. It claims that missionaries abducted children, exploited the sick, and effected other ruses to get converts. The author displays sentiments that are both anti-Christian and anti-Semitic; for example, he describes the United Nations as a “Jewish Crusading organization” that is dependent on “Jewish money.” In what appears to be a reference to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, he also warns that “Christianizers [al-munassirin] . . . made a great mistake because Islam is a tall building which no one can destroy.”


In this lengthy volume, the author describes Christians as infidels (kuffar) who have historically hated Islam, and he cites verses from the Qur’an to support the idea that Islam approves of killing Christians in Muslim domains unless they accept their subordinate status as dhimmis. The author also argues that the continued existence of Christians in the Islamic world proves Islam’s intrinsic tolerance and refutes accusations of its fanaticism. The author asserts that the Crusades have been steadily raging since before the late eleventh century, indeed since the dawn of Islam, and that “they will not end as long as the Crusaders fail to recognize the prophecy of Muhammad.” He sees the Christian West as a spreader of wickedness and criticizes Arab governments for giving missionaries and local Christians (e.g., the Egyptian Copts) free rein as well as for promoting secular policies. He inventories all Christian institutions and foreign schools in Kuwait (providing photographs and descriptions) and urges the Kuwaiti government to crack down on them. He also warns that Christian guest workers, for example, those from Kerala in South India, may be secretly functioning as “foot soldiers” (jumad) for Christian evangelism.


The author, a professor of Islamic philosophy at Cairo University, wrote this book at the request of the College of Shari’a and Islamic Studies, Qatar University. Though he acknowledges that among Christian missionaries there were some good people who respected Islam and cared about Muslims, he insists nevertheless that “Orientalism and Christianization [transir] were among the most dangerous means that imperialism used for its political penetration in the Islamic world, and there is no doubt that they were two faces of one [evil] deed [anla].” The author suggests, therefore, that one should distinguish between Christianity (maslikiyya), the religion of Jesus, and Crusaderism (salihiyya), the ideology of Christian missionaries and Western imperialists. Like several other works in this genre, the author surveys the missionary conferences of the early twentieth century and refers to the tactics of men like Samuel M. Zwemer (the bête noire of these antimissionary writers), whose confrontational evangelistic tactics earned him lasting notoriety among Muslims.


In these two works, the author argues that missionaries were the most destructive agents of Western imperialism. They planted doubts about Islam, contributed to spiritual weakness or cultural alienation, and paved the way for Westernization—that is, they influenced Muslims for the worse, even if they did not convert them outright. In references to Zionism and the creation of Israel, the author suggests that the Crusades revived with the British seizure of Palestine in 1918. Western Christian evangelists, he asserts, “began [their work] after the Crusaders left the Islamic world in 1291, and they are still working today, though they have changed their skin more than once.” The 1984 volume also affirms the relevance of Islam and Muslim mission for modern times and cites examples of distinguished and progressive-minded Westerners who converted to Islam.


Originally published in 1953 and reissued several times thereafter, this book initiated the postcolonial Arabic genre of antimissionary treatises. It has been translated into Russian, Turkish, and Persian. Its thesis—that Christian missionaries were the primary tools of Western political, economic, and cultural imperialism—proved extremely influential, appealing to Arab nationalists and Islamists, academics and polemists alike. The book draws extensively on English and French missionary sources of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and includes Protestants and Catholics in its scope. Its coverage is particularly strong on Lebanon (not surprising, given that the authors were based in Beirut).

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This slim book surveys work related to the Christian church or to mission in greater Khartoum, Sudan, over the course of the twentieth century and offers some policy suggestions. (Note: Many of its historical details, including dates, are incorrect.) The author traces the work of Christian charities among southern Sudanese and Nuba Mountain refugees or migrants. This topic of foreign Christian involvement commands particular interest among northern Sudanese Muslims, given the country’s postcolonial history of chronic civil war and the widely held belief that missionaries created or accentuated north-south divides by propagating Christianity in the south among practitioners of local religions. The author also considers the role of foreign schools (including both church-affiliated and nonsectarian institutions descended from colonial-era mission enterprises) in educating the children of local Khartoum-area Muslim elites. He urges the Sudanese government to crack down on these schools, which he considers to be centers of Westernization, and to bolster Islamic studies and practices within them.


As befitting a book published in Iraq during the era of Baath Party rule, this work takes a secular Arab nationalist, not Islamist, tone and shows a Marxist historiographical influence. It argues that missionaries tried to destroy Arab culture after six centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule, which had already mired the region in backwardness. It also argues that missionaries promoted a “Zionist imperialist plan” in the Middle East, that they engaged in the colonial policy of divide and rule, and that they fought a psychological war to demoralize Arabs. The author devotes a whole chapter to the relationship between missionaries and the CIA—claiming, for example, that missionaries received special training from the agency in “the skill of agitation” (tafannun al-ilhara), citing examples that range from the Congo to Vietnam.


A biographical note indicates that the author was born in an Egyptian Delta village in 1950 and was a lecturer of history at Minya University in Egypt. This book draws upon archival records and Arabic and English sources to recount a history of Anglo-American missionaries in Egypt. It asserts that Christian missions in the modern Middle East led “the most recent attempt to besiege Islam on its own ground” and that these new Crusaders remain a threat to Muslims globally. He therefore begins his study with a call to action: “Brothers of Islam, wake up!”


Although Middle Eastern Muslims and Christians historically lived as brethren, this writer argues, Christian evangelists—nowadays backed by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches—have declared Islam to be their enemy and have led attacks against it. Muslims must counter these efforts with global Islamic mission and must be aware that Christian evangelistic strategy, as articulated by the early twentieth-century missionary Samuel M. Zwemer, is to Christianize Muslims covertly, by deriding Islam and demoralizing Muslims about their capacity for modern civilization. He stresses the danger posed by Christian institutions, ranging from the American University in Beirut to a school run by Catholic nuns (most of them Iraqi Christians) in Abu Dhabi. He urges Muslims to action, asking, “Are we going to sleep until we awaken to the clanging of the church bells announcing an assault of the cross?” This book directs its policy suggestions to the government of the United Arab Emirates, advising it, for example, to criminalize violations against the state religion (i.e., to criminalize Christian evangelism among Muslims), to impose quotas on Christian guest workers, and to restrict foreign schools to foreign children (i.e., to prohibit Muslim students from attending).


Published by the Islamic Heritage Society of Cairo, this volume discusses Christian (Catholic and Protestant) evangelical radio broadcasts to the Middle East and considers how these programs, which began in the 1920s, have targeted Muslim audiences.


The author emphasizes the historic tolerance of Islam, which favored its expansion, contrasting it with the petty nationalist rivalries, imperialist ambitions, and material motives that have driven Christian evangelists since the Crusades. He discusses the dubious tactics that Christian missionaries have used around the world to acquire converts in modern times, citing examples from Senegal to the Philippines.


Writing from an Arab nationalist, not Islamist, perspective, the author asserts that “the goal of Christian evangelism . . . in the Arab countries under Ottoman rule was not to spread love and the egalitarian spirit that Christ [al-sayyid al-masih] called for, but rather to realize economic and political interests for Europe in the guise of religion.” More of a historical survey than a polemic, this book focuses on the history of the Arabic *nahda* (the nineteenth-century Arabic intellectual revival that paved the way for Arab nationalism). The author is critical not only of missionaries but also of the Ottoman (Turkish) imperial authorities, blaming both groups in the nineteenth century for trying to divide the Arab peoples and to push them into backwardness.
Said’s Orientalism and the Study of Christian Missions

Herb Swanson

In 1978 Edward W. Said (sah-eed) published his masterful and highly controversial book Orientalism, subtitled “Western Conceptions of the Orient.”1 In the quarter century that has followed, scholars in several fields have conducted an ongoing debate over the particulars of Said’s thesis that Western scholarship about Asia, which he calls Orientalism, has historically “constructed” a false, demeaning, and self-serving representation of the Orient. Said (1935–2003) accuses the orientalists with using their false, fabricated body of knowledge to aid and abet the European and American domination of Asia. He writes with power and passion about his subject in a tone that has captivated and converted some and driven others to fiery dissent. Important in its own right, Orientalism is also important because of the quality of the debate it has inspired. 2 That debate has in some ways modified, in other ways softened, and in still other ways fleshed out Said’s thesis so that his blunt attack on Western scholarly treatments of the Oriental “Other” has become a more balanced and useful tool for understanding how Western scholars have comprehended the peoples of the Orient. In light of this debate and the broad influence Said has exercised in the scholarly study of Western ways of “constructing the Other,” the adjective frequently applied to Orientalism is “seminal.”

A survey of issues and concerns debated by missiologists over the last twenty-five years, however, shows Said to be largely absent from the missiological literature. Many students of missions may not be aware to any extent of the Orientalism debate, which has taken place in journals and forums they do not normally read or attend. Others may have been put off by Said’s unremitting attack on the West and reluctant to submit the history of missions to an attack of that nature. Still others may have written Said off as “just another postmodernist,” a trendy savant of only passing interest. There are, to be sure, missiological studies that have made use of Said,3 but they do not constitute a trend, and there is no indication that Said or his critics and supporters have played a role in the study of missions comparable to their contribution to other fields.

The purpose of this essay is not to present yet another review of Said and his critics. It intends, rather, to point out a variety of ways in which the scholarly debate concerning Orientalism can contribute to the study of historical and contemporary international missions. It looks upon that debate as a tool for critical analysis and for cross-cultural reflection, a tool of potential value to the field of missiology.

Said’s Critique

While Said did not invent the term “Orientalism” and was hardly the first to describe and criticize European orientalists,4 the term has become associated with his name far more than anyone else’s. Orientalism, according to Said, is a bundle of interrelated characteristics. In a narrow sense, it is a centuries-old traditional body of knowledge created by European and, more recently, American writers who are considered experts on the Orient. They include scholars, novelists, travelers, diplomats, and missionaries, with scholars standing closest to the center of Said’s critical bull’s-eye. According to Said, this unified, international body of knowledge describes Orientals as being uncivilized, unprogressive, immoral, passive, emotional, sensual, and an extensive list of other unsavory characteristics. This body of knowledge is embodied in what Said calls a “discourse,” borrowing the term and some of his understanding of it from the French historian-philosopher Michel Foucault. Said focuses on the written discourses produced by orientalists and submits a significant number of them to a sharp, at times brutal, scrutiny. He also acknowledges, although with far less precision, that European policies and actions toward Orientals are a part of the orientalist “discourse.”

Said emphasizes the traditional nature of Orientalism, which has been so powerfully embedded in Western thinking about the Orient from ancient Greece onward that it constitutes an unquestioned habit of mind. When it comes to Asia, in effect, the West wears a set of blinders called Orientalism. At points, Said contends that there is no real or actual “Orient,” it is merely a mythical discourse invented by Europeans on the basis of their hereditary fear of the Arabs and especially of Islam. At other times, however, Said clearly assumes that there is a real Orient and feelingly condemns the ways in which coercive, aggressive, and oppressive orientalists have misrepresented the Orient. At the end of the day, Europe and America have used this orientalist body of knowledge as a tool for establishing and expanding Western power in Asia; Orientalism is a tool of Western colonialism and imperialism.

Said, finally, stresses the dualistic nature of Orientalism, which dualism makes hard and fast distinctions between the “civilized West” and the “uncivilized East.” Orientalism revolves around the distinction between Us and Them. Orientalists, as a consequence, assume that while the West is progressive and dynamic, the East is essentially stagnant and unchanging. Orientals, according to traditional orientalist discourse, are also ignorant, and they do not know themselves nearly as well as the orientalists know them. In one of his numerous summary descriptions of Orientalism, Said states that it is “the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice.” Or, again, it is “that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line” (p. 73).

Orientalism is a book that forces its readers to take sides, and no little part of the earlier debate that swirled around it amounted to either a passionate acceptance or rejection, usually clothed in apparently reasonable, academic dress. More recently, however, several scholars have built on Said to achieve a more useful understanding of the meaning and role of Orientalism. They have demonstrated, for instance, that there have been many “good” orientalists who wrote about Orientals with sympathetic understanding in spite of wider European prejudices. More recent scholarship has also found that many Asians actually contributed in various ways to sustaining Orientalism and that orientalist discourse has even been used in a variety of creative ways by Asians to counteract the power of Europe. Indian nationalists, for example, used orientalist descriptions of a non-violent and pacific India to encourage a nonviolent approach to national liberation. Scholars of Asia have also found, less hap-

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pily, that Asians at times developed their own versions of Orientalism, which they applied to other Asians. In the dying days of the Ottoman Empire, for example, the ruling Turkish elite articulated an “Ottoman Orientalism” that looked down on the other peoples of the empire as unprogressive, barbaric, and in need of modernization by the progressive, civilized Ottoman government. Many scholars are beginning to see that “Orientalism” as described by Said was actually but one instance of a larger assemblage of Western ways of dealing with the Other, be they Asians, Africans, the urban poor, Native Americans and aboriginals, Jews, or the many other peoples who stand at the margins of local, national, or global society.

The passionate debate over Said appears to have receded in the last decade or so. It has been replaced by passing references to him as the starting point or inspiration for new applications of the concept of Orientalism. It is this refined Orientalism that is of value to the historical and contemporary study of foreign missions.

Missionary Discourse and Orientalism

Turning to the possible uses that missiologists can make of Said’s Orientalism, it is important to observe from the outset that missionary writings comprise a stream of discourse that displays many of the characteristics of orientalist discourse. The intensive search by missiologists and missionaries across the theological spectrum for ways to break with older missionary attitudes and discover more contextual ways to present the Christian message in and of itself suggests that traditional missionary discourse was a form of Orientalism. At various points, Said himself implies a connection between Christianity, including Christian missions, and Orientalism. He claims, for example, that while Orientalism was primarily a secular discourse, it originated in Christian religious discourse and that even in its secularized forms “it also retained, as an undislodged current in its discourse, a reconstructed religious impulse, a naturalized supernaturalism” (p. 121). He thus considers Orientalism to be a set of structures that are “naturalized, modernized, and laicized substitutes for (or versions of) Christian supernaturalism” (p. 122). Said also links Protestant missions in the Middle East to European colonial expansion into the region (p. 100). While Said does not focus on the religious elements of Orientalism or give them anything more than passing, oblique notice, the hints and passing comments concerning the religious aspects of Orientalism deserve closer consideration. Hart has written, thus, of “Said’s cryptic, fugitive, but persistent reference to the sacred, religious, theological, and Manichaean.”

Said apparently sees one of the key links between Orientalism and Christianity to be the dualistic, Us/Them nature of orientalist thinking mentioned above. This dualism stands close to the heart of what he finds both fundamentally to and fundamentally objectionable in Orientalism. It comprises the constant lens by which the orientalists describe and understand the supposedly eternal, unchanging essence of what it means to be an Oriental. Orientals, that is, by their very nature are traditionally described by orientalists as being inescapably backward, degenerate, and completely unequal to progressive, moral European civilization (see p. 206). Said refers repeatedly to the dualistic nature of Orientalism, and in his summary description of four widely held

Noteworthy

“Depending on Uncompromising Leadership in a Syncretistic World” is the theme for the conference of the Interdenomina
tional Foreign Mission Association, the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies, and the Evangelical Missiological Society, September 23–25, 2004, in St. Louis, Missouri. For details, visit www.ifmamissions.org or call (630) 682-9270.

Sustainable Resources, an advocacy group based in Boulder, Colorado, will hold its “international forum connecting people with hands-on solutions to world poverty” September 30 to October 2, 2004, at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Representatives of non-profit agencies, humanitarian organizations, and educational institutions are invited. For details, visit www.sustainableresources.org or call (303) 998-1323.

The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Pacific and Asian History Division, of Australian National University, Canberra, will host the first Biennial TransTasman Conference on Australians and New Zealanders in Christian Missions, at Home and Abroad, October 8–10, 2004. Presentations will be made on New Zealand and Australian contributions to Christian missions, according to http://rsps.anu.edu.au/pah/TransTasman. For details, e-mail Ian Welch, ianwelch@coombs.anu.edu.au.

The Eastern Fellowship of the American Society of Missiology will meet November 5–6, 2004, at Maryknoll, New York, to discuss Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West (2003), by Lamin Sanneh of Yale Divinity School. Speakers will include Sanneh, Todd Johnson, and Patrick Johnstone. For details, e-mail Jonathan Bonk at bonk@omsc.org.

The Third International Conference on Missionary Linguistics, with presentations on early-modern descriptions of non-Indo-European languages prior to 1850, will be held March 12–15, 2005. Special attention will be given to research on missionary linguistic work in Asia and the Pacific, according to organizers Gregory James (lcgjames@ust.hk) of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and Otto Zwartjes (zwartjes@kri.uio.no), University of Oslo. The conference will open at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and conclude at the Inter-University Institute of Macau. Details may be found at www.hf.uio.no/kri/ospromil.

