

“Awash in a Sea of Archives”: Key Research Sources in the United States for the Study of Mission and World Christianity

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ABSTRACT: The essay describes some holdings from five key mission archives in the United States, with the suggestion that mission archives can prove a valuable source to understand the intersection between mission and World Christianity and can raise questions about the relationship of one to the other, especially since the fulcrum of Christianity has shifted from Europe and North America to areas once considered “mission countries.” The sources hold a myriad of further research possibilities, which include the visual and performing arts in relation to inculturation; literature, the history of print, other media, and technology; the history of museums; maps, geography, and perceptions of the world; economics/business; oral history, church history, Christianity in particular countries, and the reception of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in “Third World” churches; and transoceanic networks with implications for local churches.

With apologies to Jon Butler,¹ the image evoked in “awash in a sea of archives” is an apt one for exploring the nexus between World Christianity and mission.

INTRODUCTION

The latest round of academic conversations related to world history and global Christianity in the last twenty-five years bore fruit recently in the Cambridge History of Christianity Series: a two-volume *World Christianities*, and the American Historical Association’s *Essays on Global and Comparative History*, to cite only two examples. The topic has engaged faculty in theological education as well.² In mission studies, Roman Catholics, who have generally thought of themselves as “global” (though “universal” or “catholic” would have been considered preferable terms), advanced missions overseas primarily through international groups (Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits), along with specialized mission societies (Paris Foreign Mission Society, Foreign Missions Society of Mexico). Protestant missionaries from Britain and the United States were sent to many countries where the British Empire had created a point of entry into “foreign” ports, especially since the late eighteenth century. These groups and their activities generated considerable records, correspondence, and artifacts from their encounter with people from backgrounds and cultures so distinct from that of Europe and North America. But in most of the “mission countries,” local churches began and grew over the centuries.

The foundation of the London Missionary Society (1795), the American Bureau of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), and the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (1910)³ signaled a Protestant leap beyond

¹ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

² Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, eds., *World Christianities, c. 1815-1914*; Hugh McLeod, ed., *World Christianities, c. 1914-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). The AHA Series is edited by Michael Adas. Dietrich Werner, “Theological Education in the Changing Context of World Christianity - an Unfinished Agenda,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35 (April 2011): 92-98.

³ The centenary was celebrated with academic conferences in Edinburgh, Tokyo, Capetown, and Boston.

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Europe and the United States toward other peoples and cultures. In the twentieth century, Roman Catholic attention was drawn to a global church through papal documents regarding the indigenization of China (1919, 1926) and Africa (1957). Maryknoller John J. Considine, well versed in Protestant mission literature, wrote *World Christianity* (1945),⁴ arguing for a wider understanding of global Catholicism from the viewpoint of local churches. Conversation on just what is global or World Christianity continues. The online *Journal of World Christianity*,⁵ in the same year as the present journal, opened its first issue with an overview of how co-editors Dale T. Irvin and Patrick Provost-Smith envisioned the topic.⁶ Academic or seminary centers for the study of world/global Christianity have opened at Yale Divinity School, the University of Edinburgh, Boston University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and elsewhere.⁷ Devaka Premawardhana, speaking at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School, has suggested that World Christianity is even changing the study of world religions.⁸

The present essay plies the waters of key archives in the United States related to overseas missions, on the premise that mission archives can prove a valuable source for exploring the intersection between mission and World Christianity and for raising important questions about the relationship of one to the other. Even a simple perusal of the sources indicated below points one to a plethora of locations and, in some cases, primary sources accessible online.

A RECENT SHIFT IN EMPHASIS

In the last twenty-five years, scholars have raised awareness of the importance of the local communities' reception of the Christian message and of the complexity of the interaction of religious and social cultures where missionaries were sent. To cite a few examples, Kwok Pui-Lan's analysis of Chinese women as translators for missionaries whose Chinese language skills were not yet honed pointed up the key role Chinese women played in choosing particular Chinese words for Christian terms/concepts, thereby interpreting the Christian message for the Chinese.⁹ While missionary endeavors and the advance of empire have sometimes gone hand in hand, Sarah A. Curtis' depiction of three French women missionaries to three continents in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries demonstrates that the womens' diverse appropriation of "empire" and their religious imagination produced different consequences

⁴ John J. Considine, *World Christianity* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1945).

⁵ <http://journalofworldchristianity.org>.

