

Encyclopedia of Missions and Missionaries

Jonathan J. Bonk, ed. *Encyclopedia of Missions and Missionaries*. New York: Routledge, 2007. 473 pp. \$190.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780415969482.

Its title notwithstanding, this encyclopedia is neither about missions nor missionaries—at least, *particular* missions and missionaries. Thus, it is *not* a reference work to consult for a nicely written sketch of the lives and accomplishments of pioneering missionary leaders, e.g. James Hudson Taylor or David Brainerd. Nor is it the place to find a well-rounded summary and assessment of the impact of important missionary movements and organizations such as the International Missionary Council or the Lausanne Covenant. Other recently published sources (notably Gerald Anderson, ed. *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, and A. Scott Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*) have covered this historically based approach admirably. Rather, from the introduction one learns that this encyclopedia, the most recent in the Routledge Encyclopedias of Religion and Society series, instead seeks to create its niche by exploring the “missionary enterprise” as a phenomenon that has intersected with the “major social, economic, and political movements” of the modern era. As such this encyclopedia is intended as a resource that “non-theological reference librarians and their clientele” (xi) can turn to to better understand the influence that the missionary movement has had on our global society.

Employing an alphabetic arrangement, the introduction explains the system of “tiered” entries, from the most general—and thereby lengthiest (5-6 page)—survey essays, e.g. “Africa, History, Protestant Churches;” through second-tier articles dealing with academic disciplines or schools of thought which have an interest in Christian mission, “Economics,” “Postmodernism,” “Sociology;” to third- and fourth-tier treatments of more specialized or subordinate areas of missiology such as “Archives,” “Libraries,” “Medicine,” “Short-term Missions.” To write these entries, general editor, Jonathan Bonk, who serves as executive director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, CT and also edits the *International Journal of Missionary Research*, has assembled, primarily from academic institutions, a well-qualified group of contributors of diverse theological and professional perspectives. All entries contain a list of sources for further reading, most having been published within the last twenty years. For added effect, some articles are supplemented by sidebars that augment the text through captioned black and white photographs or as excerpts from primary source documents. The photographs, it must be said, are a disappointment. They are usually less than half a page in size and lack acuity. Their primary purpose appears to be adding a small bit of visual relief to the columns of text. A very useful index concludes the work, sufficiently detailed to make access to sub-topics and themes as well as persons and organizations possible.

Overall, this reference work is a fine achievement and accomplishes what it has set out to do by assembling a wealth of engaging articles that, taken together, form a mosaic of the missionary impulse and how it has shaped and been shaped by the growth and development of modern political, social, economic, cultural, etc. movements and institutions. It is the synoptic and synthetic quality of the articles, their ability to see and analyze the interplay between missiological concerns and societal forces, which give rise to new insights and form contextual understanding surrounding this uniquely Christian phenomenon.

Several examples may illustrate. In his thoughtful article on “History,” Stanley Skreslet discusses the problem of writing mission history from inside the discipline of missiology. While historians of Christian mission are not exempt from the same rigorous techniques required of historians in other disciplines—a respect for the rules of evidence and the ability, so far as possible, to disentangle facts from perceptions—at the same time the spiritual convictions of those being studied and to some degree of the historian also must be accounted for and not simply “bracket[ed] out” (179). History from within the perspective of missiology, no less the wider fields of theology and biblical studies, requires a “critical empathy” (180). History will be critical by subscribing to modern methods of analysis and interpretation, but will be empathetic to views that ascribe to events causation that extends beyond human agency.

Jessie Lutz’s article on “Education—Religious, Theological” explores the dynamics of missionary efforts in starting schools, their intent in doing so and, in some cases, outcomes that differed from their intentions. Catholic missionaries/educators sought a setting wherein children could be taught Christian doctrines. Protestant missionaries established schools set apart from heathen influence where students could learn to read the Bible for themselves. Instruction eventually expanded to include a Western curriculum which was assumed to be superior, “the source of Western political and military power, industrial expansion, and cultural achievements” (134). A Western education, in a colonial context, soon began to be seen as a door to greater economic and social opportunity which, in turn, led many to seek out Christian schools, not for the purpose of becoming Christian, but to learn English and improve their standing. Attesting to the reach of Christian schools, Lutz points out that by mid-twentieth century, more than one-third of India’s 279,309 educational institutions were administered by Christian churches.

Readers of this journal will want to note in particular the number of entries that survey the various sources and avenues available for conducting missions and missionary research. Rosemary Seton has written a helpful article on the important role played by archival collections. Mission work by its nature, taking place in remote locations far from the missionary’s homeland, extended family, sending churches and, in many cases, away from ready access to publishing sources, led to the production of an enormous amount of unpublished material that now has assumed a crucial role for writing its history and, furthermore, represents a considerable challenge to preserve. Ms. Seton concludes by listing a number of websites that profile and provide selected content from significant archival collections here and overseas. In an entry on “Journals,” Terry Barringer discusses the use missionary organizations made of periodicals to keep supporters informed, to mobilize financial and prayer backing, and to attract recruits. Later came along journal publications devoted to the scholarly study of missions. Barringer also includes an interesting account of how missionary publishers were not hesitant about using new technology. *China’s Millions*, a publication of the China Inland Mission whose first editor was J. Hudson Taylor, from the beginning incorporated high quality illustrations and maps, thereby imitating popular, secular magazines. Many other missionary magazines and journals quickly adopted this practice. Paul Stuehrenberg has contributed an article surveying international libraries (“Libraries”) that hold rich collections for studying missions and world Christianity. Intended for the non-specialist, this article helpfully lists the categories of published and unpublished literature one might expect to find within these libraries. Philippe Denis has a very enlightening essay on the nature and purpose of “Oral History” and its place alongside documents based history. Gerald H. Anderson surveys academic “Professional Associations” devoted to missiology, the journals they publish, and their web addresses. Martha Smalley, also a consulting editor for this project, profiles “Reference Tools” (survey histories, encyclopedias, atlases, directories,

handbooks, and guides for locating primary and secondary sources) and their functions. Included in her survey are freely available websites such as the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (www.dacb.org) and the *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity* (www.bdcconline.net), sites that will, in all likelihood, only continue to grow in importance.

In an interesting shift of focus, several entries describe how mission and missionaries have influenced areas of Western art and culture. In separate entries, Jamie S. Scott reflects on how both history and our imagination surrounding missions have inspired works of “Fiction” and “Film”. Portrayals have traversed the spectrum from the “heroic” to the “hypocritical” with many, “the ambiguous” (165), residing in between these two poles. Two waves of mission activity have been particularly fruitful for story telling: the Portuguese, Spanish, and French Catholic missions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g. *Silence* [novel] by Shusaku Endo and *Black Robe* by Brian Moore [novel and film]) and the British and North American Protestant missions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe [novel] and *Jungle Drums of Africa* [1953 film directed by Fred Brannon]). Tricia Pongracz’s article on “Art” looks at how Asian Christian art has developed a worldwide following.

Through its spotlight on “central themes” of mission from an interdisciplinary vantage point, the *Encyclopedia of Missions and Missionaries* occupies a unique place within the array of reference tools that describe and interpret the phenomenon of Christian missions. While it is no doubt true that “non-theological” librarians and students will benefit from this study of missions as a movement within a much wider societal context, it seems equally the case that theological librarians and students, those looking for thoughtful articles that summarize and synthesize wide-reaching topics and provide a springboard for further research from a solid foundation, will also be well served. This work is highly recommended for all academic libraries.

Bruce Eugene Eldevik
Luther Seminary Library

