


The book has nine chapters, each with tables and figures, as well as “Food for Thought” and “Burning Questions for Today,” which highlight, recapitulate, and illustrate the text. The first five chapters are general in nature; the last four focus on evangelicals. This arrangement tends to overemphasize the evangelical movement and undervalue the ecumenical movement. The book ignores Hendrik Kraemer, W.A. Visser’t Hooft, and Lesslie Newbigin, missionary statesmen of the World Council of Churches.

The four chapters on evangelicals are the focus of attention. They deal respectively with the evangelical explosion, the “unevangelized,” the future of Christian missions, and the possibility of an evangelized world. Chapter 7, on the “unevangelized,” is the longest and most challenging chapter. Johnstone prefers the term “unevangelized” over “unreached.” However, this term is problematic as well. First, people outside the realm of the church are labeled negatively: un-. Second, how strict is this term? Are only non-Christians “unevangelized”? What about liberal and heretic Christians?

The “future of the global church” needs to be analyzed thoroughly and projected as prophetically as possible. The author’s optimism about Christianity’s future is appealing—but is it also convincing? I also appreciate Johnstone’s comments on Barrett’s encyclopedia. It is now time to carefully study the conceptual, methodological, and terminological agreements and disagreements between the two scholars and to evaluate carefully their shared optimism.

Johnstone has written an excellent work that will be studied all over the world. I have no doubt that many institutions will use it as a textbook. I recommend that a second edition include an index of geographic names; it is now impossible to quickly find data regarding, for example, Namibia, Nepal, or Nicaragua.

—Jan A. B. Jongeneel

Jan A. B. Jongeneel, a contributing editor, is Honorary Professor Emeritus of Missionology at Utrecht University and author of Jesus Christ in World History (Peter Lang, 2009; reprinted in India, 2010).

Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou.


Many have heard Wenzhou City on China’s southeastern coastline described as “China’s Jerusalem,” a reference to it as a flourishing center of Protestant Christianity. Far removed from the country’s centers of power by the mountainous terrain of rugged Zhejiang Province, the city and its surrounding region have always been both out of step with and one step ahead of the rest of the
country. Its isolation and the historically freewheeling nature of the population have contributed to rapid economic growth, as well rapid growth of the Protestant church. By some estimates, the Christians in Wenzhou may constitute as much as 15 to 30 percent of the city’s population of 10 million. There may also be as many as 1,800 churches and meeting points, most of them not registered with the government and operating openly outside the official church structures.

In Constructing China’s Jerusalem, Nanlai Cao, who teaches at the University of Hong Kong, provides the first detailed account of the Protestant church in Wenzhou, presenting an ethnographic study of the daily practices of local church members. According to Cao, Christian revival has taken place there because of “a modernizing state, lax local governance, an emerging capitalist consumer economy, and greater spatial mobility among individuals” (p. 11). His study focuses on the dynamic role business and the so-called Boss Christians (laoban jidutu, successful businessmen and church leaders) have played in shaping Christian identity in Wenzhou. His treatment also explores gender roles and the participation of rural migrants in the life of the urban church.

Though at times the author seems to reduce the faith of his subjects to an aspect of their approach to business and a means for getting rich and gaining prestige, this book opens a unique window into daily church life that not only reveals a detailed portrait but also allows readers to hear the voices and stories of many Christians in Wenzhou. Because of its unique location, culture, and circumstances, Wenzhou certainly stands out on China’s Protestant landscape. In fact, though, much of what Cao describes as taking place in “China’s Jerusalem” is also happening in urban churches all around the country.

—Kurt Selles

Kurt Selles teaches at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama.

A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians.


In taking a biographical case-study approach to the Bible and the Victorians, Timothy Larsen shows how deeply embedded the “One Book” was in the culture and world of nineteenth-century England. At one end of the spectrum, Charles Bradlaugh, the noted atheist, and Annie Besant, later involved in
Theosophy, both engaged with the Bible—the first to disprove it, and the second to articulate her atheism. Thomas Huxley, the original agnostic, frequently used language and imagery from the Bible in his correspondence. While opposing bibilolatry, he saw the Bible as great literature that should be used in schools.