The Fourth International Lausanne Researchers Conference, held under the auspices of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, is slated for April 10–14, 2005, in Limassol, Cyprus, with “Uncovering Truth: The Impact of Research on Mission and Ministry” as its theme. Participants interested in presenting papers are invited to contact Peter Brierley, admin@christian-research.org.uk. Conference details may be found at www.Christian-research.org.uk.

With the theme “Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile,” the World Council of Churches will hold its 2005 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Athens, May 9–16, the sixth such gathering since integration of the International Missionary Council and the WCC in 1961. This will be the first ecumenical mission conference held in a predominantly Orthodox context, according to www.mission2005.org.
key orientalist “dogmas,” he lists dualism first and describes it as being “the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior” (p. 300). In his brief account of how Europe came to see the Orient “as its great complementary opposite,” Said cites a long list of sources of the dualistic vision, with the first item on his list being the Bible and “the rise of Christianity” (p. 58).

Protestant missionary discourse has historically exhibited a dualism that closely parallels the orientalist dualism described by Said. Missionary writings have consistently divided the world into two antagonistic, incompatible realms of Christian and non-Christian. Missionary literature, especially up to 1920, frequently describes the non-Christian world as being immoral, benighted, idolatrous, pagan, barbaric, infidel, and so on down a long list of other terms that may be summarized best in that old-fashioned word “heathenism.” Although the term “heathen” fell out of fashion after World War I, it is a word with a long history, going back at least to the ninth century according to the Oxford English Dictionary, which lists fifteen forms of the term from heathendom to heatheny. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature of missionaries, as students of that literature know, is brimming with descriptions of the nature of heathenism, frequently comparing contemporary heathenism with that described by Paul in Romans.

Dualistic missionary discourse, thus, shares a number of important characteristics with orientalist discourse. It is a traditional body of knowledge employing a specialized language and embodied in a set of self-aware organizations, institutions, and practices. Those who share in Christian missionary discourse take it to be composed of essential, unchanging truths, such as the claim that heathenism now is exactly what it was in Paul’s time or that idolatry now is exactly what it was in the time of the Hebrew prophets and psalmists. Like Orientalism, missionary discourse traditionally has been aggressive, and derogatory in its treatment of Asians of other faiths, expressing attitudes that have frequently also included negative views of indigenous cultures. Said states at one point, as we have seen above, that Orientalism designates “that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line.” Missionary discourse, as both written and practiced, similarly contains the “dreams, images, and vocabularies” used by missionaries and other Christians to describe those who are “east of the dividing line” of the faithful versus the infidel.

The parallels between missionary and orientalist discourses are close enough that Said draws on theological terms to describe Orientalism. He, for example, calls the basic tenets of Orientalism “dogmas.” He accuses a key orientalist of having a “metaphysical attitude.” He specifically accuses yet another orientalist of articulating the European drive to dominate the Orient in the “Romantic redemptive terms of a Christian mission” (pp. 300–301, 283, 172). Missionary and orientalist discourses, in other words, share significant characteristics that locate both of them in the larger family of European discourse. It can only be concluded that Said’s Orientalism, as a seminal, widely influential work on Orientalism, deserves serious, intensive attention from those engaged in the study and practice of missions.

The Henry Martyn Centre, Cambridge, U.K., announces a CD-ROM containing the collected papers of the North Atlantic Missiology Project and the Currents in World Christianity Project. The two projects, which ran from 1996 to 2001, were based in the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. Contact: Polly Keen, administrator, Henry Martyn Centre, pk262@cam.ac.uk, or visit www.martynmission.cam.ac.uk.

The School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London announces the creation of a new master’s degree in Christianities of Africa and Asia. The one-year course of study has been planned especially for clergy, church workers, and missionaries. Students may major in either Eastern and Orthodox Christianity or Christianity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa. For details, visit www.soas.ac.uk or e-mail Paul Gifford at pg@soas.ac.uk.

Personalia

Died. David C. Pollock, 64, global advocate for third-culture kids (TCKs), April 11, 2004, in Vienna, Austria. A graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Houghton College, he and his family went to Kenya in 1975, where they served as boarding-home parents at Rift Valley Academy, and he taught at Moffat College of the Bible. Returning from Africa in 1980, he became the executive director of Interaction International, which he had cofounded in the 1960s, and now focused its work on providing a “flow of care” for TCKs, expatriate families, and the personnel who work with them. He was also on the faculty of Houghton College as an adjunct professor and as director of intercultural programs since 1992. Codirector of three International Conferences for Missionary Kids, held in the Philippines (1984), Ecuador (1987), and Kenya (1989), Pollock was a member of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance and was codirector of WEA’s Global Member Care Task Force. He was named Houghton College’s Alumnus of the Year in 1993 and received an honorary doctorate from Houghton in 2000. In 1999 he coauthored the book The Third Culture Kid: Growing Up Among Worlds.


The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate named Mary E. Bendyna, R.S.M., former senior research associate, as executive director, the first woman appointed to that post. Information on CARA, based at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., may be found at http://cara.georgetown.edu.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies has announced that president and CEO Paul McKaughan will step down from his leadership position on December 31, 2005, after fourteen years with EFMA, which represents some 100 agencies and 20,000 missionaries worldwide.
**Issues Relevant to Missiology**

Missiologists will find Said unremittingly negative and vociferously critical of Western thought as it is revealed in Orientalism. Some, at least, will hesitate to introduce his approach and views into the realm of mission studies, fearing that to do so will result in nothing more than another round of “missionary bashing.” Impassioned rejection of Said by those who once wore the title “orientalist” with pride echoed for many years through the journals and tomes of several disciplines, particularly West Asian area studies. Yet it is recognized today that in his one-sided, judgmental, polemical, almost liturgical attack on the institutions of Orientalism, the very nature of his passionate assault continues to stimulate an enormous range of creative responses. Scholars of India, China, and Japan have found themselves looking at their subjects with fresh insights, and even where Said is wrong, his mistakes provoke thought and inspire revisions. Orientalism is far from a perfect piece of work, but it has a central integrity to it that kindles new avenues of research and reflection. From a Christian missiological perspective, there is something prophetic in Said, as secular as he himself may be, that recalls the ancient Hebrew prophets’ passionate pursuit of justice and truth.

Realizing that missiologists will also have to work on Said, softening, cutting, and trimming as needed, still we recognize that he directs our attention to a number of critically important areas. First, Said emphasizes the relationship of knowledge and discourse to power. He rejects Orientalism not simply because it softening, cutting, and trimming as needed, still we recognize applies with particular force to missionary relationships with “native” churches. In Thailand, as just one example, there is the case of a mainline American mission that dissolved itself in the 1950s, only to have its senior members lodge themselves in positions of power in the Thai national church, which as a consequence did not become functionally independent for another quarter of a century. There is also the example of an evangelical mission, also in Thailand, that refused to allow its churches to establish their own denominational structures on the premise that the New Testament does not mandate such structures—while the mission itself remained a distinct supra-church body that retained functional power over the churches in its own hands. How much more powerful were the missions in the age when the missionaries still judged “their” converts as being tainted with heathenism? How did that power influence the communication of the Gospel? How did it influence the historical emergence of Asian churches? Said helps to expose the missionary relationship to the convert church as a power relationship, one that does not always benefit the churches.

Second, and related to the point just made, Said makes it clear that Orientalism functions as blinders that restrict the orientalists’ vision so that they tend to see the worst in the East and the best in the West. In missionary literature we sometimes discover a similar tendency to describe perceived weaknesses among Asians as being essential traits of their Asian-ness. Asian achievements, when they are acknowledged at all, are written off as the work of particular individuals. Said views Orientalism as an “archive” that embodies the European experience with the Orient and from which has been created a set of types and typical responses. He calls these responses “encapsulations” or “bins,” and he observes that orientalists use these categories to make sense out of the totality of their experiences with Orientals. In those cases where orientalists discover something new or unusual, they will invariably recast the experience in terms of the negative stereotypes of Orientalism (pp. 58, 102). It seems evident that earlier generations of missionaries brought their own cognitive bins and encapsulations with them from home and rendered the alien world of the mission field into a dualistic, blinkered version of the familiar. It is well worth studying the nature and extent of missionary prejudices. How have those prejudices, where they have existed, influenced missionary relationships with the people of other cultures and faiths? How have they influenced missionary relationships with the churches they founded? To what extent have such prejudices been a barrier to the international missionary movement?

Third, Said accuses orientalists of having what he calls a “textual attitude” that falsely assumes “that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say.” Orientalists, he claims, depend on this textual attitude when they encounter “something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant.” “In such a case,” Said writes, “one has recourse not only to what in one’s previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has read about it” (p. 93). True to the general thesis of Orientalism, Said understands this textual mentality to represent yet another dualistic orientalizing strategy for defining (negatively) the “essence” of the Orient. His argument raises an important question concerning the role of the Bible in the work of traditional Protestant missions. Missionary literature well into the twentieth century was liberally seasoned with quotations and passing references to the King James Version of the Bible, and missionary writers clearly relied on it as a medium for understanding heathenism and justifying to themselves and others their attitudes and actions toward the heathen. What, then, is the role of the Scriptures in missional relations with people of other cultures and faiths? Is it fair to say that missionaries in the past have frequently misused Scripture, turning it into an ideological textbook? If fair, what has been the impact? If not fair, how do we understand historical missionary uses of the Bible? Said, in any event, has the value of encouraging us to look at the biblical text as a historical factor in missionary behavior and thinking.

Fourth, Said describes the relationship between orientalists and the Orient as being one of “intimate estrangement.” The orientalists knew the Orient well, even intimately, but still felt superior to it and essentially different from it. Said argues that this sense of estrangement, in particular, comprised a distinguishing characteristic of the orientalist tradition that was handed on from generation to generation of orientalists (pp. 248, 260). The letters and reports of nineteenth-century missionaries, at least in Thailand, reflect a relationship to local cultures that is hauntingly similar to Said’s “intimate estrangement.” The missionaries knew the people, spoke their languages, ate their food,
visited their homes and villages, and spent much of their daily lives in close proximity to the “natives.” But they seemed never quite to forget that those natives were representatives of a less advanced and heathen nation. They described families who worked at single-family mission stations as being “alone” and “isolated,” even though they lived in the midst of thousands of local people. Again, Said’s observations raise important questions about the relationships of missionaries to local cultures, local people, and local Christians. Did they live in “intimate isolation”? If so, how did that relationship influence the reception of the Christian faith by local peoples?

Space constraints forbid fuller exploration of other Saidian themes. It is important to mention, however, examples of at least two ways in which other scholars have built on and corrected Said’s work. First, Ussama Makdisi has written an intriguing description of what he and others term “Ottoman Orientalism.” He uses the term to describe the ways in which the ruling elite of the Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, resisted European Orientalism, while they, on the other hand, created a parallel Orientalism with which they defined themselves as the creative, dynamic, modernizing element of the empire and described other peoples as backward, violent, and traditionalistic stumbling blocks to modernization. Makdisi provides us with an example of how Asians took over European racialist, orientalist thinking as their own and used it against Asians. Churches in the so-called Third World provide what appears to be a parallel phenomenon to the Asian use of Orientalism against other Asians. In many parts of the world, convert churches have historically defined people of other faiths as “outsiders” who are damned to eternal punishment and suffering. In Buddhist nations, at least, such Christian attitudes have been a serious impediment to the sharing of the Gospel and, to an extent, forced Christian minorities to live in their own theological ghettos sealed off religiously from their larger societies.

Second, along the same line of reasoning, but more positively, we have already noted that Asians now and then made creative, positive use of Orientalism. Richard Fox has thus noted that in British India the Sikhs accepted the British stereotype of them as militant and militaristic and in turn fostered these traits and ethos among themselves to resist British occupation. Fox faults Said for failing to “map” ways that Orientalism itself became a weapon in the Asian arsenal of resistance to European colonialism. Can it be argued, by the same token, that Asian Christians have appropriated positive aspects of missionary discourse and put them to good use in the communication of the faith in their own contexts—as well as in the life of the church more generally?

Building on Orientalism

Lying between the extremes of enthusiastic converts to a full-blown Saidianism and the absolute rejectionism of those who cannot abide the book or the man, the reaction of the academic community at large to Said’s Orientalism has been a pensive, appreciative “yes, but” response. His work, precisely because it has prodded the thinking of so many others, has become central to the scholarly enterprise in several fields of study, to the point that it is not even mentioned in so many words; his insights are now simply assumed. For reasons described above, missiologists will do well to subject Orientalism and the larger literature it has inspired to their own scrutiny. It can be expected that some will respond with a “no, never” and others with a “yes, always” reaction. One trusts, however, that the majority of mission scholars will take Said’s passionate negativism with the requisite grain of salt and realize that, “Yes, Said is in many ways correct, but, no, he has not told the whole story, has told parts of it incorrectly, and has failed to reach the proper conclusion in other places.” Said is seminal partly because of the questions he inspires. Engaging Said, grappling with him, will surely lead to fruitful explorations of difficult but exciting issues in the study of missions.

There is one final return that might be expected from closer study of Said by missiologists. One of the greatest strengths of Orientalism has been the way in which it ignores the boundaries between scholarly disciplines. It combines aspects of history, sociology of knowledge, literary criticism, and other fields, so that when today one reads Said, one is reading a shared work that has had a powerful impact on global intellectual thought. When one reads the wider literature related to Said, Asian names abound. At the same time, Said draws on postmodernist thinking without apparently being a “real” postmodernist (he commits the crimes of “essentializing,” writing a “universalizing metanarrative,” and being a closet “realist” who believes there is a real Orient). Working through Said, then, opens one to much wider cognitive horizons, ones that missiologists will surely want to explore so as to better understand how the Gospel relates to the world. Communication of the Gospel, we now understand, always requires sensitive appreciation of context. Said’s Orientalism has become one important source for reflection both on our own histories and contemporary situations and on our relationship as Christian communicators to those with whom we would communicate.

Missiological readings of Orientalism, in sum, offer missiologists the opportunity to reflect critically on their own field of study. Those readings raise new questions and look at old questions in new ways. They offer missiologists the opportunity to engage contemporary intellectual thought, which is immediately relevant to their own enterprise. Said and Orientalism, that is, present a patently Asian challenge to missiologists. Said addresses them, albeit indirectly, as potential orientalists themselves, and he seeks to reorient their perception of their subjects, their field of knowledge, and their research methods. Said’s challenge is a powerful, prophetic one, and if he overstates and even misstates his case at times, the issues he raises are crucial to the study of Christian mission and ministry in Asia and in the rest of the world.

Notes


Time to Give Up the Idea of Christian Mission to Muslims? Some Reflections from the Middle East

Colin Chapman

After first articulating common challenges raised against Christian mission to Muslims, in this article I want to reflect on fundamental issues to be taken into account whenever Christians think of mission in Islamic contexts. Then instead of trying to arrive at a possible redefinition of Christian understanding of mission, I shall put forward some much more modest reflections on fundamental issues to be taken into account whenever we try to arrive at a possible redefinition of Christian understanding of mission. Then instead of trying to arrive at a possible redefinition of Christian understanding of mission, I shall put forward some much more modest suggestions related to priorities in Christian thinking about our relations with Muslims at the present time.¹

Articulating the Challenges

All the main arguments from history and experience that have been used in the last two hundred years to question the concept of Christian mission sound specially convincing when developed in relation to Islamic contexts. Here are several of the more common, which need to be heard and addressed:

The devotion of ordinary God-fearing Muslims puts us to shame. If Christians recognize the genuineness of this devotion, why should they ever want to encourage Muslims to change their religion and become Christians? A Western Christian who has lived in Turkey for a number of years expressed this view when he wrote, in a comment passed on to me, about his experience of living among Muslim students: “It has become harder and harder for me to imagine or even want them to convert. Many of them live more ‘godly’ lives than I do, or than most Christians I know. We should be talking about coexistence rather than conversion.”

The social and political realities in the world demand that we should be talking about real issues in the world around us rather than trying to discuss theology. Terrorism, AIDS, poverty, corruption, Third World debt, inequalities in world trade, the population explosion, global warming, and injustices like the oppression of Chechnyans and Palestinians—surely these are the crucial issues that confront the human race, and they have little or nothing to do with our understanding of God.

Christianity has a terrible record in its relations with the Muslim world. Weaknesses in the Christian churches in the Middle East and North Africa allowed Muslims to gain control through their initial conquests and then gradually win converts over the next four centuries. European Christendom eyed the world of Islam across the Mediterranean with a mixture of suspicion, fear, and envy, and then it launched the Crusades. The mentality of crusading continued for many years, even after the Crusaders were finally driven out of the Middle East. Christian mission enjoyed a dubious relationship with the imperial powers that controlled Africa and much of Asia, and in these continents Christian mission in Muslim areas has been remarkably unsuccessful. The Muslim world sees the West as still being “Christian” in some sense, and as still engaged in a war against Islam.

