
Thirty Books That Most Influenced My Understanding of Christian Mission

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When I was a graduate student, my interests developed in the areas of mission history and ecumenics, then focused on the theology of mission and the theology of religions, with particular orientation toward Asia. There my wife, Joanne, and I worked for nearly a decade.

The first books that captured my interest and attention were Kenneth Scott Latourette's *History of the Expansion of Christianity* (7 vols., Harper & Brothers, 1937–45) and William Richey Hogg's *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth-Century Background* (Harper & Row, 1952). At the Bossey Ecumenical Institute we had a seminar devoted to Hendrick Kraemer's recently published book *Religion and the Christian Faith* (Lutterworth Press, 1956), which challenged my theological views at that time, especially in discussions with students from Asia.

A small paperback book by Wilhelm Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission: A Study of the Encounter Between the Missionary Enterprise and the Church and Its Theology* (SCM Press, 1955), was helpful as I wrote my doctoral dissertation, "The Theology of Missions in the Twentieth Century" (Boston University, 1960).

I recognized the importance of Dutch and British mission scholars. So I studied Dutch and for several years in the Philippines I subscribed to two Dutch mission journals: *De Heerbaan* (The Lord's Highway—Protestant) and *Het Missiewerk* (Mission Work—Roman Catholic), and I always read Max Warren's *CMS Newsletter* with great interest and benefit. Johannes Blauw, secretary of the Dutch Missionary Council, wrote *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (Lutterworth Press, 1962), which was much needed.

Teaching in the Philippines during the 1960s was an exciting time to be in Asia, especially in a Roman Catholic country while the Second Vatican Council was going on. *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott (Guild Press, 1966), with an introduction to each document by a Protestant or Orthodox scholar, was required reading. The 1960s was also a time of great turmoil and transition in many Asian countries. For me, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, by M. M. Thomas (SCM Press, 1966), was the most profound and provocative book on the subject by an Asian churchman.

The "three Ns" were authors who became very important and influential in my understanding of mission: D. T. Niles, Stephen Neill, and Lesslie Newbigin. Each of them wrote many important books, but I mention here only one from each. At the request of the World Council of Churches, D. T. Niles held a series of consultations around the world in preparation for writing *Upon the Earth: The Mission of God and the Missionary Enterprise of the Churches* (Lutterworth Press, 1962), which gave an overview of

the state of mission and the theological challenges at a time when the International Missionary Council had just been integrated with the World Council of Churches.

I first met Stephen Neill in Singapore in the summer of 1963, when he was lecturing at a study institute for those of us who were teaching church history at seminaries in Southeast Asia. He asked three of us to help him proofread his latest book, *A History of Christian Missions* (Penguin, 1964), which is still a classic textbook. In his preface he commented that he had received valuable help in the correction of the proofs "from three distinguished missionaries of the younger generation," and then mentioned our names. So my friends and I are perpetually "of the younger generation!"

Lesslie Newbigin wrote so many influential books that it is hard to choose one. For my purposes, however, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (Eerdmans, 1978; rev. ed., 1995, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*) was particularly important, because it was profoundly biblical and balanced in its treatment of the subject.

Water Buffalo Theology (Orbis Books, 1974; 2d ed., 1999), by Kosuke Koyama, written when we were both teaching in Southeast Asia, set a new standard for doing theology from the rice-roots of Asian society. It was the first in a series of books that he wrote with his unique perspective as an Asian missiologist.

R. Pierce Beaver, director of the Missionary Research Library in the 1950s, was the founder of this journal when it began as the *Occasional Bulletin from the Missionary Research Library*. Later, at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, I joined him and became his successor. He was a prolific author, and two of his books were pioneering works of permanent importance for me: *Ecumenical Beginnings in Protestant World Mission: A History of Comity* (Thomas Nelson, 1962) and *All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in World Mission* (Eerdmans, 1968; rev. ed., 1980, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America*).

Two books on the history of women missionaries that have been valuable for me are Dana L. Robert's *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Mercer Univ. Press, 1996) and Ruth A. Tucker's *Guardians of the Great Commission: The Story of Women in Modern Missions* (Zondervan, 1988).

Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction (Eerdmans, 1978), by Johannes Verkuyl, is a masterful textbook by the leading Dutch missiologist after World War II. Another valuable text from a Dutch missiologist is *Philosophy, Science, and Theology of Mission in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (2 vols., Peter Lang, 1995–97), by Jan A. B. Jongeneel, a work that is encyclopedic in its scope and detail. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991), by South African David Bosch, was probably the single most important textbook in missiology in the late twentieth century. All of these have been influential in my work.

I admired Alan Neely's skill in using case studies for teaching courses in mission, and students have always responded with appreciation when I have used his book *Christian Mission: A Case Study Approach* (Orbis Books, 1995) in my classes.