At the other end of the spectrum, Larsen uses Catherine Booth and William Cooke to illustrate the centrality of the Bible for Methodists and Holiness Christians, Elizabeth Fry for Quakers, Josephine Butler for Evangelicals, and Charles Spurgeon for “Orthodox Old Dissent.” There are no surprises here, although in selecting six women overall (Mary Carpenter for Unitarians and Florence Nightingale for Liberal Anglicans are the other two) and six men, Larsen has clearly shown that Bible reading and study was not just a male profession. For Fry, the prison reformer, it is said, as it could be said of many Victorians, “the Bible soaked into her being” (p. 171)—and, one could add, into their life and work.

Edward Pusey represents the Anglo-Catholic Victorians, for whom the church fathers provided the lens for reading the Bible. For Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman the Catholic Church and its tradition gave the context in which the Bible should be read and understood.

Each chapter takes one denomination and uses one of the individuals listed above to illustrate how the Bible impacted them within the context of their lives. Larsen richly blends biographical background with a critique of both their personal and published writings about the Bible. It is a truism that, in order to understand the Victorians, we need to understand how they read and applied the Bible. This is not always readily appreciated by people today for whom the Bible no longer has a place in their lives. Larsen’s book provides a well-researched study of the range of Victorian approaches to the Bible, enabling readers to grasp its centrality in private devotions, family worship, preaching, and public life.

—Allan K. Davidson

Allan K. Davidson is Honorary Research Fellow at St. John’s College, Auckland, and the University of Auckland, New Zealand, where he taught church history for many years before retiring in 2009.

### Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies.


Toward the end of the book, Scott Moreau offers a revealing semantic analysis of the presentations at the forum. His conclusions accurately reflect how cultural differences between Koreans and North Americans can influence opinions on the details of what constitutes good accountability on the mission field.

Not surprisingly, some contributors discussed common accountability issues such as patterns of financial and sexual misbehavior, but other issues, less commonly considered, also emerged. For example, while discussing strategic accountability, Min Young Jung contrasted result-based and process-based management styles in regard to the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of missionary strategies and achievements on the field. Hyun Mo Lee also dealt with strategic accountability as he explained the differing perspectives of missionaries from high- and low-context cultures on the importance of mission policies, subjective judgments, and maintenance of relationships. With the huge influx of non-Western missionaries in various mission agencies, Lee’s admonition to those agencies is cogent: “Rules that are comprehensible to all parties must be put in place, and strategies that are acceptable to both Western and non-Western missionaries must be developed” (p. 296).

Various contributors did an excellent job of presenting the supracultural truths of the Bible that are relevant to accountability in missions. The problem comes, however, in applying the biblical truths to the details of mission work. Bahn Seok Lee commented, “I grant that the concept of accountability is universal. We cannot forget, however, that the practice of accountability is inevitably shaped by one’s cultural worldview” (pp. 195–96). Accountability in Missions should be required reading for anyone seeking to understand Korean and Western perspectives on accountability.

—Mike Morris

Mike Morris is Assistant Professor of Missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

### Christianity and Public Culture in Africa.


This book builds on a tradition of scholarship on religion in Africa that has focused on the political role of Christianity in postcolonial African societies. However, the volume deliberately broadens the earlier focus on politics (as represented, for example, by Paul Gifford, Gerrie ter Haar, and Stephen Ellis) to include an interest in public culture. As Englund explains this shift, “African Christians have constituted, and not merely addressed, domains and categories for moral and political practice and reflection” (p. 3). Englund, who is a reader in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, has brought together a number of renowned scholars of African Christianity such as Birgit Meyer and Barbara Cooper, as well as some upcoming voices. Their backgrounds are in anthropology, sociology, history, literary studies, and religious studies. Theological perspectives are missing; this book seeks to shift the focus from beliefs and doctrines to the acts and discourses through which Christian groups and churches present themselves publicly and shape political, ethnic, and gender identities.

Although the volume includes chapters on the Catholic Church in Zambia and
on the different Christian attitudes to Luo widow inheritance in Kenya, it largely follows the popular academic trend to focus on Pentecostalism. Indeed, several chapters make an important contribution to the understanding of Pentecostal Christianity in Africa. It is crucial, however, to examine how other vibrant forms of Christianity assume public significance, perhaps in ways different from those of Pentecostalism but also in response to Pentecostalism. Notwithstanding this criticism, the book clearly is a valuable resource for everyone with a scholarly interest in Christianity in contemporary Africa.