When Christians and Muslim have so much in common theologically, it’s pure arrogance for Christians to claim that they have the truth.” Anyone who has ever tried to explain the Trinity, the incarnation, or the atonement to Muslims knows how difficult it is. Anyway, what’s the point of trying to do so? Christians are far closer to Muslims in their beliefs than to Hindus or Buddhists. We share belief in one Creator God and a moral law based on his revealed will. How can Christians claim that their understanding of God is “better” or “truer” than that of Muslims, or that their way of life is closer to what God requires than that of Muslims?

The conversion of individual Muslims is very difficult and often causes extreme suffering. Since Muslim communities are so close-knit and since the penalty for opting out of the Muslim community is so severe, converts can seldom continue to live in their own communities and therefore often end up being extracted from their families and their culture. The Christian community finds it very hard to provide an adequate substitute for all that converts have to give up. Why engage in an activity that is so obviously
provocative in the eyes of Muslims and leads to so much heart-ache for those who do respond?

Understanding the Deeper Issues

These various arguments raise important challenges and indeed should give us pause. Deeper issues, though, underlie the idea of Christian mission to Muslims. Reflection on these more fundamental points, several of which are outlined below, can provide the context for properly evaluating these and other seemingly intractable challenges.

Christianity and Islam are both missionary religions. In an address entitled “The Challenges Facing Christian-Muslim Dialogue” given at Al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1996, George Carey, former archbishop of Canterbury, urged Christians and Muslims to be honest enough to admit that the missionary element is part of the nature of both faiths: “The fact is that both Islam and Christianity are missionary faiths. We make absolute claims and we are anxious to promote our faiths. This is integral to both our religions and there is nothing to apologise for. Muslims are commanded in the Holy Qur’an to ‘act as witnesses for mankind’ just as Christians are commanded in Holy Scripture to ‘go into all the world and preach the Gospel.’”

According to Islamic tradition the Prophet Muhammad sent messengers some years before his death to the emperors of Abyssinia, Egypt, Byzantium, and Persia (three of whom were Christians). In Islamic thinking the Prophet was obliged to give these nations the opportunity to accept Islam before the Muslim community undertook any kind of conquest. We are dealing with a faith that came into existence 600 years after Christ and that, from the beginning, has had a clear understanding of its mission to correct the errors of Christian belief. Part of its message to Christians is therefore very blunt: “Islam is the true faith. Your understanding of God is wrong because you have compromised the oneness of God by inventing the Trinity. You are seriously misguided in putting Jesus on the same level as God and in believing that God could have allowed him to be crucified. Muhammad is the last of the Prophets.”

If both faiths have from the beginning behaved as missionary faiths, and if Islam has a clear mission in relation to the Christian church, would it not be a strange irony if Christians now were to give up any commitment to mission, just when some Muslims are redoubling their efforts to win the West for Islam?

National Christians and foreign missionaries often have quite different agendas. Living within the Christian community in the Middle East for some years and working with foreign missionaries of different kinds has made me acutely aware that these two groups generally have very different perspectives and agendas. For the vast majority of Christians in this region, the major questions about Islam have to do with survival and coexistence: Can Christianity survive in this region? Is genuine coexistence possible? Does the Christian church have a future? Will there be any Christians left in a hundred years’ time?

Many of the foreign workers, however, come (often uninvited) with “mission” and “evangelism” as the main items on their agenda. When they first arrive, they have little sense of history and are blissfully unaware of the legacy of centuries in which Jews and Christians lived as dhimmis (protected communities) under Islamic rule—a status that made anything like mission almost unthinkable. Their impatience both with the ancient churches and with the Protestant churches often leads them either to establish new denominations or to bypass the existing churches altogether, working entirely independently of the churches.

If these two groups stand aloof from each other and even attack each other, the witness of the church is weakened, and both parties lose something of real value. But if they can try to understand each other’s perspectives and even begin to trust each other, both can be enriched, even if they accept a kind of “division of labor” and continue to work quite separately. Fortunately there are many examples in the Middle East of fruitful interaction between national Christians and foreigners—especially in cases where the foreigners don’t invite themselves into the country but come at the invitation of the national church. When this happens, the foreigners become much more sensitive to the total context and work within and alongside the churches, and nationals become much more articulate about the mission of the church and find greater confidence in sharing their faith.

Evangelism needs to be understood in the broader context of mission and Christian discipleship. In mission conferences I have attended over the years, I have sometimes felt a little uneasy about an exclusive focus on evangelism that is based simply on the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16–20: “Go . . . and make disciples of all nations.” Most of the discussion tends to be about the procla-

Many foreign workers come (often uninvited) with little sense of history.

We need to listen to the Muslim critique of Christian mission. In July 1976 a significant consultation was held at Chambésy in Switzerland on the subject “Christian Mission and Islamic Da’wah [invitation].” The main reports and main papers by people like Bishop Arne Rudvin, Lamin Sanneh, Kenneth Cragg, and Isma’il al-Faruqi remain a valuable statement of how each faith perceives both its own mission and each other’s mission. One of the basic criticisms of Christian mission in the last three centuries is that it has so often been closely associated with Western imperialism. Since the missionaries have generally arrived with the soldiers, the traders, and the colonial administrators, people
could hardly resist accepting the Gospel and Western culture along with the education, the medicine, and social services that were being offered. Another fundamental criticism is that so much mission activity in medicine, education, and relief work has exploited people in positions of weakness. The practical and material help that has been offered has produced “rice Christians,” with people being pressured to accept the faith that comes with the practical benefits.

Both these criticisms acquired new poignancy in this part of the world with the murder of three Southern Baptist medical workers from the United States at a mission hospital in Yemen. And on November 21, 2002, an American nurse was shot dead in a clinic attached to a Protestant church in Sidon, south of Beirut. It looks as if some Islamists are angry about Christian missionaries working among Muslims and may have deliberately targeted Americans as a way of expressing their anger over the policies of the present American government. The fact that the victims have been dedicated to healing the sick, that several of them were women, and that the vast majority of American missionaries in

A fundamental criticism is that much mission activity has exploited people in positions of weakness.

this part of the world are extremely critical of their government’s policies in the Middle East (especially over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and now the war in Iraq) is probably dismissed by the Islamists as being irrelevant.

A different kind of response to the Islamic critique is respectfully to ask Muslims if they are prepared to own up to their own imperialisms in the past (e.g., in their first three centuries across the Middle East and North Africa and in the Safavid, Mogul, and Ottoman Empires). Are they willing to examine more critically the processes by which populations in the Middle East (which were largely Christian) became majority Muslim communities over a period of around four hundred years? If Syrian, Palestinian, or Egyptian Christians of the seventh to tenth centuries could speak, would they not use tones that are very similar to those of Muslims who have been at the receiving end of Western imperialism and Christian mission? Are Muslims willing to be as critical of their own Islamic mission as they (and Christians) have been of Christian mission?

We need to hear the message of converts and inquirers. If we need to listen to what Muslims have been saying about Christian mission, we need also to be listening to the message of Christians from Muslim backgrounds. Their testimonies generally speak about a personal encounter with Christ that has changed their thinking and transformed their lives. Sometimes (but certainly not always) they have met Christians who have shown sacrificial love in action. Very often the reading of some part of the Bible (and especially the Gospels) has been highly significant. And in many cases they believe that they have experienced the power of Christ through a vision, a dream, or some kind of healing. In almost every case there has been a price to pay in terms of rejection and sometimes even death. But they are willing to accept all this because of the joy they have found in Christ. Some of their stories read like the parable of the treasure hidden in a field: “someone found and hid [it]; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44). Others sound like the parable of “a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matt. 13:45).

A number of missions focus their efforts on proclamation to Muslims through literature, radio, or satellite television. When Muslim listeners and viewers respond, some are angry, threatening, or argumentative, while others are deeply curious about the Christian faith and life. An example of this last type is a Tunisian man who responded by letter to a Christian radio program as follows: “I came across your broadcast that enlightens the Arabic mind and increases his spiritual education. One day I was very depressed and all alone, so I turned on the radio, which is my only companion. While I was listening to different world stations I found your station. It is really a great treasure. I was fascinated by it, and since that day I became an addict to it. It is like my vitamin C that activates my mind. It is incredible. I would like you to send me some scientific, health, and spiritual books. Also I would like you to send me some cassettes and videos and the teaching of the Gospel, because I want to deepen my knowledge.” If this is how converts speak about their pilgrimage in faith and how inquirers express their initial openness, both groups would be among the first to encourage Christians to persevere in their efforts to communicate their message.

It will be pointed out that conversion works both ways, that Christians also need to be willing to hear why some Christians have turned to Islam. The point is well taken. But Christians need also to hear this other message: Are you going to deny Muslims the opportunity of hearing the Gospel? No one is compelling anyone to believe and change their religion. But don’t you have any desire or responsibility to make the Christian message accessible through every available means to all who might want to hear and see it?

Genuine dialogue does not rule out evangelism. One of the most common arguments put forward by those who argue for dialogue over against evangelism is that it is impossible to engage in genuine dialogue if you enter the discussion in order to convince the other person of what you believe. If this comment simply means that dialogue involves genuine openness, listening, and a willingness to change one’s mind where necessary, most if not all would accept this conclusion without question. Often, however, the idea is pressed further to suggest that only those who are completely open-minded can engage in dialogue, and that those who are convinced about what they believe can never engage in real dialogue. My own experience with Muslims (both in Europe and the Middle East) suggests precisely the opposite. Many of the Muslims I know say that they are tired of talking to Christians who do not know what they believe and would far rather talk to convinced Christians who will argue passionately for their convictions.

Some days after the murder of the American missionary in Sidon, I received a phone call from a Shiite Muslim sheikh whom I had come to know recently, who expressed his condolences over the murder and said, “This was not an Islamic action but a terrorist action.” Then later, at a seminar in July 2002 for graduates from the Near East School of Theology, this same sheikh was asked what he thought about tabshir (evangelism), a word that has quite a strong, negative connotation in Arabic. His reply was very significant: “I have no problems at all with Christians sharing their faith with me and trying to convince me about what they believe. I too want to convince them about my Islamic
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beliefs. But what happens when they find that I don’t want to change my faith? Is that the end of the relationship when they find that I’m not willing to convert? Or will they go on talking to me and remain friends? If there’s a genuine personal relationship between us, I have no problems at all with evangelism.”

Alongside a “mission to Muslims” we can think of a “mission to Islam.” This vision has been part of Kenneth Cragg’s thinking for many years. He would say that preoccupation with making individual converts can lead to discouragement and despair when there is little or no tangible fruit in one’s ministry. He suggests, therefore, that while not giving up the hope that individuals will become disciples of Christ, Christians can and should hold onto the hope that perhaps Islam itself can change. Sufism, for example, has been deeply influenced by Christian ideas and practices at various stages in its development, and many Sufi ideas have come into mainstream Islam. This example shows that Islam has never been either static or monolithic, has changed in the past, and is still changing in the present.

Although Muslims that we relate to at the present time may not seem open to consider the Christian message, perhaps because of what they now see and hear, their children and grandchildren may be more open to ask questions and open their minds. Could we not believe that Muslim ideas about God and our relationship with him might change over the years and come a little closer to those revealed in the Gospels? Are such thoughts simply a rationalization of failure, or could they represent a genuine, long-term hope for Christians?

Defining Immediate Christian Priorities

I trust that consideration of these various “deeper issues” might lead to a more rigorous evaluation of our present methods and motives in mission work among Muslims. Christians, for example, might be more hesitant to sum up everything concerning Christian-Muslim relations under the slogans of “Muslim evangelism” or “dialogue.” Such reappraisals are valuable and necessary. At this point, however, I wish to turn to several immediate, more limited priorities that could make a difference “on the ground.”

Relationships with people. While in certain situations Christians and Muslims are living together and mixing freely, I suspect that in many more situations they do their best to avoid meeting face to face with each other. For reasons that are very understandable, they may tolerate each other, but they do not really want to get too close to each other. Where this is the case Christians and Muslims in positions of leadership and authority need to do all in their power to enable people of all kinds (and not just scholars) in both communities to meet each other.

Engagement with immediate issues in the context. What would happen if, instead of constantly thinking in terms of “us” and “them,” Muslims and Christians in a given place were to work together in facing the pressing issues in their society? The challenge would then be to work for the well-being of the whole community and for genuine nation-building, not simply for the interests of one’s own family and faith community. We cannot go on forever putting the blame for our problems on other parties; we need to shoulder our responsibility now for things that we really can do—where possible, together.

In the Lebanese context, for example, this engagement would mean addressing the depressing economic situation of the country, the corruption that exists at many levels of society, the inequalities between rich and poor, the destruction of the environment, and the legacies of a long civil war. Then of course the Palestinian problem hangs over everything like a menacing cloud, and we wonder if there can be real progress on any front as long as the conflict continues, affecting everything that happens in the region. When we understand the reasons for America’s support of Israel and discover the extent of the support that its present government receives from the so-called Christian Right in the United States, we begin to recognize the enormous responsibility of Christians (and especially Protestant evangelical Christians) in one of the major problems of the Muslim world against the West.

Could we not believe that Muslim ideas about God might come closer to those revealed in the Gospels? Serious dialogue. Official dialogue conferences with communiqués issued in front of television cameras no doubt have their place. But what is probably more important here is the kind of conversation that takes place between Christians and Muslims living in the same building, studying together at school or university, serving together in the army, or working in the same office. Although these situations are ideal for what is called the dialogue of life, conversation with my students suggests that the kind of dialogue that takes place in these settings often does not go very deep because neither side is very interested in a real meeting of hearts and minds.

Witness to Jesus. Part of my answer to the challenge about the devotion of committed Muslims is that at the end of the day the most significant thing that Christians have to offer—if not the only thing—is their testimony to Jesus. We feel like Peter and John, who, when forbidden to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, replied: “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). We are not offering a superior culture, a richer civilization, or a more powerful ethic. All we have to offer is the conviction—based on our experience and our understanding of revelation—that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). It is Jesus of Nazareth who gives us the clearest picture of what God is like and communicates the love and mercy of God to our troubled conscience.

This basic urge to bear witness to Christ is summed up beautifully by Kenneth Cragg in a memorable passage from his Call of the Minaret, first published in 1956 and revised and reprinted many times since then, most recently in 2000:

This is the inward tragedy, from the Christian angle, of the rise of Islam, the genesis and dissemination of a new belief which claimed to displace what it had never effectively known. The state of being a stranger to the Christian’s Christ has been intensified by further failures of love and loyalty on the part of institutional Christianity in the long and often bitter external relations of the two faiths through the centuries.

It is for these reasons that the call of the minaret must always seem to the Christian a call to retrieval. He yearns to undo the alienation and to make amends for the past by as full a restitution
as he can achieve of the Christ to Whom Islam is a stranger. The objective is not, as the Crusaders believed, the repossession of what Christendom has lost, but the restoration to Muslims of the Christ Whom they have missed.

Acceptance of suffering. When Christians think about suffering in the context of Christian-Muslim relations, they are usually thinking about the suffering involved in situations where Christians live as minorities in predominantly Islamic societies, the suffering involved in any Muslim opting to become a disciple of Christ, or the suffering experienced by the messengers. Western involvement in the Muslim world over the last two hundred years has led to distinct improvements in the status of Christians in Islamic societies, and no country practices the dhimma system any longer. A number of moderate Muslims speak of banishing the concept to the cupboard of history, although it will take many years for this thinking to percolate down to Muslims on the street. If Christian minorities want to stay rooted where they are and not emigrate to the West, they therefore need to develop positive attitudes that will enable them to cope with the difficulties of their minority status. Somehow they have to work out whether “turning the other cheek” inevitably means passive submission or whether it can suggest attitudes and responses that show both firmness and respect and spring not from weakness but from inner strength.

The problem of suffering associated with conversion out of Islam has stimulated a widespread debate about contextualization or inculturation, which has led in recent years to creative thinking about different possible options for Muslims who want to follow Christ and remain in their situation. In the end, however, Christians will never be able to escape the simple fact that suffering is inevitable for followers of a crucified Savior. After fatal attacks by Islamists on Christian workers in Pakistan, Lebanon, and Yemen, Christians are inevitably bracing themselves for similar attacks in the future. But they do so now with a keen awareness of the ambiguities of the situation: in one sense some will certainly be martyrs; but from another point of view they will simply be victims of their own governments’ policies.

If the Middle Eastern context has brought some of these issues about Christian mission to Muslims to the surface, I trust it has also suggested what it may mean for all Christians to reflect on the meaning of Christian mission in different contexts at the present time. Despite the many objections to such mission, we go forward, not forgetting the one who said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). No, it is not time to give up!

Notes
2. George Carey, “The Challenges Facing Christian-Muslim Dialogue” (address given at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, October 4, 1996).
Zwemer considered Islam to be a form of spiritual slavery from which its victims needed release.

of all cultures and language groups to a personal faith in Christ that would at the same time allow them to participate fully in the blessings of a “Christian” civilization best represented by European and American societies. These two things—conversion and civilization—were intimately connected. This is not to say that nineteenth-century missionaries were agents of colonial governments, but they were unapologetic about the benefits Christianity as a system brought to both individuals and societies that came under its benevolent sway.