Because of my special interest in Asia, I am indebted to Sam-



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uel H. Moffett for his definitive two-volume *History of Christianity in Asia* (Orbis Books, 1992–2005).

As a historian, I appreciate everything written by Andrew Walls, especially his book *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Orbis Books, 1996).

Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture, by Lamin Sanneh (Orbis Books, 1989; 2d ed., 2008), was a landmark book that helped many of us to understand better the remarkable relationship of the missionary enterprise with cultures.

The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions (Orbis Books, 1987), edited by John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, is an example of radical theological relativism, which, as one of the authors says, “has devastating theological effects.” He believes the results to be desirable, but such relativism would actually be a form of theological cancer for the Christian mission.

The writings of Kwame Bediako from Ghana, such as *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Orbis Books, 2004), have helped me to better understand a theological response to the Gospel from an African perspective.

The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History, by Angelyn Dries (Orbis Books, 1998), is essential for understanding the contribution of American Catholic missions. For mission theology and practice, *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, edited by William R. Burrows (Orbis Books, 1993), provides commentary and discussion about two of the most significant official Catholic

statements on mission in our time, which have been important for my understanding.

Missionary biographies and autobiographies have always been of special interest to me. Many have been influential and inspiring, but if I had to choose only one biography, it would be *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*, by Courtney Anderson (Little, Brown, 1956); and the one autobiography would be *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography*, by Lesslie Newbigin (Eerdmans, 1985; updated ed., Saint Andrew Press, 1993).

As I was involved in editing two mission dictionary projects, I developed great admiration and appreciation for the accomplishment of the *Encyclopedia of Missions*, edited by Edwin Bliss (2 vols., Funk & Wagnalls, 1891; 2d ed., 1904). It is a massive global project with historical information of enormous value.

The World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900–2000, edited by David B. Barrett (Oxford Univ. Press, 1982; 2d ed., 2 vols., 2001), was a monumental achievement. For the first time it gave us reliable statistical information on the whole church in the whole world.

For my special interests, there is one book that has never been written: a comprehensive history of Christian attitudes and approaches to people of other faiths, from the early church to the present. To my knowledge, such a comprehensive study has never been published in any language. If I were starting over, I might try to do it myself—but now I wait and wish for someone else to undertake it!

The book that influenced Rowling the most is her favorite book by her favorite author: Emma, by Jane Austen. Emma, which was published in 1815, is a comedy of manners about a young, pretty, rich, and clever woman named Emma Woodhouse. Emma is single and has no desire to marry but likes to get involved with other people's love lives. One book that had a big effect on former President Ronald Reagan as a child was the Christian book *That Printer of Udell's*, by Harold Bell Wright. The main character of the book, Dick Falkner, was born into a broken home with an alcoholic father. In the opening pages of the book, his mother starves to death while his father has passed out. Christian mission is not about converting people, but it's a series of actions that naturally follow the transformation of a person by what Jesus Christ has done. It is to genuinely love others and therefore serve others because of our commitment to God's commands. Also it is to honestly convey all that we know (the rich historical, archaeological, logical, philosophical, psychological evidence) to people. And the rest of work is left with God and that person who is given the information. John Stott in this book takes a look at what Christian mission has been, what it is, and what it should be. This mission is usually described as either mainly evangelism or as mainly social welfare. Stott examines both these ideas and leads us back to the Scriptures to look at what they tell us. The beginnings of Christian scripture. More than almost anything I've ever written about, the subject of this book has been on my mind for the past thirty years, since I was in my late teens and just beginning my study of the New Testament. Because it has been a part of me for so long, I thought I should begin by giving a personal account of why this material has been, and still is, very important to me. started making me question my understanding of scripture as the verbally inspired word of God. If the full meaning of the words of scripture can be grasped only by studying them in Greek (and Hebrew), doesn't this mean that most Christians, who don't read ancient languages, will never have complete access to what God wants them to know? A Christian mission is an organized effort to spread Christianity to new converts. Missions involve sending individuals and groups, called missionaries, across boundaries, most commonly geographical boundaries, to carry on evangelism or other activities, such as educational or hospital work. Sometimes individuals are sent and are called missionaries. When groups are sent, they are often called mission teams and they do mission trips. There are a few different kinds of mission trips: short-term, long Since then, the Mission has published many more books to challenge Christians around the world. Its successor, OMF International, remains committed to declaring the faithfulness of God through books and publications in the digital age. Make sure the layman understands what you are saying. May you write with joy and may God use your writing to bless others. e are OMF International (formerly the China Inland Mission and Overseas Missionary Fellowship), founded by James Hudson Taylor in 1865. We serve the church and bring the gospel to many of the countries in East Asia, and we have a pioneering ministry in the rest. We help place Christians with professional skills in China and other Asian countries, and share the love of Christ with East Asians worldwide.