—Adriaan van Klinken

Adriaan van Klinken, from the Netherlands, is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Heirs and Joint Heirs: Mission to Church Among the Mennonite Brethren of Andhra Pradesh.


Paul Wiebe narrates the story of the Mennonite Brethren in South India, describing the transformation of a Protestant mission endeavor into a local Indian church in Andhra Pradesh. The story goes beyond an ordinary academic study of Christian missions, because it is intertwined with the author’s family history. Wiebe’s grandparents were among the first Mennonite Brethren missionaries who went to India from the United States, around 1900. Wiebe himself grew up and was educated in India, received a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Kansas, and taught at several institutions of higher education in southern India.

The book combines the author’s broad historical and sociological knowledge with the experiences of his own family within the mission community. Part 1 provides an overall description of the social and religious context the Mennonite missionaries encountered upon their arrival in India and traces the history of their mission to the subcontinent. Part 2 explores the social structure of the local congregations. It further discusses controversial issues of leadership and social development brought about by the mission. Reflections on the transition from mission to church lead to part 3, which deals with the formation of an Indian church after the withdrawal of foreign long-term missionaries in the 1970s.

Wiebe’s vast knowledge and experience are evident, and his effort to draw a comprehensive picture of India, the Mennonite Brethren, and Christian mission is very welcome in the highly fragmented field of mission studies. The many diversions from the central theme, however, create the impression of lacking a coherent narrative. It is not clear whether the book aims at a general public outside India or the Mennonite Brethren Church in India. A positive feature of the volume is the detailed maps that illustrate local case studies. Overall, Wiebe offers a rich, insider account of the Mennonite Brethren mission and church in India. It will be particularly interesting for the Mennonite community and for scholars who engage with Protestant missions and churches in Andhra Pradesh.

—Matthias Frenz

Matthias Frenz is an independent researcher in the field of religious studies. He works as a program director at the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes, Bonn, Germany.
This is an outstanding volume containing ten contributions, substantial editorial introduction, bibliography, and index. It is organized in two parts: part 1 examines changes in American missions, and part 2 looks particularly at major results of these changes in missionary encounters in the Middle East. The chapters, which come from discussions over two years in the Middle East Studies Association in Washington, D.C., and Boston, deal with areas that were part of the former Ottoman Empire.

Until relatively recently, American interests in the world were not seen to be akin in any real sense to those of Europe. The recent American engagements in the Middle East seem to be contributing to a revision of this view, but this volume shows that, unlike the image of missionaries and mission movements led by Europeans, the American missionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have generally not been considered imperialistic. This is because the American missionaries, sans the trappings of empire, represented the most benign and culturally and religiously enlightened face of America.

Despite emerging from a single nation and being rooted in the revivals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American missions were clearly neither monocultural nor monod denominational. What afforded them a greater degree of flexibility and ability to be creative was their sense of interior spirituality as opposed to rigid creedal boundaries, greater awareness of the varied cultural contexts of mission, and the lack of excessive pressure to conform to past traditions.

The examples of change in part 2 paint a complex picture of American missions, which were open to revising their strategy and approach to suit local needs. The broader picture that emerges reveals that not only were American missions and missionaries changed through their interaction with the contexts (such as is seen in the increasing “secularization” and “feminization” of mission), but these missions also met local needs in ways that would not have been possible if they had remained inflexible.

Two brief examples should suffice. First, Carolyn Goffman’s chapter “From Religious to American Proselytism” shows that Mary Mills Patrick and her American board experienced a change in their aim: from “mass conversion” to “a more idiosyncratic faith in post-imperial nation building” (pp. 84–121). Second, Beth Baron’s chapter “Comparing Missions: Pentecostal and Presbyterian Orphanages on the Nile” shows that two different American missions (Presbyterian and Assemblies of God) working in the same region conceived their mission rather differently (pp. 260–84)—one aiming to equip orphaned girls to become “good wives,” and the other promoting equal opportunity education for girls at the highest levels.

I highly recommend this fine collection to mission historians and students of Christian history.

—David Emmanuel Singh
City of Extremes: The Spatial Politics of Johannesburg.


City of Extremes paints a dramatic and detailed picture of Johannesburg’s built environment, before and after apartheid. The political, economic, and social tensions that have accompanied the city’s ever-changing urban landscape are on display in this well-researched and penetrating work. Murray, professor of urban planning at the University of Michigan’s Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, helps his readers to wrestle with the ephemeral and the real as he traces...
the historical, architectural, and spatial development of South Africa’s largest city.