Zwemer’s education in Islam began during his seminary years at New Brunswick Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey. He was one of three students who met regularly to prepare for mission service in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, which they considered to be the most challenging mission field in the world. In this task they were mentored by John G. Lansing, their Old Testament professor, who had recently returned to the United States from a mission stint in Egypt.

What was theoretical in seminary became practical when Zwemer, along with fellow seminarian James Cantine, moved to the Arab world upon his graduation from seminary in 1889. After studying Arabic for a year in Beirut, the pair settled on Basra, Iraq, and Manama, Bahrain, as the initial sites for what they came to call mission stations. Bahrain became Zwemer’s operational base.

Zwemer served in the Middle East until 1929, when he accepted an appointment at Princeton Theological Seminary as professor of missions and of the history of religion. After retiring from Princeton in 1937, he continued to teach and write, constantly encouraging mission work among Muslims.

Harsh Critic of Islam

Once in the Middle East Zwemer soon discovered the essential social, political, and religious cohesiveness of Islam, the “mightiest of non-Christian faiths.” In his eyes this cohesiveness was a curse, for he perceived Islam to be a spiritual and sociological straitjacket, keeping its adherents from reaping the benefits Europeans had enjoyed under the tutelage of the Christian faith. In 1907 he approvingly quoted William Clifford Palgrave as saying, “When the Koran and Mecca shall have disappeared from Arabia, then, and only then, can we expect to see the Arab...
largely on ideas borrowed from various contemporary sources)\textsuperscript{13} but put the stamp of his own character on it. “The religion which Mohammed founded bears everywhere the imprint of his life and character. Mohammed was not only the prophet, but the prophecy of Islam.”\textsuperscript{14}

In his early writings Zwemer shows a grudging admiration for Muhammad’s genius, admitting that the prophet had a sharp mind, charismatic personality, and natural leadership abilities. For Zwemer, these positive qualities are negated by what he perceives to be Muhammad’s immoral character. The proof of Muhammad’s dissoluteness is seen in the ethical system he created, which contrasted poorly with other moral codes of his day. What was worse was Muhammad’s behavior, as he was unable to live up even to his own low standards. One only had to look at his marital irregularities for proof of this failing. The Qur’an put the limit for polygamous unions at four wives for one man. Muhammad had fourteen wives, at least one of whom was a child bride.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Qur’an and Hadith.} Zwemer dismisses the Qur’an as a jumble of distorted history, fables, and superstition, which he saw as a mirror of Muhammad’s debased morality. In Zwemer’s eyes the Qur’an “perpetuates slavery, polygamy, religious intolerance, the seclusion and degradation of women and petrifies social life.”\textsuperscript{16} Even more serious was the solidification of Muhammad’s immoral behavior in the collection of traditions known as the Hadith, which held him up as the shining example of Islamic living.

Muhammad’s teaching in the Qur’an and his example in the Hadith led millions of people who came under the influence of his teaching into an immoral lifestyle that required the liberation of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{17} Many of the names Muhammad’s followers used to describe him were similar to those attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. Words spoken by Jesus found their way into Muhammad’s mouth in the Hadith. Muslims were thus unable to recognize the uniqueness of Christ because Muhammad had usurped his elevated status. “The sin and guilt of the Moslem world is that they give Christ’s glory to another, and that for all practical purposes, Mohammed himself is the Moslem Christ.”\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Islamic moral code.} The fruit of Muhammad’s Islam was a weak moral code, the denunciation of which was a preoccupation of Zwemer’s writing throughout his career. Islam, Zwemer contended, was “the most degraded religion, morally, in the world.”\textsuperscript{19} This was strong language, but justified in Zwemer’s eyes by what he observed in the lifestyle and behavior of Muslims in his travels through the Arab Muslim world.

Zwemer was particularly critical of what he perceived to be Islam’s casual attitude toward sin. Islam maintained a hierarchy of sins that tended to narrow ethical concern to those designated \textit{askabira}, “great sins,” on which Muslims had no agreement. Such things as lying, deception, and lust (which Zwemer felt to be integral elements of Muhammad’s character) were regarded by Muslims as easily forgivable sins, not all that critical to Allah.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, Islamic ethics failed to recognize any clear difference between moral and ceremonial law.\textsuperscript{21} Eating pork held the same moral weight as stealing, sometimes even more. This attitude led Zwemer to conclude that Islam was “phariseeism translated into Arabic.”\textsuperscript{22}

An important work in this respect was Zwemer’s \textit{Childhood in the Moslem World} (1915), which focused on the corrupting influence of Islam on the lives of innocent children. “Moslem children come into the world handicapped. The curse of Islam, through its polygamy, concubinage, and freedom of divorce, already rests upon them . . . it is hardly conceivable that a child can grow up pure minded in such an atmosphere.”\textsuperscript{23}

Zwemer was concerned also about the role of women in Islamic society. What victimized children victimized women as well, whom Zwemer considered to have been better off in pre-Islamic Arabia than now: “It was Islam that forever withdrew from Oriental society the bright, refining, elevating influence of women . . . . The harem system did not prevail in the days of idolatry. Women had rights and were respected.”\textsuperscript{24}

**Hints of Change**

World War I was a philosophical watershed for Protestant mission, a time of deep soul-searching for many in the missionary community. At issue was the fact that “Christian” nations were drawing colonial subjects into a conflict of the colonialists’ own making, which forced a revision of previously held convictions about the superiority of Western “Christian” civilization. For John Mott, the long-serving chairman of the Student Volunteer Movement, this change of attitude came as early as 1914. At the SVM convention in Kansas City, Mott observed, “The situation is more urgent than ever because of the rapid spread of the corrupt influences of so-called Western civilization. The blush of shame has come to my cheeks as I have seen how these influences from North America and the British Isles and Germany, not to mention other countries, are eating like gangrene into the less highly organized peoples of the world.”\textsuperscript{25}

Zwemer was not as quick as Mott to pick up the anticolonialist spirit. His address to the same convention in 1914 found him waving the imperialist flag, claiming that it was essential for Western countries to remain in the ascendancy in the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{26} This view arose in part from Zwemer’s fear that Muslim nations, freed from a colonial infrastructure, would close their doors to further gospel witness.

In his book \textit{The Disintegration of Islam} (1916), we begin to discern a subtle alteration in Zwemer’s thought, evidence that Mott’s critique was beginning to hit home. After affirming that Providence had placed Great Britain in a position of political, moral, and spiritual leadership in the Muslim world, Zwemer goes on to express feelings of betrayal, suggesting that Britain had not done all it should have or could have to aid the advancement of the gospel witness: “Surely Christian missions and Chrisliendom have a right to demand that nominally Christian governments, although they may not help forward the spread of the Gospel, should at the very least not be permitted to oppose or thwart the efforts of missionaries.”\textsuperscript{27}

A crack had opened up in Zwemer’s optimistic appraisal of the colonial venture. In the years immediately following the turmoil of the war, what began as a doubt became a growing conviction—that he had been wrong to put his hopes here. The course of his ministry was about to take a turn in a new direction.
Lyle Vander Werff notes that the later stage of Zwemer’s career was marked by a more “anthropological-Christocentric approach” to Islam, a stage that began in 1916: “It is almost as if Zwemer is a liberated man. No longer is it his duty to make battle against Islam as a system. He can now concentrate on the message which is Christocentric and eschatological, a message of Good News for the Muslim as a man.”32

Al-Ghazali. One sign of Zwemer’s move in this new direction is the positive references he makes to the life and thought of the great Muslim mystic and theologian al-Ghazali (1058–1111). We see it already in The Disintegration of Islam, where he briefly references al-Ghazali and his work. It soon becomes even more evident, in a work Zwemer devotes entirely to the life and work of al-Ghazali, entitled A Moslem Seeker After God (1920). In both of these books al-Ghazali is seen to represent the best Islam has to offer. Zwemer praises him as someone whose teaching moves toward a Christian perception of truth. Zwemer even goes so far as to compare al-Ghazali favorably with the apostle Paul: “In giving his thoughts on the spiritual character of prayer, [al-Ghazali] attains almost to the height of St. Paul.”29

It is important to note here that Zwemer praises al-Ghazali for his contributions as a Muslim. Zwemer recognizes that there is value to the writing of a Muslim thinker who never left the faith. “Of all those who have found a deeper spiritual meaning in the teachings of the Koran and even in the multitudinous and puerile detail of the Moslem ritual, none can equal Al-Ghazali.”30 Zwemer was clearly beginning to break free from his blanket condemnation of Islam, seeing shades of gray where he once only saw black and white.

Abdul-Wahab. Another example of Zwemer’s more open attitude appears in comments about Abdul-Wahab bin Mussherif, the person behind the Wahabi movement, which later solidified into something approaching an official theology for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Zwemer shows his approval for Abdul-Wahab’s reforms, noting that he was “an incarnate whirlwind of Puritanism against the prevailing apostasy of the Muslim world.” Where he had compared al-Ghazali to the apostle Paul, what Zwemer sees in Wahab are parallels with Martin Luther. His reform, notes Zwemer, was iconoclastic, fruitful beyond his territory, and represented a return to a purer, more primitive form of the faith.

It must not be assumed from such a passage that Zwemer’s earlier objections to Islam had ended. The denunciations of his earlier works continued in modified form throughout his career. But it is important to note that the blanket condemnation of Islam was giving way to a more subtle critique, one that was willing to recognize that there were gradations of light within the darkness, at times approaching the dazzling light of Christ. In the often overlooked little book Call to Prayer (1923), Zwemer signals the end of one era and the beginning of the next: “Two methods stand out in clear contrast: the polemic and the irenic; the method of argument, debate, contrasts and comparison on the one hand, and on the other hand the method of loving approach along lines of least resistance.”32

Seeing Points of Contact

Much in this irenic little book reflects this new approach. For the first time Zwemer addresses his Muslim neighbors as “brethren,” which is something few missionaries today would be comfortable doing. Even more telling is his reluctance to say what he had said numerous times before—that Islam has had a wholly negative effect on the lives of those who come under its sway. For the first time Zwemer openly and freely admits to positive contributions made by this “greatest of all non-Christian faiths,” making its valuation much more complex than he had originally assumed. In this context he approvingly mentions current Islamic reform movements, what he calls New Islam, saying that those who were caught up in these movements could be considered allies with Christians in their desire to bring social and ethical reform to their societies. This signals an end to Zwemer’s earlier assertion that the only hope for the Muslim world is the radical displacement of Islam. He now openly admits that Muslims working within the confines of their Islamic worldview can be the source of positive societal changes.

This book signals Zwemer’s attempt to break with his triumphalist past. No longer will he support the colonial venture. It was a mistake, he says, to ever have relied on that avenue to forward Christ’s aims. “We must not put our trust in politics. They are uncertain at best, and whatever may prove the final adjustment of the present tangled situation neither our hopes nor our dread lie in that direction.”34

Muhammad. In his last comprehensive treatment of Islam, The Cross Above the Crescent (1941), the missionary-now-turned-professor shows that his earlier critique of Muhammad remained consistent. He is still convinced that Muhammad’s character was flawed, even though the criticism is more muted than in previous works. The near-deification of Muhammad in Muslim piety remains a source of irritation. Muhammad had stolen the glory due Christ in the minds and hearts of most Muslims. However, Zwemer balances this with a positive appraisal of Muhammad’s genius. Zwemer the reluctant admirer of Muhammad in the early 1900s has become a genuine admirer in 1941. Muhammad was “one of the greatest creative spirits in the history of human culture. The impress of his mind and life has been colossal.” Even more astonishing is Zwemer’s assertion that Muhammad was sincere in his prophetic calling and, despite a growing arrogance, did in fact exhibit signs of personal and spiritual integrity.35 Noticeably absent in this book is the deprecating polemic of earlier works.

Islamic theism. We see a change in Zwemer’s attitude toward the Islamic doctrine of God. The mature Zwemer, while still feeling that Muhammad’s portrayal of God was inadequate, no longer believes it was inadequate enough to justify the harsh language of his early years. In an article he wrote for the journal Theology Today in 1946, we see an emphasis less on what Muhammad got wrong than on what Muhammad got right. In a complete rever-
sal of his earlier conviction, Zwemer is now convinced that Allah is merely a different name for the same God worshiped by Jews and Christians. Zwemer celebrates Muhammad’s role in calling the Arabs “back to the worship of one living God.”

Zwemer also now finds that the ninety-nine attributes of Allah, with only one or two exceptions, are equivalent to the attributes of Jehovah in the Hebrew scriptures.

Such conclusions all give weight to Zwemer’s argument that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. The most convincing proof, however, was something he had observed during his long years as a missionary in Arabia: no Muslim convert ever claimed to have changed gods. “No Jew since Paul’s day, any more than Paul himself, was conscious of a change of ‘gods’ when he accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. The same is true of every Muslim convert today.” Zwemer had moved into new territory here. His abandonment of a polemical approach to evangelistic outreach had allowed him to see points of contact, where before he had seen only reasons for conflict. He was more of a listener now, anticipating the dialogic approach of those who would pick up where he left off.

A Caution

The case for Zwemer’s transformation of thought should not be overstated. It was a modification more than a transformation. Many of his original critiques, though less harsh, remained consistent throughout his life. In 1941 he was still echoing earlier themes: “In spite of all its elements of worth and strength and vitality, Islam has failed conspicuously and proved itself hopelessly inadequate to meet the social, the intellectual, the moral and spiritual needs of humanity. Its inward weakness, its denial and falsehoods have corrupted the best that is in it, and proved the truth of the Latin proverb: ‘The corruption of the best is the worst.’ The failure of Islam is the justification and plea for missions to Mohammedans.”

Zwemer remained consistent in his evangelical calling to people whom he perceived to be held in the grip of a faith he considered fatally flawed. But years of living among and interacting with Muslims he learned to call friends and neighbors forced him to modify his harshest views. (A particularly touching tribute to Muslim friends appears in A Call to Prayer, where he notes with heartfelt appreciation the support his Bahraini Muslim neighbors gave him and his wife during their time of grief after the death of their two daughters.)

Nurtured on nineteenth-century triumphalist polemic, the mature Zwemer evolved into a more thoughtful critic, exhibiting a greater respect for people he had always loved and an increased admiration for the faith that shaped their lives. In these days, when the “clash of civilizations” is being touted as the most accurate description of Muslim-Christian relations, we would do well to follow Zwemer’s lead, moving further down that same road. Zwemer himself, I believe, would approve.

Notes

3. Ibid., p. 28.
10. Ibid., pp. 30, 48, 49.
11. Ibid., p. 55.
22. Zwemer, Moslem Doctrine of God, p. 52.
26. Ibid., pp. 70–78.
33. Ibid., pp. 49, 22.
34. Ibid., pp. 25–28, quotation on p. 27.
37. Ibid., p. 67.
38. Zwemer, Cross Above the Crescent, p. 48.
My Pilgrimage in Mission

Michael C. Griffiths

I was born in Cardiff, Wales, in April 1928. A simple calculation shows that like others of my generation I have lived through a third of the history of Anglo-Saxophone mission, giving an interesting perspective upon it.

At age ten I won a scholarship to Christ’s Hospital, a boys boarding school, founded as a Reformation response to the need of London’s street children. Then two weeks after World War II started, I began attending the school’s Christian Union, a group indigenous to and organized by senior schoolboys. After four years of Sunday meetings, I came to Christ through Alfred Schultes, a German pastor of the Confessing Church. We boys listened to this “enemy” because he had suffered, having been imprisoned by Hitler with Martin Niemöller and later interned by us. In broken English he expounded 1 John, “Gott is luff, Gott is laif!” I realized that while God’s holiness reveals my sinfulness, Christ’s love in dying for me brings me forgiveness of sin and new life. I have felt indebted to German Christians ever since.

In primary school I had competed for top place, but now in a school restricted to bright kids from lower-income families, I was down at the bottom. Things began to change around the time of my conversion. Reading Paul de Kruif’s book Microbe Hunters inspired me to aim for a medical career. The 1944 Education Act opened the door to Oxford and Cambridge, previously only open to boys from wealthy homes and a few poorer boys of outstanding genius. (“Boys,” since Cambridge did not finally admit women until 1948). “Even people like you, Griffiths, can go to Oxbridge now,” a master told me. The headmaster urged me to go to Cambridge, rather than a London medical school.

Providentially, I gained an entrance award to Peterhouse, Cambridge, but was then conscripted into the Royal Army Medical Corps. I worked on wards as a nurse and then in charge of a pathology lab in a small hospital. I loved medical work but was disturbed that our patients remained ungrateful and selfish. Was I to devote my life to producing healthy sinners? After demobilization, I talked with evangelist Dick Rees about Church of England ministry. Evangelical advice at that time was strongly against studying academic theology, then at the high-tide mark of biblical skepticism, so I started reading natural sciences at Cambridge in October 1949. Though I have often since regretted my lack of any formal theological degree, I recognize that we are the product of our own times and circumstances.