⁶ See especially Dale T. Irvin, "World Christianity: An Introduction," *The Journal of World Christianity* 1 (2008): 1-26 and Peter C. Phan, "Doing Theology in World Christianity: Different Resources and Methods," *ibid.* 27-53. Lamin Sanneh defines World Christianity as "the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian," with "no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel." Global Christianity "is the faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe." Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 22.

⁷ The URLs for these universities or seminaries are <http://www.yale.edu/worldchristianity/about.shtml>; <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/divinity/research/centres/world-christianity/overview>; <http://www.bu.edu/cgcm>; <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Center-for-the-Study-of-Global-Christianity.cfm>; <http://www.utsnyc.edu/iwrg>. Some of the sources in the ATLA Cooperative Digital Resources Initiative provide further material. <http://www.atla.com/digitalresources/>.

⁸ Devaka Premawardhana, "Christianity Becomes Unfamiliar: World Christianity is Changing the Study of World Religions," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* Vol. 39 (Winter/Spring 2011): 1. <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr>.

⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860-1927* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Christian Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), which more strongly moves the argument of indigenization away from missionaries and toward the Chinese.

for local cultures and the reception of Catholicism.¹⁰ Cross-cultural studies examine the interstices wherein cultures meet and multi-level alterations that deal with the interaction.¹¹ Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Dana Robert¹² have been a few of the key scholars to suggest the importance of local Christian communities around the world and to raise new questions and perspectives related to the transmission of Christianity. *Rescuing the Memory of Our Peoples*¹³ is an archives manual prepared by Martha Lund Smalley (Yale University Divinity School) and Rosemary Seton (School of Oriental and African Studies) to provide a “how to” approach for indigenous churches to document their ongoing story both through oral histories and written sources.

The global reach of the Internet has offered the means for making indigenous peoples’ stories more accessible to a wider audience. One key source, *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB)*,¹⁴ is available exclusively online and is written mainly by Africans. The site is in a continuous process of adding local stories in English, French, and eventually in Portuguese, Swahili, and Arabic. The project, initiated in 1999 by Jonathan Bonk, Executive Director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut, recently inspired a similar project for Chinese Christianity, using the same model as the *DACB*.¹⁵

ARCHIVAL SHIFT IN EMPHASIS

THE DAY MISSIONS LIBRARY

By briefly traversing the United States, we are able to highlight five archives/libraries that hold a wealth of material on our topic. The locations have websites that greatly facilitate the initial research “legwork” online prior to a visit. Still, an added feature of an onsite visit is that knowledgeable, courteous, and enthusiastic archivists/librarians/staff help to make the visit pleasant and connect the visitor with other researchers engaging similar topics. The Day Missions Library¹⁶ at the Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, might be considered the resource equivalent of “one stop shopping.” The Library was established in 1891 through the efforts of Professor George Edward Day, a Hebrew and Hebrew Literature scholar at Yale from 1866 to 1901. Day also engaged in the study of missions, acquiring books, maps, and other items for the education of missionaries. The Library contains a premier source of archival material, including correspondence of mission organizations/missionaries, books, photographs, periodicals, maps, diaries, posters, postcards, and other objects.

¹⁰ Sarah A. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits. Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹¹ See, for example, Michal Jan Rozbicki and George O. Ndege, eds., *Cross-Cultural History and the Domestication of Otherness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹² One representative example from each author includes Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples to All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Dana Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Each scholar inaugurated a key institute for the study of World Christianity and mission: Walls at the University of Edinburgh, Sanneh at the Yale Divinity School, and Robert at Boston University. The three schools have historical roots in the mission tradition. Before coming to Yale, Jonathan Edwards worked at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, among Native Americans. Edwards edited the diary of his protégé and missionary to Native Americans, David Brainerd. The University of Edinburgh, founded in 1582, aimed to educate pastors and to provide a broad-based humanist education. Boston University’s predecessor was the Methodist General Biblical Institute.

¹³ The Documentation, Archives, Bibliography, and Oral History Committee of the International Association for Mission Studies initiated the idea. Martha Lund Smalley and Rosemary Seton, comp., *Rescuing the Memory of Our Peoples. Archives Manual*. International Association of Mission Studies, 2003. It is available online in seven languages at <http://www.omsc.org/archivesmanual.shtml>.

¹⁴ <http://www.dacb.org>.

¹⁵ Dr. Yading Li is Project Manager for the online *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*.

¹⁶ <http://www.library.yale.edu/div/DayMissions.html>.