Murray’s examination of the influence of real estate capitalism on modern city-building is particularly incisive, especially as it relates to how the private sector has impacted “spatial outcomes similar to those that prevailed under apartheid” (p. 181). Murray shows ways the city has perpetuated varying degrees of social exclusion, where downtown office buildings, designed to be consistent with Western themes, exert symbolic power, while marginalized urban populations struggle for “the right to a sustainable livelihood, decent shelter, and available resources” (p. 170).

Murray sees Johannesburg as a splintered, placeless, and fragmented city, “a makeshift patchwork of different places” (p. 29), a city without an archetypical city center, and a city that exemplifies “first world glamour and excess and third world impoverishment and degradation” (p. 3). In a chapter that describes Johannesburg’s suburban sprawl, where real estate developers pander to fears about the “dangerous city” (p. 282), Murray summarizes the sentiments of a post-apartheid middle class who have retreated to “fortified enclaves ... deliberately designed to protect their residents from the uncertainties of daily existence: falling property values, vandalism and petty theft, random violence, and even chance encounters or unplanned conversations with persons unlike oneself” (p. 287).

Murray’s poignant analysis unpacks Johannesburg’s architectural and spatial complexities, the city’s Eurocentric past, modern public-private partnerships, and divergent ideas about place-making. City of Extremes is a significant and helpful resource for the study of cities in an era of globalization and urbanization.

—Travis Vaughn

Travis Vaughn serves as Cultural Renewal Director for Perimeter Church, near Atlanta, Georgia.

Apostolic Religious Life in America Today: A Response to the Crisis.


The essays in this volume address the question, “Why have apostolic [i.e., outward-oriented to mission] Catholic religious communities [i.e., men and women taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience] lost members and largely failed to recruit new members since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965?” They do so from a horizon that judges that a fundamental mistake was made by “progressives,” who saw the council as calling for reforms that were in discontinuity with tradition and ended with a “process of transforming religious life to resemble so closely the life of the contemporary world that distinctive religious identity could be harmed rather than renewed or updated” (p. 7).

This hermeneutic of the council has been criticized in recent years as “anticonciliarist” by Pope Benedict XVI, who favors “renewal in continuity” as the key to understanding the council. This review is not the place to go into the major controversy that has erupted in the last few years over what the council stands for in relation to both the past and the future. It is important, rather, to take note of the seriousness with which this book’s authors aim at what they call the “secularization,” “domination by consumerism,” and “bourgeois culture” that they allege many communities have taken. Given the centrality of orders of men and women to Catholic efforts in mission since the beginnings of early modern missions in the fifteenth century, the issues at stake are enormous.

Curiously, although Gribble and most of the authors in the volume belong to orders that have operated missions in the traditional sense for the entire period from 1454 to the present, none of the authors asks what the ramifications of their views are for mission outside the United States. Nevertheless, their arguments are important for anyone trying to understand what is occurring; the orders they criticize are recruiting substantial numbers of men and women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and many of these religious are being inserted into parish ministry and innovative “mission” assignments in Europe and North America, as well as being assigned to missions outside their native lands and cultures in the Global South.

In this reviewer’s judgment, the authors are quite accurate in pointing out deficiencies that fostered rapid secularization during the period of writing and gaining approval for updated...
constitutions for the orders, from 1965 into the late 1980s. They do not take sufficient note, however, of groups that Sandra Schneiders and others identify as prophetic movements toward more radical discipleship, from which the Catholic Church as a whole should take its bearings in order to overcome sexism and structural rigidity. The question of radical discipleship in today’s altered mission is not one that can be solved merely by being faithful to traditions and the hierarchy’s desire for loyalty.

—William R. Burrows

William R. Burrows, a contributing editor and managing editor emeritus of Orbis Books, is research professor of missiology at New York Seminary.

Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine.


The relationship between colonial aspirations of so-called Christian nations and their impact on local Christian communities or Christian missionary endeavors has long been a subject of serious discussion. In Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine, Laura Robson sheds light on this important relationship by focusing on Mandate Palestine, which existed from 1923 to 1948. One of the major objectives of the author is to trace the interaction of the local Christian communities with British authorities. The British mandate of Palestine failed to understand the social, religious, and political dynamics of the Palestinian Christian communities and thereby played a major role in the marginalization of these communities. This result, however, has helped these communities to “re-imagine their religious communities as modern political entities” (p. 11), thus giving them “a viable political identity” (p. 100). Robson explores the roots of violent sectarianism in Mandate Palestine, convincingly arguing that the British mandate itself was a major factor in promoting this sectarianism.