English Student Work

Peterhouse was the oldest college (1284) at Cambridge, and almost the smallest. That year our college group belonging to the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU) began with seven members, but we finished with thirty-seven Christians out of two hundred Peterhouse undergraduates. The larger

CICCU was seeing students converted every week; of the five hundred members, half were converted after joining the university. After two terms I was invited onto the Executive Committee, and in my second year became president of this indigenous student movement, run by and for students. At age twenty-three, this experience provided remarkable on-the-job training. The following two years I served as missionary secretary, and then chairman, of the national InterVarsity Fellowship (IVF) Student Executive, covering twenty-two universities in the United Kingdom (now fifty years later there are five times as many). As well as seeing many conversions through student evangelism, two other things accelerated my pilgrimage.

In my first term the CICCU was organized into forty mission prayer groups of ten members each. For five years I prayed for East Africa every Saturday of term. Several members of our small group later went as missionaries to Africa, while Africans like my friend John Maca, graduate of the Alliance High School in Nairobi, later translator of the Maasai Bible, became East Africa Bible Society secretary. I was soon committed to becoming a missionary, probably in Africa. Our daily prayer meetings (since 1848) met in the Henry Martyn Hall, with Martyn’s portrait looking down on us. In 1950 Mildred Cable spoke to us at a missionary breakfast about closing doors to China. We enjoyed other speakers from the China Inland Mission, too; I remember Dr. Jim Broomhall, Lesley Lyall, and David Bentley-Taylor—all six-foot, phlegmatic, “front-row forwards.” But China closed in 1950, and as the insecure product of a broken home, I was manifestly not qualified. After graduation (1952), and feeling even more insecure because my parents divorced that summer, I stayed on in Cambridge at Ridley Hall to train for Anglican ministry. The four faculty and sixteen of the students were liberal, and forty of us students were conservative evangelicals. The faculty attempted to open our admittedly narrow mind-set to “new truth,” while we wrote comic songs lampooning their efforts. We questioned suspiciously everything our lecturers told us (not the best way to study theology!). Our essays benefited from advice from Andrew Walls, then at nearby Tyndale House, before he left for West Africa. Many of us were giving weekly Bible expositions in college CICCU groups; I spent three days each week preparing and delivering that material. Fellowship among us was rich and deep, and while, typically, there was no missiological constituent in the theological curriculum, several of us went on to spend much of our later lives overseas.

The second impulse came from three overseas visits, possible now that the war was no longer imprisoning us in our small islands. My first trip was to the Norwegian university and high school movement, led by Ole Hallesby and Carl Fredrik Wisløff. I was astonished to find Bible-believing, passionate, hymnsinging Lutherans believing in baptismal regeneration and lacking assurance of salvation. My second trip involved speaking at Reformed societies in Netherlands universities. In their network of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and the Free University, all teachers had signed the Augsburg Confession and the Articles of the Synod of Dort—but there was no prayer meeting in any Dutch university. It was doctrinally as sound as a bell, but spiritually as dead as a dodo. Yet these courageous people had fought for the Reformation, against Catholic Spain, and later against German occupiers. I began to realize that each
country has its own church history related to its own unique culture, and that we must not try to force others into the Procrustean bed of our own cultural ecclesiology. My third visit was in 1953 to an early conference of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), drawn almost entirely from North America and Europe rather than the Third World. Paul White was from Australia, David Adeney from Asia, while cultural diversity came from Hans Burki (Switzerland), Uli Wever (Germany), and Frank Horton (France). I realize now that because of my own experience of rapid conversion growth among British students, I was almost "triumphalist," expecting confidently that wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached, it must inevitably spread to the ends of the earth. The ebb tide of spiritual decline in Europe (not least in the U.K., Norway, and Holland) has accompanied a rising tide in Africa and Asia. This development substantiates Andrew Walls’s thesis that church growth is not steadily progressive but proceeds in fits and starts.

The Anglican Church was not for me. When I told my bishop that I thought infant baptism was neither dominical nor apostolic, but that I would be prepared to baptize children of believing parents who accepted covenant theology, he told me the curate must baptize every child in the parish before it was six weeks old. I had no choice but to resign. (Roland Allen had resigned over the same issue!) Doors to medicine and to Anglican ministry closed—so what did God want me to do now?

I was given a unanimous call from the IVF Student Executive, which I accepted, to become one of three male traveling secretaries, one of my colleagues being Methodist Donald English. This experience proved superb missionary training, with learning by doing, training student executive committees and Bible study group leaders, counseling individuals, modeling friendships with non-Christians, and engaging in personal evangelism. We occasionally preached at church evangelistic services, but what I enjoyed most were informal late-night evangelistic cocoa parties! After five years as a student activist, three years as a student worker was a natural development. Leadership was still indigenous, by students for students. We traveling secretaries might spend four days in a university, but then we would move on to another (by train!), so that students never became dependent upon staff workers.

Work in Japan

I met Valerie, my wife-to-be, one of two women a year reading theology at Oxford, at a conference on the English Puritans. We both had a clear call to overseas mission: she had worked at Nazareth among illiterate Arab women, I had been praying for Africa. Some compromise was essential, which was settled in favor of Asia, as statistics showed that Africa had more Christians and more missionaries than Asia. There were few overseas students in Britain after the war, but three Japanese I met were so intriguing that I started reading everything I could about Japan. Ariga Hisashi, who was returning from studies at the Free University in Amsterdam, came along with me on university visits. He was uncomplimentary about missionaries, whom he saw as poor in language and ignorant of culture, so he astonished me by asking me to pray about joining the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF, the successor to Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission) and coming to Japan to work with Kiriutoshia Gakuseki Kai (KGK, Christian Student Association), their national student movement, of which he was about to become general secretary. Our prayers for guidance were being answered, not with a Macedonian vision, but through real-live Japanese. As soon as Valerie completed her postgraduate teaching diploma, we were married. A year later we boarded a ship for OMF international headquarters in Singapore; it took us nineteen days. The night before we sailed, on October 4, 1957, I completed the manuscript of my first book, requested and published by InterVarsity Press (IVP) as Consistent Christianity (1960). Valerie was keener on Indonesia than Japan, but we accepted the director’s designation to work in Japan, initially in language study and church planting in the north, and then, only after that apprenticeship, joining KGK.

In spite of all we heard in training, and despite our having taken a language-learning course with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, nothing had prepared us for the shock of finding ourselves so utterly useless in our ability to evangelize or teach the Bible; we realized what a long slog learning Japanese would be. We could offer only ¥100 an hour (then worth only 2 shillings, or 40 cents) for informants rather than trained teachers. So, simply by listening, we worked at learning a difficult northern zuzu ben dialect. In Hakodate, where we had no baptized converts, I was befriended by an unemployed tuberculosis patient who had learned English by listening to radio. He was depressed and impoverished but, after we had left, was baptized following a life-threatening hemorrhage; he subsequently became an elder in the emerging church and still is a friend today. We moved to Hirosaki, where I tried to pastor a dozen believers, with inadequate language. Each Sunday I preached on the main street, where presenting a thousand tracts always meant a stiff back from all the bowing.

Student unrest in Tokyo caused Christian students to reject the KGK board, publishing house, and staff, so Ariga resigned. I was called to fill the gap: two Japanese colleagues said they would cover the rest of the country if I would cover the 110 universities in Tokyo. It was a daunting task, but four years spending all day with students rapidly enlarged and improved my vocabulary!

Tokyo seemed full of specialist parachurch organizations working with radio, literature, and university and high school students. Such organizations were parasitically dependent upon local churches to finance and follow up broadcasting, distribute tracts, buy books, provide staff, and so on. The justification for such organizations was how well they served the churches. Years later I discussed this with Lorne Sanny of Navigators, for while the Navigators emphasized prayer, Scripture memory, witness, and fellowship, at that time they were teaching nothing about the church. Sanny’s visit with me arose out of his reading my bestselling book Cinderella with Amnesia (IVP [U.K.], 1975; U.S. title: God’s Forgetful Pilgrims). I suggested that the bride of Christ had lost her memory, squatting in the institutional ashes, for many churchgoers merely attended churches instead of bonding and belonging to them, forgetting what church is for.

Working in Tokyo, I noticed the Gilbert-and-Sullivan relationship between ecumenical and evangelical missionaries, who even took their holidays in different resorts! Each group talked to Doors to medicine and to Anglican ministry closed—so what did God want me to do now?
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traveling secretary to missionaries instead of students. There was a huge postwar drift into the cities, which made rural church-planting unproductive. In addition to population
drift, local ties to shrines and temples could make planting a rural
church the work of a thirty-year missionary lifetime. In growing
urban areas there were few traditional temples and new congregations might arise in five years. It was better use of a missionary’s
energies to plant six urban churches than one rural one. At OMF’s
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My initial proposal to send missionaries into Cambodia was refused by colleagues, who felt we were too thinly spread else-
where. It was finally accepted in 1974, only a year before Phnom Penh fell. We called for single people to volunteer (wanting no responsibility for deaths that might produce widows or or-
phans), as rockets were already falling in the city. In the end, the
handful we sent had only ten months, but some remained working with refugees across the Mekong, and with Cambodians for the rest of their lives. Our missionaries in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were forced out, and the fall of those countries to radical leftist regimes, plus the “domino theory” which assumed that Thailand must swiftly follow, made missionaries feel inse-
cure. Two leprosy nurses in Muslim South Thailand were kid-
napped for ransom. A letter showed up on my desk from them
addressed to “Dear Mike,” demanding half a million dollars and
the withdrawal of Israel from the West Bank. This experience was
shattering, as was news of their deaths a year later. It would be
so easy for terrorists to grab more of our vulnerable missionaries
and cash them in, so paying ransom was impossible, even if
money had been available and if we had had influence with the
Israelis.

While living in Singapore, Valerie worked with wives of Japanese businessmen, and this ministry ultimately grew into a
congregation of expatriate Japanese, enabling us to remain fluent
in Japanese language and culture. The growth of our family also
spanned between Singapore and Japan. We were privileged to be
given four children—the first and last born in Singapore and the
middle two in Japan. Like other missionary children, getting an
English language education involved sacrificial separation, pain-
ful for all of us. They certainly enriched our lives, and we hope
living with us in East Asia enriched theirs.

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On a first visit to the United States following Urbana 1967, I
felt like a puppet popped up on platforms to do my thing and
ended up exhausted. I was stimulated meeting Kenneth Pike of
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president of Wheaton College, Donald McGavran at Fuller’s
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While living in Singapore, Valerie worked with wives of Japanese businessmen, and this ministry ultimately grew into a
congregation of expatriate Japanese, enabling us to remain fluent
in Japanese language and culture. The growth of our family also
spanned between Singapore and Japan. We were privileged to be
given four children—the first and last born in Singapore and the
middle two in Japan. Like other missionary children, getting an
English language education involved sacrificial separation, pain-
ful for all of us. They certainly enriched our lives, and we hope
living with us in East Asia enriched theirs.

OMF General Director

Stacey Woods had invited me to consider succeeding him in
IFES, but at that time I was invited by OMF to succeed Oswald
Sanders as general director. I accepted the OMF offer, which meant that in 1969 we had to move back to OMF’s international
headquarters in Singapore and travel the world from there. I was
forty-one. The job entailed delegating administration to others,
while fulfilling a similar “traveling secretary” role among nine
hundred missionaries of varied nationalities working in twelve
countries across East Asia. After a hundred years as an all-
Caucasian mission, we had at last decided to admit Chinese,
Japanese, Korean, and other nationalities. Hudson Taylor had
always placed his headquarters in China rather than in the West,
but transition to true multiracialism was slow at first. Escaping
the arrogance and cultural imperialism of mononational mis-
sions was one thing, but growing beyond a dominant Anglo-
American subculture was another.

On a first visit to the United States following Urbana 1967, I
felt like a puppet popped up on platforms to do my thing and
ended up exhausted. I was stimulated meeting Kenneth Pike of
the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Hudson Taylor Armerding,
president of Wheaton College, Donald McGavran at Fuller’s
Institute of Church Growth, and Ralph Winter, at that time still
at Fuller. My appointment to OMF leadership almost coincided
with the arrival of the charismatic movement, which initially
proved as divisive among missionaries overseas as it was in
churches at home. We are all vulnerable to suggestions that our experience might be deficient, so we had to find ways of tolerat-
ing different spiritualities by neither encouraging propagation
nor forbidding what Scripture allows. Mutual respect for the
spiritual autonomy of others was basic. I had to speak about it at
conferences, and I developed the ideas in books like Three Men Filled with the Spirit (OMF, 1969) and Gifts Without Inverted Commas (MARC Europe, 1986).

My initial proposal to send missionaries into Cambodia was refused by colleagues, who felt we were too thinly spread else-
where. It was finally accepted in 1974, only a year before Phnom Penh fell. We called for single people to volunteer (wanting no responsibility for deaths that might produce widows or or-
phans), as rockets were already falling in the city. In the end, the
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London Bible College

In 1977 I had been privileged to preach in King’s College Chapel
at the centenary of the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian
Union. After the service I was asked whether I would consider
returning to become general secretary of the Universities and
Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF), the national body uniting
the various University Christian Unions. I set in motion cumber-
some procedures for finding a successor at OMF, which we did:
a Mandarin-speaking great-grandson of Hudson Taylor. In 1979
I enjoyed leading two eight-day university missions in Durham
(what a missionary privilege to preach Christ between the bones
of Bede and the tomb of Cuthbert!) and Oxford Universities, glad
to be back in evangelism. Sadly, however, we had to decline the
UCCF invitation, because there was no clear role for Valerie.

At this point, much to my astonishment, for two years at
Ridley Hall did not earn me even a first theological degree,
London Bible College (LBC; now the London School of Theol-
ogy) invited me to become their third principal. They were the
first independent U.K. theological college to gain government
validation of a bachelor degree (1972), and later also the first for
an M.A. (1983). I accepted. This totally unexpected sideways
missed Japanese and Chinese friends left behind in East Asia. Because of my travels in East Asia and in countries from which OMF missionaries came, I was familiar with the backgrounds of many international students. Having engaged in mission for a quarter of a century, I now was able to share that experience with others. One plus was that Valerie was invited to continue some Old Testament teaching.

We graduated a hundred students a year, with overseas students returning home and some British graduates leaving for mission abroad. We derive huge vicarious pleasure from reading reports and praying for our students’ subsequent ministries. British Bible colleges are different from those in North America: our students were mainly older (the average age was twenty-nine) and already committed to Christian ministry. On a wider canvas, the European Evangelical Accreditation Association was concerned with standards of training throughout western Europe, where I could work alongside French- and German-speaking colleagues. At quadrennial youth mission conferences of The European Mission Association (TEMA), held first in Lausanne (a European Urbana), I gave the Bible expositions four times out of the first five; I formed links with mission enthusiasts throughout Europe and enjoyed opportunities of conference ministry with them. I became increasingly aware of the Lord of mission at work in every country.

Though initially I had been promised adequate administrative backup at the college, it never materialized, and a new chairman tried to push me into a more administrative role as chief executive officer for which I was not trained or gifted, and which I never wanted. I was not that kind of leader. Thus I found myself leaving after nine years, at sixty-one years of age.

Regent College, Vancouver

In one week, however, I received three invitations from North America. I accepted one—to Regent College, Vancouver, where in 1990 I became their first full-time professor of mission studies. The average age of the students at Regent was thirty-three, and the college was a total learning experience where students and faculty learned from each other. In London my opportunities to teach mission had been minimal. Now it was all systems go. It was a wonderfully creative time; I wrote twelve new courses over the three years, including Church Growth Around the Pacific Rim and Contextualization, until reaching retiring age. In seminars titled Mission Thinkers and Mission Activists, students made presentations about the ministries of significant heroes and heroines chosen by them. The whole class read the appropriate IBMR “Legacy” articles, while I read more widely in order to be on top of the subject. It was a good way of teaching and learning. Sadly, however, Harvie Conn’s dream of a “missiological agenda for theology, not a theological agenda for missions” was never fulfilled.

I found myself becoming enthusiastic for what I started calling historical missiology. Example and enthusiasm sparked off each other. More recently, the opportunity to teach Iranian Christians has fired my interest in the Persian church: imagine this body, which around A.D. 500 included a theological college in Nisibis on the Tigris with a thousand students. Persecution drove this church out to China and South India. Such accounts make it clear that mission history does not start with William Carey or the Moravians but with forgotten saints and martyrs of generations before and after the advent of Islam.