Among the Special Collections' online sources are images from Indonesia and elsewhere, taken by the renowned Yale missions scholar Charles W. Forman. Project Canterbury contains selected papers from the Lambeth Conferences, 1867-1931, books by Charlotte Mary Yonge, a nineteenth-century author of popular stories and works on missions, and geographically specific items from Anglican missions. The papers from the 1910 World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh can be read online (Volumes 1-9). The Vinton Books provide online brief biographical information of Congregational missionaries sent overseas under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. On the library shelves, I located an English-Cantonese dictionary that Maryknoll missionary Bernard F. Meyer wrote, but which I had not discovered in the Maryknoll archives. Under the current leadership of Divinity School Librarian Paul Stuehrenberg and Special Collections and Curator of the Day Missions Library Martha Smalley, the Missions and World Christianity collections continue to grow and to include materials from local Christian communities around the world.

The Day Missions Library is home also to the Mission Periodicals Database,¹⁷ a project initiated in 1997 through the University of Cambridge's North Atlantic Missiology Project and continued in 1999 with the Currents in World Christianity Project. Aimed at a scholarly analysis of Protestant missions and the impact of Christianity beyond Europe and North America, the database provides a detailed listing of over 600 mission periodicals published in Britain from the late 1600s to the 1960s by evangelical, conciliar Protestant and some Roman Catholic organizations. The database is searchable by periodical title, by region, or by specific terms and indicates the location of those libraries that house the periodicals. Many of the publications can be found in the Yale Library system itself. The Day Missions Library website has a multitude of links to other key archival resources for the study of mission and World Christianity in North America, Britain, and elsewhere. Anyone even slightly interested in missions or World Christianity will benefit immensely from a visit to this Library, first online and then in person, to get a feel for the scope of subject possibilities. The lovely, warm, oak-paneled, two-tiered reading room of the library provides a wonderful ambience in which to research and write.

THE CATHOLIC FOREIGN MISSION SOCIETY OF AMERICA ARCHIVES

A second stop on our tour is in the rolling hills of Westchester County, New York, on the outskirts of Ossining, at the archives of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (Maryknoll). The Society (the priests and brothers) was founded at that location in 1911, with the Sisters' group following a year later. Among the multitude of Roman Catholic missionary societies in the United States, Maryknoll has one of the best organized and most user-friendly archives. I have visited these frequently since 1987, when they were contained in cardboard boxes housed in a garage on the Fathers and Brothers' property. By 1992, the archives of the Society and the Maryknoll Sisters were gathered in one location. The finding aids for the archival collections are clearly written, with excellent overviews of the holdings. What I found helpful about these guides is that I can quickly discern whether there is even any need to peruse a particular box or set of folders. Until the early 1960s, both the men and the women wrote monthly diaries of their missions. The reader thus is given some of the first impressions of "the other" through the eyes of the new missionaries as they observe the life, customs, and expressions of people in Asia, East Africa, and Latin America. The diaries are in the tradition of the *Jesuit Relations*¹⁸ and the Missionaries of Africa

¹⁷ <http://divdl.library.yale.edu/missionperiodicals/>. For an overview of the beginnings and development of the database, see Terry Barringer, "From 'Beyond Alpine Snows' to 'Homes of the East' – a Journey Through Missionary Periodicals: The Missionary Periodicals Database Project," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 2002): 169-173.

¹⁸ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791* (Cleveland: Burrows Bros. Co., 1896-1901). The documents are also available online at <http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations>.

who had a similar practice.¹⁹ A two-page obituary for each of the deceased Maryknoll men highlights key events from their life and mission. A small archival library contains books written by or about Maryknoll around the world.

About thirty years ago, under the leadership of Dr. Jean-Paul Wiest, Maryknoll initiated an oral history project to gather the life stories of their men who served in the early days in China. The project expanded to include Maryknoll missionaries elsewhere and key people associated with the Society. Over 1,000 oral histories have been recorded and transcribed, and are searchable. The Archives has thousands of photographs taken since Maryknoll's origins.

The research facility is well-lit, user friendly, and, under the capable directorship of Ellen Pierce, a place to meet others who are writing on topics related to mission and World Christianity. The library space on the second floor of the Society headquarters has been renovated and offers a beautiful environment in which to read periodicals and books related to mission and world issues.

THE BILLY GRAHAM CENTER AT WHEATON COLLEGE

Moving to the Midwest, the third floor of the Billy Graham Center²⁰ at Wheaton College, near Chicago, features over 60,000 books and 130,000 items in microfiche or microform, including that of New Religious Movements in Primal Societies, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,²¹ the Baptist Missionary Society Archives, and the Joint International Missionary Council. A fascinating collection in the Worldwide Mission of the Church section of the URL, "Images of Colonial Africa," includes photographs taken by missionary Laura Collins in colonial pre-1913 Kenya.