The book combines well-researched historical data with sociopolitical analysis. The first two chapters introduce the reader to the Palestinian Christians in the late Ottoman era up to the British mandate, showing the role of British imperial policy in creating communal politics. Chapters 3 and 5 provide a good analysis of the Arab Orthodox movement and the Arab Episcopalian, and their roles in Palestinian affairs, including the issue of Zionism. Chapter 4 focuses on how Arab Christians “appropriated the colonial idea of sectarian representation” to serve “their own nationalist and anti-Zionist agendas” (p. 103). The book concludes with an up-to-date bibliography and a helpful index. Robson makes good use of Arab sources, including memoirs, published diaries, books, and articles.

This is a must-read book for all who wish to understand the religious, social, and political dynamics that pervade daily life in the Middle East. As an Arab Christian reviewer, I sincerely hope that the West will learn from history and not deliberately neglect the Christian communities of this region (p. 72).

—Riad A. Kassis

Riad A. Kassis is a consultant in theological education and a visiting professor at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut, Lebanon.

The Church as Salt and Light: Path to an African Ecclesiology of Abundant Life.


This collection, presented at a 2007 meeting in Abidjan, commemorates the 1956 publication by African and Caribbean Catholic priests of Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent (Black priests question themselves), which inaugurated self-conscious African theology. The authors—African Catholics born after independence, five priests and one nun—probe the church’s role in pursuing the abundant life motivating African traditional religions and Christianity.

The essays cover diverse topics. Critical of images of Christ in most African theology, Stan Chu Ilo draws upon the gospels to develop a theology suited for Africa, examining gospel episodes with African cultural hermeneutics to argue that Christ brings God to us and thereby offers abundant life. Next, to address Africa’s suffering, Emeka Xris Obiezu utilizes the concept of
the church as the family of God (a metaphor prioritized after the first African Synod in 1994) to unfold a Christian understanding of sustainable development. Joseph Ogbonnaya then discusses the daily life of African Christians, identifying how their communities operate as salt and light, after which Alex Ojacor analyzes the African situation, identifying signs of hope in abiding cultural values, despite dire circumstances.

In an innovative piece, Ebere Amakwe considers the impact of information technology (IT) in Africa, urging that IT be made available to women and girls. In the final chapter, Bekeh Ukelina Utietang suggests that evangelization in Africa ought to be mindful of Africa’s cultures and Christ’s call to love. Ilo’s conclusion considers challenges facing the church today involving accountability, appropriate identity and autonomy, and religious freedom in practices of interreligious dialogue.

These essays present solid empirical evidence, engage ecclesial documents responsibly, and set future theological agendas. At times, though, I felt that exhortation substituted for sustained analysis. In addition, a regrettable number of typographic errors appeared. Nonetheless, this collection valuably reveals young African Catholic theologians reflecting on the challenges facing their church.

—Paul Kollman

Paul Kollman teaches in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana. He is currently studying the history of Catholic evangelization in East Africa.


Recall the last time a trip to the movies took you into traffic central, that room full of video screens where city officials monitor traffic flow. Like most of those cameras, each page in Mark Gornik’s Word Made Global overlooks an intersection of lives, moving in multiple directions to transact the business of families, cities, and, through immigrant communities, nations. The difficulty in traffic central is knowing on which screens to fix your eyes. Gornik directs his readers to focus primarily on three intersections in bustling, global New York City, each cruciform, and each in the shape of a church—in fact, “three churches in two worlds” (p. 87).

After pointing out major arteries of African Christianity in New York—Catholic, missionary Protestant, Pentecostal, and African Independent (and rightly questioning this typology)—Gornik provides a thicker description of the three congregations: Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Harlem, Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx, and Redeemed Christian Church of God International in Brooklyn. The genius and great service of Word Made Global is Gornik’s exchange of camera lenses between the wide-angled analyses of globalizing theology (with debts to Bediako, Katongole, and Walls) and urban studies (indebted to Saskia Sassen and others) and painstaking, close-up, ethnographic fieldwork in New York City. As part of his doctoral research, supervised by Andrew Walls at the University of Edinburgh, Gornik attended over 250 church gatherings in worship, Bible study, prayer, and healing services, and he conducted over 100 interviews between 2003 and 2008. Especially valuable are his profiles of the formation and work of three pastors: Rev. Yaw Asiedu, Mother Marie Cooper, and Dr. Nimi Wariboko.