During visits to Israel, first with a group from our local church, next with LBC students, and then as a guest of the Fellowship of Christian Students in Israel, I realized how few “traditional missionaries” are sent there by mission “agencies” (a horrible word, representing the disastrous shift from a closely bonded fellowship of fund-sharing teams to groups of independently-funded individuals for whom “agencies” are merely temporary flags of convenience). Instead, I discovered a network of committed, largely self-supporting, like-minded individuals. I suddenly realized that a much older, more efficient, and more knowledgeable mission society led by its three experienced, divine Directors has placed men and women where they want them, in accordance with their all-knowing wise providence. This missio Dei is an observable and glorious fact in which we can rejoice and revel, until “in every place” his name is great among the nations where Jesus shall reign. David Bosch’s article “The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20” was the most seminal for my own thinking, addressing both the authority of the Lord for evangelizing Jews, Muslims, and Hindus, and his continuing presence with us in mission, dealing with our inability and weakness.1

As my pilgrimage draws toward its natural anticipated end, I realize the extent of my ignorance and brighten at the possibility that in glory we will be able to meet saints who are themselves primary sources, living mission “Torah,” not available to us on earth because they have been forgotten, their records lost, or their thoughts never committed to writing. That great cloud of witnesses before whom we each have run our own individual pilgrimage race will, when we in turn join their number, surely provide many opportunities for questionings and reminiscences, and above all for having the time to marvel more fully at the wisdom of the missio Dei.

Note

The Legacy of Leslie E. Maxwell

W. Harold Fuller

Though he himself never served as a missionary, Leslie E. Maxwell (1895–1984), cofounder of Prairie Bible Institute (PBI) in Three Hills, Alberta, left a legacy that has had a major impact on the world Christian mission. James Hudson Taylor III told this author that Maxwell’s ministry was felt not only in Canada but also around the world, including inland China. Bible conference speaker Stephen F. Olford, himself the son of missionaries, says that Maxwell’s mentoring produced a distinctive type of missionary.

In the pool halls of his youth, Maxwell’s companions would have scoffed at the idea that this feckless youth would ever become a preacher and a world missions leader. Born to a farmer in Salina, Kansas, the eldest of nine children, Maxwell as a young man was terrified of public speaking and spent more time playing pool than sitting in church. Religion was not part of his family life, though a godly grandfather would read from the Bible during the visits of his grandchildren. Years later, Maxwell characterized his youth as playing ball, playing pool, and playing the fool.1

He and his family experienced a tragic episode when a younger brother, Ernest, was crushed to death under the wheel of a grain wagon. But what drove Leslie, in his late teens, to repentance and faith was the hellfire preaching of a Methodist evangelist and a Presbyterian minister’s invitation to “come to Christ.” Maxwell made his personal transaction with the Savior and turned full circle. He stayed up most of that night reading the Bible, and the next day he left his poolroom companions.

The young convert began to realize the tenacity of a praying aunt, Christina. Her prayers had preceded his conversion and now stayed with him through his early Christian growth. When he left for France to serve with the U.S. Army during World War I, she gave him a Bible motto: “The blood of Jesus Christ saves us from sin.” Shortly after his discharge from the army, his father died, leaving him responsible for the support of his widowed mother and five siblings. Aunt Christina helped by securing a clerical job for Leslie at a bank in nearby Kansas City.

The job in the city also enabled him to study at the newly opened Midland Bible Institute in Kansas City. The principal of the school was William C. Stevens, former head of Nyack College, founded by A. B. Simpson of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.2 In Maxwell’s last year at the school, a plea came to Stevens from a farmer, Fergus Kirk, in the remote village of Three Hills, Alberta. Kirk’s sister had taken one of Nyack’s Bible correspondence courses developed by Stevens, and Kirk had used the material to teach a Bible class. Feeling the time had come to employ a Bible teacher, he inquired whether Stevens knew of a student who could come to Three Hills for a couple of years to teach the class.

And so it was that in 1922 Maxwell found himself in the grain-elevator town of Three Hills in southern Alberta. After a two-year stint, the young Kansan stayed on. Although neither Maxwell nor Kirk intended to start a full-blown Bible school, the class of eight students in fact became the nucleus of Alberta’s first continuing Bible institute. Within twenty-five years it had become one of North America’s largest.

In spite of Maxwell’s early fear of public speaking, his personal gifts of wit and drama, coupled with spiritual insight, transformed classes into unforgettable encounters with the Scriptures. “He was the most significant teacher I ever had,” says Elisabeth Elliott, noted author and conference speaker. “A riveting speaker, a man of deep compassion, side-splitting humor, and an unswerving determination to follow his God!”3

Soon in demand as a conference speaker, Maxwell traversed the continent and later the globe. He was a guest speaker at the first student mission conference sponsored by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, held in Toronto in 1946.4 As word of this Spartan school and its effervescent leader spread, students came from all parts of North America and, increasingly, from other continents. The largest enrollment followed World War II, when servicemen and servicewomen came with the vision of taking the Gospel to areas of the world where they had seen great physical and spiritual need. The school with the motto “Training disciplined soldiers for Christ” had its own appeal to these war veterans. As the campus grew, Maclean’s, Canada’s weekly newsmagazine, called it “Miracle on the Prairies” in a main feature.5

**Missions, the Church’s First Business**

“Christians must become convicted and convinced that missions is the first business of the church,” Maxwell frequently declared. He saw missions in the entire Bible, beginning with the Abrahamic covenant and Israel’s role as a witness to the nations. This emphasis is followed in the Gospels by the risen Lord’s Great Commission, which is then enacted by the apostles through their witness, with the ultimate fruit—“a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues”—unveiled in the Book of Revelation.

Stephens, under whom Maxwell studied at Midland, strongly believed that the return of Christ depended upon global evangelization. PBI emphasized the imminent return of Christ, but above all else the school saw world evangelization as a matter of obedience and fulfillment of God’s purpose for the church. All peoples must have the opportunity to accept Jesus as Lord before he returns to judge the earth.

Always in financial straits in the early years, the school and its supporters may have seemed an unlikely base for giving to missions, but they practiced what they preached. At the first PBI missionary conference, in 1923, guests—mostly struggling farmers—pledged $2,000 for missions. Within four years, friends of the school channeled some $10,000 (many times that in today’s currency) to foreign missions.6 Moreover, by 1930 three of the faculty’s five members left to help found and staff a Bible school and mission in the Caribbean.7

As PBI graduates shared the Gospel in other lands, the churches they helped establish also gave priority to missions. Within two years of first hearing the Gospel, converts from a warring tribe in Nigeria took up an offering to send an evangelist into neighboring Dahomey (now Benin). Within six years of organizing, the Evangelical Churches of West Africa, an indigenous Nigerian denomination, launched its own mission society, the Evangelical Missionary Society, with a PBI graduate as a

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W. Harold Fuller, a graduate of Prairie Bible Institute, entered missionary journalism with SIM in 1951, becoming editor of West Africa’s largest circulation monthly. The most recent of his eleven books is Maxwell’s Passion and Power (2002).
to help support a Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan. In the presents and butter for two years so the family could fulfill a pledge Kirk at various times sold his car, some of his farmland, and porters and staff alike. To help finance early construction, Fergus was so rustic Pearl had to wear snow-boots in the house during the winter, and she would perch her infants on the kitchen table to keep them warm. Members of the staff and the faculty received campus housing, basic farm produce, and volunteer medical care; they divided equally any gifts that were designated for staff. 

Sacrificial living was embraced by the school’s early supporters and staff alike. To help finance early construction, Fergus Kirk at various times sold his car, some of his farmland, and lumber he had bought to build a respectable house. As a boy Kirk had seen his parents—and their children—forego Christmas presents and butter for two years so the family could fulfill a pledge to help support a Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan. In the 1930s Maxwell pitched hay during the summer to help provide for his family. He and his family joined in the annual missionary pledge offering in faith that God would somehow help them find the money. As the school grew, the buildings themselves were stark reminders of a simple lifestyle—basic tarpaper and clapboard “boxes” with no frills. Going into debt, however, was out of the question. If there was no money for a keg of nails, the volunteer builders-cum-farmers halted operations until money came in. 

This lifestyle was in accord with the struggles of prairie farmers. Occasionally there were good years, but whenever drought blew away the fertile topsoil, the settlers had to move on to find virgin land. When the American stock market collapsed in 1929, farmers on the Canadian prairies felt the repercussions. The price of wheat, Alberta’s staple export, collapsed. Hunger and unemployment hit many communities. But because the little school in Three Hills owed nothing, it carried on. Farmers trucked in loads of potatoes and sides of beef. Students handled daily maintenance assignments. Decades later, when some semi-

Lifestyle: Sacrificial and Resourceful

Responding to the missionary calling required sacrifice. In his first year at Three Hills, Maxwell realized that the local farmers could not support him financially. Adopting a simple lifestyle, he boarded with farmers during his first three years in Three Hills. After he and Pearl Plummer married in 1925, the newlyweds lived in the student dormitory. When they did find a house, it was so rustic Pearl had to wear snow-boots in the house during the winter, and she would perch her infants on the kitchen table to keep them warm. Members of the staff and the faculty received campus housing, basic farm produce, and volunteer medical care; they divided equally any gifts that were designated for staff. 

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naries and Bible schools faced huge debts because of changing demographics and economics, PBI was able to continue its ministry unabated, though it did have to tighten its belt.

PBI graduates took this simple lifestyle and no-debt policy with them when they went overseas as missionaries, and the new churches they helped to found followed their example. In Ethiopia indigenous missionaries tramped over the hills into hostile territory with only a bag of flour over their shoulders. Ethiopian Christians built churches and Bible schools as they were able, without foreign funds. In West Africa, when Dompago Christians told PBI graduate Roland Pickerling that they needed a Bible school, he replied, “Fine—you build it, and I’ll be glad to teach in it.” The school had only a thatched roof and mud walls, but it belonged to the Dompago Christians, and there was no debt.

The frugality of the Three Hills school necessitated resourcefulness to operate the campus, which by midcentury sprawled over 120 acres. One example was the heating system. Roger Kirk (Fergus’s brother), a tinsmith, cobbled together cast-off boilers and pipes to construct a central heating system, fueled by coal from a nearby mine. The pipes ran through tunnels under the campus walkways (keeping them de-iced) and into the buildings. Students knew that the warmth of their dorm rooms during a howling blizzard depended on the ingenuity of people like Emil Bruck, an American volunteer master machinist who sometimes had to design and make his own replacement parts for the heating system.

A Soldierly Discipline

“Prairie Bible Institute stands for an unusual ruggedness, discipline, and spiritual emphasis in training,” states Olford. The soldier metaphor came readily to war veteran Maxwell and was enhanced during the post–World War II influx of students who had served in the armed forces. Maxwell himself kept up a daily regime of exercise, but he had in mind much more than physical discipline. He referred to Paul’s call to soldiership (2 Tim. 2:3–4), and he found models in the lives of early Christian martyrs and of mystics such as Francis of Assisi and Jeanne-Marie Guyon. It was Amy Wilson Carmichael, a contemporary of Maxwell, who influenced him most of all. An Irish Anglican missionary who served in Japan and India, Carmichael founded a refuge for children, especially young girls destined for “marriage” to Hindu gods in temple service. In her prime, Amma (Tamil for “mother”), as everyone called her, suffered a crippling fall and spent her last decades directing the work of Dohnavur Fellowship from a bed of pain. But from her affliction flowed volumes of poetry and prose that called Christians to a life of self-denial and discipline. Maxwell often quoted Carmichael, challenging PBI students with memorable lines such as the following, penned by the Irish missionary in 1912:

From subtle love of softening things,
From easy choices, weakenings,
From all that dims thy Calvary,
O Lamb of God, deliver me.

At PBI, Carmichael’s spirituality fit in with the rustic campus, the strict social regulations, and the challenge to “endure hardship as a soldier of Christ.” Olford notes, “I have met graduates from this school all over the world. They are usually known for two distinctive Christian qualities—spirituality and stickability.”
Commitment, simple lifestyle, and discipline were the outward expressions of Maxwell’s core message expressed in his book *Born Crucified.* This work stressed that every follower of Christ is spiritually reborn only as he or she accepts Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross. By identifying with Christ, every believer is “born crucified.” That identification extends to Christ’s resurrection. In dying to sin, disciples are made “alive unto God.” That meant taking up one’s cross daily and following Jesus into new life. Whenever believers live for themselves, they deny Christ in those areas of their life. They have not yet picked up their cross and denied themselves. Maxwell saw that condition as an utter contradiction of the believer’s position of being “born crucified.”

Missionary statesman Ian M. Hay, general director emeritus of the Sudan Interior Mission (now SIM, or Sailing in Mission), sees Maxwell’s born-crucified message as the major reason for the missionary effectiveness of PBI graduates. With special reference to those facing the strains of serving in cross-cultural contexts, Olford observes, “Without the moment-by-moment application of the Cross to the self-life, relationships are strained and resentments are stirred to explosive proportions. This in turn, can lead to alarming defections from the mission field.” James Hudson Taylor III comments, “The mark of the people [Maxwell mentored] was their commitment to Christ, love for the Word, heart for the world, and servant spirit.”

**Finding Theological Balance**

Some misunderstood Maxwell’s strong emphasis on the crucified life, hearing only the “dying-to-self” refrain and not listening long enough to hear the balancing principle of “rising-to-life.” Hyper-Calvinist camps accused PBI graduates of being unsure of their eternal security, and some Holiness camps accused them of being too Calvinistic.

Maxwell’s theology reflected a rich background of Presbyterian ancestry, Methodist evangelism and emphasis on the work of the Spirit, and Baptist doctrine. He had no doubt about God’s sovereignty, but he also understood the role of human will. Early in his ministry he had read The Twofoldness of Divine Truth, a book that bridged the opposing poles of hyper-Calvinism and Holiness. The author avowed that the Scriptures sometimes state different positions in order to display the full truth and prevent a one-sided interpretation. In his ministry Maxwell melded the best from both theological camps, presenting a balanced, nonsectarian stand in the midst of strong sectarian factionalism on the Canadian prairies. His approach to the tension between law and grace, he confessed, did not follow the beaten track.

This openness to seeing value in differing views on secondary issues equipped PBI graduates for global missions.

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**Women in Ministry**

Early in the school’s history, Maxwell asked his vice-principal, Dorothy Ruth Miller (a graduate of New York University and Columbia University and a gifted speaker and theologian), to preach on Sunday mornings. Given the fact that Three Hills was a frontier kind of town with a typical macho character, this was a bold move. “Wherever the gospel goes, it betters the lot of women,” stated Maxwell. His openness to the role of women in ministry and his belief that a woman had liberty to use her spiritual gifts in any role to which the Holy Spirit called her placed him ahead of his time.

He came to this position as a result of independent study. Poring over his Hebrew and Greek lexicons, perusing church history, and reading many sources pro and con, he came to the conclusion that barring women from leadership roles in ministry did not line up with the overall teaching of Scripture. Late in life he expressed his views in *Women in Ministry.* “His desire was that women might be set free from what he felt were unscriptural restrictions placed on them by many churches and Christian leaders,” wrote dean of women Ruth C. Dearing in her introduction to *Women in Ministry.* Maxwell faulted rabbinic teaching, a male-centric worldview, and medieval tradition as the causes of continued bias against women in ministry.

**Methodology: Study and Apply**

“Scripture is its own best commentary!” Maxwell often paraphrased renowned expositor R. A. Torrey, who wrote: “There is no other commentary on the Bible so helpful as the Bible itself.” Rather than passively absorbing lectures, students at PBI were expected to examine and apply the Scriptures for themselves, using an inductive, search-question approach adapted from the system used by the Bible school in Kansas where both Leslie and Pearl had studied. Lesson materials listed questions that helped students prepare for class discussion. The questions were de-
signed to send students searching through passages and cross-references in order to develop their own exegesis, which they were expected to defend in class by appeal to Scripture.

The system attracted a wide range of students. One was a quiet-spoken engineering graduate, Ralph Winter, who spent a semester at PBI before taking postgraduate studies in anthropology and linguistics at Cornell University. “I’d heard of the school’s inductive system,” he explained to the author, “and wanted to see firsthand how it worked.” Winter went on to serve as a missionary in Central America. He eventually helped initiate Theological Education by Extension and programmed instruction, both becoming valuable systems in Bible teaching programs worldwide.28 He employed a similar question-and-answer method in his widely used missions course, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement.

The inductive method put into students’ hands a valuable tool they would use long after graduation, a tool that lent itself to adaptation in other languages and, according to Goertz, prepared missionaries for isolated ministry.29 Thus, in new Christian communities overseas no less than in the missionaries’ sending countries, the Bible was central in study and teaching. It was especially revolutionary in cultures that traditionally taught by rote learning. Inductive learning helped develop indigenous leadership.

“Many Prairies graduates have been involved in Bible school teaching, using the inductive method they learned in Three Hills,” states George M. Foxall, a member of the International Council of Evangelical Theological Education. “And that made a great impact on church growth. Once Bible schools (most of them vernacular) were established, graduates aided the rapid growth of churches.”30

Gus Kayser, a 1945 PBI graduate who in 1949 went to Ethiopia with his wife, Lois, is one example. In the Kambatta village of Durami they used an inductive Bible study method, translating study questions into Amharic, the country’s lingua franca. This material was recycled and contextualized for more than twenty other Kambatta district schools. According to Paul and Lila Balisky, “Dozens of Kayser’s students became strong leaders in the national church.”31

The inductive material was further adapted and updated by other missionaries and became a key factor in the survival of these churches during Ethiopia’s Marxist regime (1974–89). During this period of intense persecution, the churches went underground but were able to continue teaching in secret. Instead of dwindling, evangelical churches actually increased numerically.