THE RICCI INSTITUTE FOR CHINESE-WESTERN CULTURAL HISTORY

Traveling to the West Coast, we find the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History,²² located at the University of San Francisco Center for the Pacific Rim, College of Arts and Sciences. The Institute was founded in 1984, by Edward J. Malatesta, S.J.²³ The collection of books, manuscripts, and objects grew from longstanding Sino-Jesuit connections, beginning with Matteo Ricci and Johann Adam von Bell Schall. In addition to books and manuscripts in Chinese and Western languages related to Jesuit mission in China from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the Institute holds diverse materials on cultural relations between the West and China and promotes research/conferences that explore religious and secular cross-cultural encounters from the late Ming and Qing eras to current times. Of particular note is R.G. Tiedemann, *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China: From the 16th to the 20th Century* (2009) and R.G. Tiedemann, *Handbook on Christianity in*

¹⁹ Charles Cardinal Lavigerie founded the Missionaries of Africa in 1868 with a respect for and sensitivity to African languages and cultures. In East Africa, his missionaries wrote regular entries in local diaries chronicling customs, issues, and changes they observed among the indigenous people.

²⁰ <http://www2.wheaton.edu/learnres/ARCSC/collects/sc133>.

²¹ The archives of the ABCFM are at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

²² <http://www.ricci.usfca.edu/institute/index/htm>. The Institute has few items available online compared with the other sites in this essay and is best visited in person.

²³ The Institute goes back to Francis Rouleau, S.J., and Thomas Carroll, S.J., who had been collecting Sino-Western materials on cross-cultural contacts. They and Malatesta founded the Institute (first called Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History) in 1982 at the time of Rouleau's death. On Malatesta, see, James S. Torrens, S.J. and Xiaoxin Wu, *Edward J. Malatesta, S.J., A Friend of China* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004).

China: Volume 2, 1800-present (2010), who prepared the books over several month's stays there while he was a Distinguished Fellow of the Endowed EDS-Stewart Chair.

THE INTERNET MISSION PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE

Our final stop, the Internet Mission Photography Archive,²⁴ housed through the University of Southern California, contains digitized photographs from mission collections in North America, Europe, and Britain. At the time of this writing, participating archives that have submitted selected photos include the Moravian Church (*Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine*), the Leipzig Mission (*Evangelisch-Lutherisches Missionswerk Leipzig*), Maryknoll, the Norwegian Missionary Society in Stavanger, *DM-Échange et Mission*, and the Hermannsburg Mission, 1888-1958. The site also contains photos from the Yale Divinity School Library, ca. 1880-1950, and the School of Oriental and African Studies,²⁵ London, ca. 1860-1950. One can scroll through more than 62,400 images, which encompass virtually the whole world. Missionaries were often among the first to employ new technology, and they pioneered photographic processes in less than favorable situations. Even as the images reveal missionaries at work, in prayer, or preaching, the viewer can observe changes in local landscapes with the onset of "development," the selection or adaptation local people made of western objects and technology, and the change of religious authority from missionary to local communities.

SUMMARY

The sources described in this essay hold a myriad of research possibilities, encompassing not only missions' history and World Christianity but other topics including women, medical arts, and the visual and performing arts in relation to enculturation; literature, the history of print, other media, and technology; statistics and religion; the history of museums (often mission institutes had small museums in their North American or European locations); geography—mapping the world; economics and business; oral history, church history, Christianity in particular countries, and the reception of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in "Third World" churches; transnational strands of lay leadership development; history of print and non-print languages; and transoceanic networks and their implications for local churches. Perusal of the rich resources noted in this essay and in other missions' archives stirs up all kinds of interesting research questions and provides insight into the relationship between World Christianity and mission history, especially since the fulcrum of Christianity has shifted from Europe and North America to areas once considered "mission countries."



²⁴ <http://www.digarc.usc.edu/impa>. Because the photos had a wide range of data about the location, event, or persons in the photo, the circumstances for taking the picture, the name of the photographer, and date, IMPA used the Dublin Core for all collections so that similar categories/data could be similar for each photograph. There is an opportunity for those who view the photographs to provide information on a given picture for consideration by IMPA. IMPA makes reference on the site to the Basel Mission, "a pioneering accomplishment in digital archiving from which our work has benefited substantially."

²⁵ Space does not allow us to do more than mention this key resource in London, especially for the London Missionary Society/Council for World Mission and the China Inland Mission: <http://www.soas.uk/library/archives/collections/missionary-collections>.