While accounting for their unique personalities, traditions, and emphases, Gornik describes these “pastoral lives [as] wisdom, developed through practice over time, which serves the ends of human flourishing” (p. 54). Through their preaching, prayer, spiritual direction and healing, cultural intelligence, and institutional leadership, these pastors provide “explanations, predictions and controls” (p. 71) that relate the spiritual and material worlds. Their liturgies orient a way of being a distinctly Christian and African people in the interpenetrating worlds of Scripture, Africa, and New York City, a social embodiment that “diffuses faith” throughout the intersecting traffic of life’s dimensions. Readers in traffic central should not only watch the three intersections Gornik points to but should also pay attention to the intersection that is Mark Gornik, a North American missiological pastoral theologian, who is coming to grips with the changing way of being church in the West.

—Gregory R. Perry

Gregory R. Perry is Director of the City Ministry Initiative, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

Contextual Theology for the Twenty-first Century.


Arising out of a conference on contextual theology held in Sydney, Australia, this book discuss general issues, such as the nature and place of contextual theology and the church’s mission, as well as particular topics, such as theological education, theology influenced by preliterate culture, problems faced by aboriginal peoples in Australia and Oceania, and Latin American liberation theology.

A “core theological concern” is “the absolute conviction that theory and practice must walk hand in hand and that this is the only way to expose and experience theology at its best” (p. ix). Theology must not only speak to each context in which Christians find themselves but must actually grow out of these contexts. All theology is held to be context-determined and thus relative.

Specifcally, most of the authors believe that outrages perpetrated on the rest of the world (mostly) by white men, and the suffering that has resulted, must form the starting point and focus of theology.

Except for one chapter on Christology by James Haire, this book is more about context than theology. God is generally immanent; theology is confined to social ethics, especially prophetic critique and political activism; alleviation of suffering in this world is the goal of mission.

Two chapters on contextual theology by Bevans and the one by Haire were the most helpful to this reader. The editors conclude with a timely call for “construction of a solid, orthodox, and
yet innovative Christology—and other traditional theological themes” (p. 127).

Stephen Bevans is professor of mission and culture at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago; Katalina Tahaafe-Williams teaches at United Theological College, Paramatta, Australia.

—G. Wright Doyle

G. Wright Doyle is Director of Global China Center, Charlottesville, Virginia, and English editor of the Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity.


This work maintains that one cannot comprehend how a secular political system in India emerged without understanding what Indian Christians contributed to this process. By examining implementation of laws pertaining to religious education, to religious endowments, and to inheritance of family property, Nandini Chatterjee argues that what began under the Company’s Raj and continued under the British Crown generated the formation of official attitudes and procedures and that these have continued to define a special kind of secularism in our own day. Drawing her data from government records, political pamphlets, newspapers, and missionary archives, as well as collections of private papers, she explains how India’s Christians not only shaped their own identity but also evolved into a self-consciously All-India “minority” within an emerging nation. She contends that India’s Christians “played a disproportionately significant role in shaping Indian secularism” (p. 2)—and, indeed, in the very shaping of modernity itself. As India’s peoples contended with conditions of imperial rule, a uniquely Indian secularism emerged.

This secularism, unlike secularism in the West, did not banish religion from public life. Rather, it stressed acceptance, support, and toleration of various religious traditions as essential for the very survival of any all-embracing political system. Indeed, India’s obsessive preoccupation with its own special kind of secularism is reflected in a ceaseless flow of books and articles. Tolerance essential for holding together such extremely diverse, hierarchical, pluralistic, and segmented structures has always evoked a logic of impartiality and neutrality in matters of religion. The more vast the sway of a regime, the more important was this peculiar logic. This was a logic that emperors from Ashoka to Akbar understood. This is a “secularism” India still requires. Indian Christian communities have long suffered civic disabilities in villages, but they have also long contributed to a vitally important secularity in national consciousness.

—Robert Eric Frykenberg

Robert Eric Frykenberg is Professor Emeritus of History and South Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

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