Complementing the inductive method used in study was Maxwell’s declarative preaching style. He taught and preached for results in the lives of students. He declared the scriptural message, seeking to follow the example of the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 2:1). Graduates went into church pulpits and missionary service with the same passion to apply the Scriptures to the lives of their hearers. It was part of Maxwell’s legacy, taken around the world.

**Prairie Populism: Sociopolitical Influence**

Perhaps Maxwell’s most surprising legacy was one he would never have intended—the impact of his message on the political landscape of the prairie provinces. Goertz, in his study of the social and religious interaction in Alberta between 1925 and 1938, finds that Maxwell led the religious consensus on the Canadian prairies at the time.32 Although a politician-preacher named William Aberhart has often been seen as the main figure in what became “the Bible belt” of southern Alberta, Goertz documents the fact that Maxwell was the principal arbiter of the Bible belt and the primary organizer and theologian of the religious revival of the 1930s. As Goertz points out, this was an era of fragmenting sects and emphasis on the social aspects of the Gospel.33 Maxwell stayed clear of both minefields. Although Maxwell and Kirk had Presbyterian backgrounds, they kept the Three Hills school nonsectarian, exemplifying a kind of evangelical ecumenicity based on spiritual unity. Also, concerned though he was about the hardships of the Great Depression, Maxwell protected the institution from political entanglements.

As some denominational leaders emphasized political solutions in place of spiritual regeneration, Maxwell’s unwavering biblical teaching resonated with a large segment of the population. Through his school, radio broadcasts, and frequent visits all across the prairies, he widened his “parish” and influenced the formation of a prairie populism still evident today.34

**Maxwell’s Family: Living Out the Legacy**

Leslie and Pearl had five girls and two boys—“our five loaves and two fish,” Maxwell often called them. Leslie’s legacy played out in the family, as all seven children took up some form of Christian service, serving in missions or churches in Africa, Japan, Philippines, South America, and North America. But the children’s personal pilgrimage did not always follow the parents’ expectations. Living in the “goldfish bowl” of campus life, the children faced pressures felt by children of public figures. The first five heeded the strict but loving discipline of their parents, but the latter two, Paul and Miriam, chafed under the family’s regimen and also the expectations of faculty and other students. They seemed determined to show they could live their own lives.

In Paul and Miriam’s childhood years, the campus had grown substantially, and the demands on father Leslie’s time had greatly increased. While the older children were young, he had faithfully set aside Saturday mornings to be with them. He failed to follow this pattern with the two youngest, though, for which he later blamed himself. As Paul and Miriam persisted in rebelliousness, their parents did much soul-searching. “Oh God, what can we do!” Pearl exclaimed in despair. “Trust me with joy,” the reply seemed to come from God.35 And she did find joy as Paul, after returning to his spiritual heritage, followed in his father’s footsteps, ultimately becoming president of the school.

Because of constant campus pressures, Miriam, an exceptionally gifted child, resented being labeled a Maxwell. “We always knew our parents loved us,” she said, “but when I married and changed my last name, it was such a relief!”36 However, as she and her husband served in churches and personal witness, she too came to value her heritage.

**Maxwell taught and preached for results in the lives of students.**
distance education program links several hundred off-campus students and students in cooperating schools.

“When historians attempt to assess and understand the special character of Canadian prairie Christianity in the mid-twentieth century, they will have to account for the influence of L. E. Maxwell,” writes Maxine Hancock, author, broadcaster, and Regent College (Vancouver, B.C.) professor.37 “God has used Prairie not only around the world but also in home missions, establishing churches,” states PBI chancellor emeritus Ted S. Rendall, citing the role of PBI graduates serving within the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission, the Canadian Sunday School Mission, and Village Missions, among others.38 Canadian church historian John Stackhouse, Jr., in a 1993 publication, declared Maxwell and his Bible institute one of the major influences on Canadian evangelicals over the past century.39

Brian C. Stiller, president of Tyndale College and Seminary, Toronto, has well summarized Maxwell’s legacy: “Our country’s history is marked by risk-taking visionaries who see in their waking hours what most dare not dream in the night. L. E. Maxwell was one of those people. He changed the course of our nation’s church history, and heaven will forever rejoice in his sojourn of faith.”40

Notes
4. After the initial conference in Toronto, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship has held its mission conferences on the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois, generally every three years. Current “Urbana” attract up to 20,000 students.
7. West Indies Mission was cofounded by Cuban Presbyterian minister B. G. Lavastida and Prairie faculty member Elmer V. Thompson.
8. As a result of incomplete record keeping in the early years of the school, statistics about graduates are necessarily approximate. As Maxwell explained to researcher Aaron Goertz, “In the early years, we were so sure that Christ would return right then, we didn’t think it worth keeping records” (of graduates and their places of ministry). “We possessed only three file cabinets. When the third got full, we threw out the contents of the first and started over again.” See Donald Aaron Goertz, “The Development of a Bible Belt: The Socio-Religious Interaction in Alberta Between 1925 and 1938” (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Alberta, 1976), p. 97; further details in interview with the author.
12. Maxwell’s bookshelves contained many of Carmichael’s thirty books (which included 560 poems), published by Dohnavur Fellowship, London.
15. In spite of this emphasis, Maxwell had no illusions that either the PBI staff or its graduates possessed some kind of superspiritual immunity to failure. With typical frankness, he would often observe, “‘PBI’ can apparently employed by William. C. Stevens at Nyack, even before he founded Midland Bible Institute. It may have been influenced by the system of inductive Bible study used extensively at Biblical Seminary in New York, founded by John R. Mott’s brother-in-law William White.
23. Maxwell attributed this idea to James M. Gray (1851–1935), Episcopal minister, scholar, and author, who served as president of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago from 1904 to 1934.
25. Maxwell, Women in Ministry, pp. 45, 105, passim. In support of his views on women in Christian leadership roles, Maxwell appealed to respected evangelical exegesis of earlier decades, such as A. J. Gordon and A. T. Pierson, as well as the example of J. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission, a pioneer in recognizing women as missionaries in their own right. See Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God, 13th impression (London: China Inland Mission, 1949), pp. 128, 294, 398.
27. This search-question approach, a form of inductive Bible study, was apparently employed by William. C. Stevens at Nyack, even before he founded Midland Bible Institute. It may have been influenced by the system of inductive Bible study used extensively at Biblical Seminary in New York, founded by John R. Mott’s brother-in-law William White.
33. Ibid., p. 116.
34. Ibid., pp. 113, 114.
35. Callaway, Legacy, p. 128.
36. Miriam Maxwell Carlson to the author, personal communication; see Fuller, Maxwell’s Passion, p. 278.
37. Maxine Hancock to author, October 1, 2001.
38. Fuller, Maxwell’s Passion, pp. 68–69.
40. Brian C. Stiller, quoted in Fuller, Maxwell’s Passion, p. i. Stiller was raised in the prairie province of Saskatchewan and was president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada for twelve years.
Are There More Non-Western Missionaries than Western Missionaries?

Michael Jaffarian

For some years now, the idea that there are more Four-Fifths-World missionaries than Western missionaries has been showing up in various missions presentations and publications. Unfortunately, it is just not true.1

This idea stems from Larry Pate’s 1989 book From Every People, which makes a very important contribution to our understanding of the Four-Fifths-World missions movement. He projected, “If both the Western missionary force and the Two-Thirds World missionary force continue to grow at their current rates [by 2000] the majority of Protestant missionaries will be from the non-Western world.” More specifically, “The number of Two-Thirds World missionaries holds the very real promise of surpassing the number of Western missionaries by the year 2000.” Though Pate warned that “a projection is not a prediction,” still the idea has been launched that this projection has become reality.2 It is one of the great items of missiometrical misinformation of our time.3

Note two important things about this assertion. First, for Four-Fifths-World missionaries, Pate counted both domestic and foreign missionaries, but for the Western world he counted only foreign missionaries. (Foreign missionaries leave their country of citizenship to serve God in another country; domestic missionaries serve cross-culturally within their own land, such as those from South India who serve among tribal peoples in central India, or Anglo-Americans who serve among Asians, Hispanics, or international students in America.) To arrive at a fair conclusion, Pate should have compared this same kind of missionaries—either foreign only or both foreign and domestic—for both regions of the world. He did not, however, and thus the size of the Four-Fifths-World missionary force is disproportionately large (or that of the Western world too small); the comparison is not valid.

Second, Pate projected that the Four-Fifths-World missionary force would maintain a constant growth rate, with no slowing of the pace. Over time, however, new social or religious movements rarely show a consistent pattern of growth. There is almost always a significant slowing of the growth rate of such movements, and the growth rate of the Four-Fifths-World missions movement since 1989 has been no exception.

Pate’s projection was thus built on the foundation of these two errors. Since 1989 both David Barrett in the World Christian Encyclopedia and the team of Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk in Operation World have done the actual counting, and both show that Pate’s projection failed to come true.

The second edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia (2001) shows the number of all Christian missionaries, from all ecclesiastical traditions. By the authors’ count, as shown in table 1, in the year 2000 there were more than four times as many Western missionaries as missionaries from the Four-Fifths World.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Christian Foreign Missionaries in A.D. 2000</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Fifths World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
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<td>Oceania</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</table>

The 2001 edition of *Operation World* shows a similar pattern. Johnstone and Mandryk were more limited in their scope, counting only Protestant, Independent, and Anglican (PIA) missionaries. In table 2 the column “Total national missionaries” includes both foreign and domestic missionaries, for both the Four-Fifths World and the Western world. There the Four-Fifths World total is close to the Western world total, but still smaller. For foreign missionaries, though, there were more than three times as many Western missionaries (PIA) as missionaries from the Four-Fifths World.

**Table 2. Protestant, Independent, and Anglican Missionaries in A.D. 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global region</th>
<th>Total national missionaries</th>
<th>Proportion serving abroad</th>
<th>Proportion missionary sent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Four-Fifths World | 91,837 | 20,570 | 88%
| Africa | 12,442 | 3,126 | 25%
| Asia | 69,203 | 13,607 | 20%
| Latin America | 10,192 | 3,837 | 37%
| Western World | 103,437 | 70,323 | 68%
| Europe | 22,897 | 16,077 | 70%
| Northern America | 71,088 | 50,720 | 71%
| Pacific | 9,452 | 3,526 | 37%
| Total | 195,274 | 90,893 | 46%


But what about growth trends? For this point, see table 3, which compares statistics from the fifth edition of *Operation World* with statistics from the sixth edition. Preparing this table required some adjusting. First, the two editions divided the world’s global regions differently, so that in some cases I had to go to the country level of statistics to get the 1990 figures to correlate with those for 2000. Second, the 1993 edition presents figures for “Protestant” missionaries, versus for “PIA” missionaries in the 2001 edition. After reviewing pages 23–24 in the older edition, however, I could see that the same group of missionaries was being counted in both cases, with improved terminology in the 2001 edition. Third, especially for the figures in 1993, did in the decade of the 1990s.

**Table 3. Protestant/PIA Foreign Missionaries in A.D. 1990 and 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global region</th>
<th>Missionaries in 1990</th>
<th>Missionaries in 2000</th>
<th>Growth rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Four-Fifths World | 6,634 | 20,570 | 210%
| Africa | 1,669 | 3,126 | 87%
| Asia | 3,476 | 13,607 | 291%
| Latin America | 1,489 | 3,837 | 158%
| Western World | 62,927 | 70,323 | 12%
| Europe | 15,701 | 16,077 | 2%
| Northern America | 43,554 | 50,720 | 16%
| Pacific | 3,672 | 3,526 | -4%
| Total | 69,561 | 90,893 | 31%


The figures in table 3 make clear a different side of the question. Though the Four-Fifths-World missions movement is still much smaller than the Western missions movement, it is growing at a much faster rate. It also is adding a larger number of missionaries each year. In the ten-year period shown in the table, the number of missionaries in the Four-Fifths World grew by 13,936, versus only by 7,396 in the Western World. This difference is significant. It doesn’t necessarily mean, however, that the Four-Fifths-World missions movement will pass the Western missions movement in size any time soon. We cannot assume that either will continue to grow at the same rate as they did in the decade of the 1990s.

In any case, we should recognize the growth in the number of foreign missionaries from the Four-Fifths World, rejoice over it before the Lord our God, and support it—even though we cannot say there are more non-Western missionaries than Western missionaries. At least not yet.

**Notes**

1. This article is adapted from *Jaffarian’s Missions Research Ezine*, a free occasional publication on missions research and information. To subscribe, simply write michael@earthlink.net and ask to be put on “the ezine list.” “Four-Fifths World” is used to better describe what has been called the Two-Thirds World or, more simply, the non-Western world.
Book Reviews

Hinduism and Modernity.

Hinduism and Modernity by David Smith seeks to explore how the seemingly disparate forces of Hinduism and modernity have interacted with one another. Smith demonstrates his pedagogical abilities through an insightful array of metaphors borrowed from popular Hinduism that he uses to illustrate various themes within Hinduism and modernity. This approach serves him particularly well in part 1 of the book when he is defining Hinduism and modernity and tracing the broad, historical themes in each movement. For example, his comparison of the great, rolling Jagannath from the great temple at Puri with the great, rolling juggernaut of modernity and its commitment to never-ending progress is nothing less than brilliant.

In part 2 the author explores the history of India’s discovery of modernism and the European discovery of Hinduism. In this part a knowledgeable reader will be surprised by the glaring omissions in Smith’s historical survey. Major Indian Christian figures (such as Brahmanbandhv Upadhyay), as well as a whole array of Western missionaries who played such a vital role in stimulating the Bengali Renaissance, are all curiously neglected. The role of the printing press and the emergence of vernacular, prose writings by Hindu reformers in mediating modernism and Hinduism are likewise omitted.

In part 3 the author chooses three themes for comparison: gender issues in modernity and Hinduism, idolatry in East and West, and the notion of the self in the modern West and the Hindu East. His insights into how modern Indian women have interacted with traditional oppressive cultural structures set against the backdrop of Hinduism, which glorifies and worships the female, is very insightful and helpful. Increasing incoherence seems to creep into the remaining two themes, however, resulting in very little substantive interaction with the comparable themes in modernity. Indeed, like modernism itself or, like the great, rolling Jagannath at the end of the festival when it rolls back into the temple of its origin, Smith’s book slowly rolls to a stop, leaving the reader wondering how much progress has actually been made. Ruminant of the famous race around the universe between Ganesh and Skanda for the mango prize, wherein Skanda actually makes the journey and the elephant-headed Ganesh merely plods around his parents and declares them the universe, the reader may wonder whether we, like Skanda of old, really made the journey and received the prize or, like Ganesh, have simply walked around the two themes of Hinduism and modernity and declared the contest over.

—Timothy C. Tennent

Timothy C. Tennent, Associate Professor of World Missions, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, is the author of Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam (Baker, 2002).


In today’s world the resurgence of religion is conspicuous amid the interplay of forces in the current rush to globalization. Several authors in this third volume of God and Globalization address the relevance of God in the midst of current global changes. Scott Thomas, for example, devotes his chapter to this subject, referring in particular to writers in different epochs who have drawn attention to the influence of religion. This chapter highlights and illustrates the merit of this excellent work.

Proponents and major players of globalization are primarily preoccupied with economic issues, which dictate to a large extent the direction of globalization. The writers of this volume are clear in pointing out, however, that, amid all the forces at work in globalization, “religion can and does shape those principalities and powers, authorities and regencies as much [as the economic]” (p. 16). This book is a forceful reminder that religion is still one of the underlying factors that must be reckoned with. Although globalization itself may be a recent phenomenon, the contributors to this volume make it clear that religion remains alive and very much active in effecting change in the modern world.

The various authors write knowledgeably in their respective fields and address insightfully the new international context. For both newcomers and veteran readers, the chapters ably clarify the various “dominions” of civilization.

Globalization, however, although a recent concept, has in a sense been taking place since time immemorial, at least in the movement of the various religions beyond their respective borders. The criticism could be made that some of the authors are perhaps overly preoccupied with the glory of the past. In this respect, they fall short and have not addressed the relevance of God in the most present and satisfactory way.

—Thu En Yu

Thu En Yu is Principal of Sabah Theological Seminary, in Malaysia, an interdenominational institution with multinational mission partners.

Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853.

Recently several new approaches to the history of Britain and its empire have begun to bear fruit. In coming to understand the limitations of both
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“national” perspectives and those confined to the history of particular colonial localities, scholars have increasingly tried to take account of the transnational, international, or global circumstances shaping the imperial experience. In reaction against the dominant secular paradigms of that empire’s historiography, attention has been given to the importance of religion for empire, particularly in the forms of overseas missionary enterprise and the Christian encounter with non-Christians. Finally, the manner in which colonial possessions and the processes of empire-building have shaped not only a distant colonial periphery but metropolitan Britain itself has become the focus of investigation.

Taking advantage of the rich literature on early nineteenth-century South Africa, and drawing on her own extensive research, Elizabeth Elbourne has combined these three perspectives in a wonderful study that will long remain an inescapable reference point for all students of the changing relations between Christianity and empire. A short review cannot do justice to its exceptional combination of scholarship, insight, and readability. Focusing on the Cape’s Khoi people, the London Missionary Society, and its Kat River Settlement, Elbourne offers a narrative account of a tragic half-century encounter demonstrating “the incompatibility of settler colonialism and the hopes of a Christianized Khoekhoe creative process of modernization in which the Sunday School Movement empowered the Copts, reminding them of their ethnicity, church traditions, saints, and martyrs.

The first section of the book is a helpful historical overview of Christian and Muslim Egypt. The second, the most important, focuses on understanding the channel through which the recent reformation came, the Sunday School Movement. Her fascinating description of the “warring founding fathers” of this movement lays the groundwork for understanding why and how the revitalized Coptic Church emerged as a political spokesperson, socioeconomic entrepreneur, and cultural agent for the politics of their identity both as a people and as a church within a Muslim majority
Creating Christian Indians: Native Clergy in the Presbyterian Church.


Events of history—well documented or not—allow for varying interpretations. This is certainly true of the events described in Creating Christian Indians, by Bonnie Sue Lewis. The creative way that Nez Perce and Dakota pastors addressed ecclesial structure in this story of Presbyterian Native mission provides an intriguing glimpse into the challenges of the time. But even as I appreciate the success, in contrast to so many others, and even as I marvel at the resilience of these Native “men of God,” questions come to mind. At a point in the narrative when Indian-initiated revival is co-opted by non-Native missionaries (paternalism abundantly evident!), we are left, once again, to question the author’s claim.

In the end, Lewis leaves us to wonder at the present state of the Native church. How has historic mission left it to fare within the wider Presbyterian Church today? Overall, her presentation is helpful, the conclusion challengeable.

—Terry LeBlanc

Terry LeBlanc, a Mi’kmaq/Acadian who lives west of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, presently serves as National Ministries Director for My People International, a ministry to Native North Americans. He has served in mission for over twenty-five years.

World Christian History

John Coakley
Andrea Sterk, editors

Readings in World Christian History

Volume 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453

This remarkable anthology gives depth to courses in Christian history by including not only standard texts but documents from the non-Western world showing the sweep of cultures and peoples previously known only to specialists.

“A model for the new history of Christianity.”

—Bernard McGinn, University of Chicago

Dale T. Irvin
Scott W. Sunquist

History of the World Christian Movement

Volume 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453

In this book for the first time, the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Near East take their rightful place in the account of the unfolding of the Christian story from its beginnings to the 15th century.

“An excellent scholarly study which will be of great use to university students of Christianity.”

—W.H.C. Frend, in Theology (UK)


Norman Thomas has impressive credentials as a missions bibliographer. From 1965 to 1999 he served as book review editor of Missiology, and he chaired the Documentation, Archives, and Bibliography Working Group of the International Association for Mission Studies from 1988 to 1992. In that capacity he undertook the compilation of an international, annotated bibliography of contemporary books on missiology, a project on which he and an editorial board of thirty-six worked for eighteen years.

As published, this bibliography has several serious flaws. The editor refers to the bibliography as a “database” (pp. xvii, 873), and doubtless the printed book was produced from an electronic database. The editor also refers to the development of subject headings (p. xvi), but there is no subject access in the printed version beyond the twenty general categories into which it is organized and their subdivisions.

One might contrast this publication with the database developed by the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at the University of Edinburgh, “Cumulative Bibliography of the International Review of Mission” (http://webdb.ucs.ed.ac.uk/divinity/cmb/). This database includes books and journal articles published on mission, or of general interest to missiologists, including coverage from 1912 to the present. Like the International Mission Bibliography, it is a classified bibliography. Unlike the International Mission Bibliography, it has keyword and subject indexes, and it is updated on a regular basis.

The potential for this work is great, as it brings together what the editors consider to be the most important works on missiology for a forty-year period, with annotations. It is unfortunate, however, that the publishers issued it as a stand-alone monograph; they might have linked it to a searchable Web site or, at the least, included a searchable CD-ROM with the publication. Given the nature of the work, one can only hope the publishers will see fit to do so at some point.

—Paul F. Stuehrenberg

Paul F. Stuehrenberg is Librarian, Yale University Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut.

Artisans of Peace: Grassroots Peacemaking Among Christian Communities


This creative volume appeals to both heart and mind. Its well-structured format of narrative, background, and analysis provides activists with a theoretical base to evaluate and better focus their work, as well as giving researchers a cross section of contemporary case studies to further test and challenge theory. All readers will

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Books like Artisans of Peace have the potential to challenge the many thousands of "good" persons who refrain from doing the little that is immediately possible out of fear that the task of peace is too complex and gigantic, or who prefer to leave everything to political leadership. Stories of simple, committed persons engaged in their daily work who are being drawn into peace initiatives through unexpected circumstances, conversations, incidents, and openings draw out hidden resources and generate a new spirituality among others. Given this movement, the all-important question of "timing" (pp. 16-17) could have been developed more compellingly.

Teamwork—from the earliest planning stages, through team research on grassroots collaboration, to team editing—is another prominent characteristic of the book. Even though this point may not have been intentional, it conveys the importance and impact of small groups, often lost sight of, in peace work. In this connection, a chapter on the concept of Christ's "little flock" (Luke 12:32) and an elaboration of "doing theology," a persistent reminder of the churches in the South, would have been yet more encouraging to persons and groups engaged in peace work.

The chapter entitled "The Theology of Power and Spirituality of Empowerment" merits special mention. The analysis it offers on types and the theology of power is a must not just for peace workers but also for clergy, counselors, teachers, politicians—really, for all thinking humans! I recommend starting first with this chapter.

A subject index would have been of help to the student of peace studies. Ideas, themes, and concepts distributed throughout the book require connections.

This book will serve as a timely inspiration and useful resource for all persons engaged in or concerned for peace.

—Duleep de Chickera

Dictionary of Christian Denominations.


Peter Day, an Australian-born member of the Russian Orthodox Church who lives in England, has produced a helpful guide to a wide range of Christian churches and movements, both contemporary and historic. Concern for history means that many articles treat groups no longer in existence, like the Euchites of the fourth to seventh centuries (eastern Mediterranean regions), two different groups of Abrahamites (one from ninth-century Syria and the other from eighteenth-century Bohemia), the Methodist Episcopal Church (predecessor of the United Methodist Church), or the Methodist New Connexion (which folded into the Methodist Church of Great Britain). Treatment of Orthodox churches is especially strong (e.g., extensive articles on the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church of America, and the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America).

Coverage of non-Western churches is spotty (e.g., only two short paragraphs on the Zion Christian Church and all other Zionist churches in southern Africa) but also helpful for what is present (like the articles on United or Uniting churches in Brazil, the Falkland Islands, India, Japan, India, Japan, India, Japan).

The Right Reverend Duleep de Chickera is the Anglican Bishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka.


When the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged with the much larger Methodist Church in 1968, over a century after the Marshall Islands, Namibia, the Netherlands Antilles, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). The short article on Pentecostals is very brief and mostly extracted from Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson's World Christian Encyclopedia. Entries on some of the individual Pentecostal denominations are better, though many significant representatives seem to be missing.

Sometimes the proportionate use of space is odd, as with long articles on the Convulsionaries (an eighteenth-century Jansenist sect) and the Cooneyites, also known as the Black Stockings and the Nameless House Church (a twentieth-century fundamentalist movement), but no separate treatment of Anglican churches in Nigeria, Uganda, or Kenya. One page is given over to the Roman Catholic Church. The absence of bibliographies detracts from the volume’s usefulness, but it is still a welcome resource for what it does contain.

—Mark A. Noll


Allowing for “dissertations which may have escaped our attention” (p. 17), the total of eighty-seven is impressive. That seventeen were completed in African institutions is not insignificant, for few students have the means for postgraduate research in the field.

Curiously, the most revealing finding is the African researchers’ acceptance without challenge of Western historical-critical approaches to the Old Testament. Holter puzzles over this realization (pp. 97, 102, 109, 114). None shows serious use of the African context as resource for interpretation or indicates that the African world, with its awareness of a transcendence that is “larger” than what the Western Enlightenment outlook allows for, can illuminate the Old Testament, probably because most of the dissertations were produced at Western institutions.

A further finding relates to translations. Though several classic translations were produced on African soil—the Greek Septuagint, the Old Latin, the Coptic, and the Ethiopic—this heritage is not reflected “beyond a mere programmatic rhetoric” (p. 110).

Here too, Holter can be criticized. Into the future, he can foresee African interaction only with “the material and methodology of the global guild of Old Testament scholarship” (p. 114), namely, the Western guild! How such a future will invigorate African Old Testament scholarship is hard to see. Holter has no expectation that African scholarship will interact with African receptions of the Old Testament occurring predominantly through Scriptures in indigenous languages. African scholars will do well to be alert to this reality on the ground, lest they alienate themselves from the “living world” of the Old Testament in contemporary African experience.

—Kwame Bediako

Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian, is Executive Director, Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, Akropong-Akwapem, Ghana.


When the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged with the much larger Methodist Church in 1968, over a century
of significant EUB mission history was in danger of being lost. In this comprehensive overview Steven O’Malley, professor of Wesleyan Holiness history at Asbury Theological Seminary, helpfully preserves this history. The book is the fourth in a projected series of six volumes that document and update the mission history of United Methodism’s various antecedent groups.

The EUB Church existed as such for only twenty-two years, the period that is the main focus of this volume. But O’Malley summarizes also the mission work of the groups that formed the EUB in 1946—the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren, groups with German Pietist and (in the case of the UB) Mennonite roots tracing back to the late 1700s.

O’Malley stresses the “indigenous and cooperative approach” (p. 30) that marked EUB missions as part of its inheritance from Pietism, “traditional EUB optimism” (p. 46) tracing back to Pietist hopes for “a more glorious state of the church than ever has been” (p. 2). EUB missions did in fact leave a remarkable heritage of indigenous and ecumenical endeavors (particularly in China, Japan, the Dominican Republic, and the Philippines), despite some failures. At the time of merger in 1968, EUB mission work was generally more ecumenical than were Methodist missions; the EUB had helped form a number of united churches—in the process losing its own identity. O’Malley shows how EUB mission was motivated by a theological vision of the kingdom of God, yet he is candid in acknowledging that the church did not always live up to its vision.

O’Malley also covers the significant EUB work in Germany and its extensive home mission work in the United States, such as the Red Bird Mission in Kentucky.

Howard A. Snyder is Professor of the History and Theology of Mission, E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky. He and his family served as Free Methodist missionaries in São Paulo, Brazil, from 1968 to 1973.

Protestantism and Politics in Korea.


In Protestantism and Politics in Korea, Chung-shin Park, professor of Christian studies at Soongsil University in Seoul, explores the sociopolitical issues surrounding the inception, initial growth, and development of Protestant Christianity from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century. Park makes the point that before 1919, Protestantism was a radical force because its social criticism appealed to the dispossessed elite and oppressed classes. Church leadership after 1919 was conservative, which he attributes to the institutionalization of the church, when the leadership sought to preserve Protestantism’s newly achieved sense of respectability. During the 1950s, Park claims, Protestantism under Syngman Rhee achieved sociopolitical dominance because the most influential members of the political leadership were Protestant, a situation that changed after 1961 under Park Chung Hee and his successors, when the bonds of religious affiliation were dissolved.

Although there is much food for thought here, the book is not free from criticism. Park unwittingly takes Korean Presbyterianism to mean Korean Presbyterianism and thereby ignores the

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importance of the denominational factor. In his discussion of the 1970s and 1980s, Park stresses the role of the church leadership over the laity, yet in my experience the laity were more politically and socially engaged than the formal Protestant leadership. In revising his 1987 dissertation, Park should have taken the story down to the present. In the 1990s two leading former dissidents assumed the presidency. Was the Protestant relationship to the political culture the same as under Syngman Rhee? If not, why not?

Despite these criticisms, Park’s book makes an important contribution to the study of the sociopolitical history of Korean Protestantism and will appeal to scholars of East Asian political history as well as to missiologists.

—James Huntley Grayson

James Huntley Grayson, Professor of Modern Korean Studies in the School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield, England, was a United Methodist educational missionary in Korea from 1971 to 1987.

The Meaning of Life in the World Religions.


Love, Sex, and Gender in the World Religions.


Ethics in the World Religions.


These books are the first three volumes in the Library of Global Ethics and Religion. They each consist of papers presented at conferences held at Chapman University in Orange, California, in 1997, 1998, and 2000. Huntington, Francis, and Griset Lectureship funds were used to sponsor all three conferences; the last was also sponsored by Loyola Marymount College of Liberal Arts and its Program in Asian and Pacific Studies.

The spirit of these conferences arises from an evident desire to find ethical universals among the world’s religions, while at the same time showing critical respect for differences of expression of those same universals in the discrete
religious traditions. They offer a “pluralistic and global perspective on questions of religion and ethics” (Meaning of Life, p. xv). The first volume is dedicated to John Hick and Huston Smith, the second to Julius Lipner and Arvind Sharma, and the third to Keith Ward and Chris Chapple. The editors are professors in the religious studies department of Chapman University.

The volumes follow a consistent pattern. After two or three introductory articles setting the context of the issue (meaning, gender, and ethics) and its relationship to religion, scholars of Western religion give a Jewish, Christian, and Muslim view of a subject, followed by scholars of Asian religion giving a Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Chinese view. Articles are then presented that give a cross-religious view and global views. The content of the articles is excellent.

Put it another way: although the “missionary” (in the traditional sense of advocating a religious position of a tradition to nonadherents in the hopes of their becoming adherents) point of view has been scrupulously left out of this work of scholarship, a “new mission” emerges. This new mission not only argues its “tradition” with skill and power, but it also questions all other missions as illegitimate; that is, traditional missionaries are not wrong just in terms of the content of what they say, but in their very attempt to advocate the rightness of a single religious tradition.

Readers of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research will resonate with the missionary intent of these volumes and will probably agree with much of the global ethical agenda presented. They will find curious, however, the ignoring of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim mission attempts to address the same issues from their very different perspectives, and the implicit rejection of those attempts as somehow illegitimate. Perhaps a better, more fruitful approach would be to acknowledge the universality of “mission” in all the religions, and then use the considerable scholarly skills evident in these volumes to help the individual religions differentiate good mission from bad mission, both of which are present in abundance in the history of world religion. And perhaps even include the religious in those scholarly endeavors?

—Terry C. Muck

Terry C. Muck is Professor of Missions and World Religions at the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

Correction (April 2004):

See www.christian-research.org.uk.

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Towards an Intercultural Theology: Essays in Honour of Jan A. B. Jongeneel.


In 2003 the outstanding Dutch theologian and missiologist Jan A. B. Jongeneel retired from his professorial chair at the University of Utrecht. Marking that occasion was the publication of Towards an Intercultural Theology, a collection of essays dealing with a wide range of topics within the fields of missiology and intercultural theology. This diversity will make the book a unique resource and reference work for everyone who is concerned with world Christian mission.

A central question considered in the volume is whether missiology can be replaced by intercultural theology. This issue is raised explicitly by Frans Wisjen, a missiologist from Nijmegen, in his essay “New Wine in Old Wineskins?” Intercultural Theology Instead of Missiology.” His conclusion is that there is still need for both disciplines, between which one ought to discern. He observes the following: “In the western world there are faculties of theology, but their professors consider themselves to be scientists of religion; in the southern hemisphere there are departments of religious studies, but their professors consider themselves to be theologians” (p. 45). The motivation for keeping missiology as a discipline in its own right, as Wisjen views it, “is the perspective of the dialectical relation between what missionary practice is and what it should be” (p. 47).

On intercultural theology the book contains several contributions, among which we find a brief but clarifying reflection on the term itself in an essay by Walter Hollenweger. Here he points out, what should be rather obvious, that “intercultural theology starts from the insight that all theologies—including the biblical ones—are contextually conditioned” (p. 90).

Given that Jongeneel has been an active advocate of missiology as a distinct subdiscipline within theology, the main theme for this Festschrift will surprise no one. Besides the essays on the theme, the book contains both a substantial biography of Jan Jongeneel, written by Tom van den End, and a selective bibliography of his works, compiled by Martha Frederiks.

—Hans Rognstad

Hans Rognstad is a parish pastor and dean in the Lutheran Church of Norway. He has been chairman of the board of the Nordic Christian Mission to Buddhists, now Areopagos, in which he continues as an active member.
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