Jerome Teelucksingh, *Beyond the Legacy of the Missionaries and East Indians: The Impact of the Presbyterian Church in the Caribbean*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2020. xv + 214 pp. (Cloth US\$132.00)

Between 1845 and 1917, the British government allowed sugar planters in its overseas colony of Trinidad to transport an estimated 143,939 indentured laborers from the Indian subcontinent. The arrival of these laborers was in response to a perceived labor shortage emerging from the abolition of African slavery in 1838. Most of the indentured laborers were low-caste Hindu peasants who were expected to work for five years and return home. But by the late 1860s the planters, to prune cost and maximize profits, induced the laborers to settle through a policy of exchanging their return passage for a piece of land. However, the plan was ill conceived. Once settled, the Indians had to fend for themselves with limited internal and external support. Within this context, the Canadian Presbyterian Church arrived in Trinidad with the expectation to fill a need where the colonial government had failed to deliver basic amenities in rural Indian communities. Jerome Teelucksingh examines the way the Presbyterians successfully provided Western education, converted Hindus to Christianity, and supplied badly needed social services to Indians in Trinidad, from indenture to the modern period. The focus is on how the Presbyterians have reorganized and rebuilt a substantial portion of the rural Indian population amid uneasy transition and resistance. The argument is that Indians benefited from their association with the Presbyterians despite the erosion of their core religion of Hinduism. Had it not been for the continuous and dedicated work of the Presbyterians the Indians would have still been trapped in socioeconomic dependence and isolation. The Presbyterian involvement helped them to achieve mobility in public service, politics, law, and medicine. The role of the Presbyterian mission is mentioned on almost every page of the text. Teelucksingh writes that quality education had become synonymous with the Presbyterians, leaving “an indelible impression on the landscape of Trinidad” (p. 93). The academic standards and achievements of Presbyterian schools on passing national exams were unmatched, although their schools were not free from low morale, indiscipline, and malingering. They also prepared young minds for leadership roles and positions. The overall Presbyterian mission among Indians allowed for a flexible approach when providing services to Indians. Hindi and Hindu customs, for instance, were encouraged in schools and communities, creating a uniquely hybrid environment that combined western and eastern ways of life in Trinidad. Furthermore, “a harmonious and successful working relationship,” Teelucksingh asserts, “with governmental agencies, non-

governmental organisations and PTAS (sic)" or Parent Teacher Associations was practiced (p. 187).

From its inception to the modern period, the Presbyterian mission in Trinidad has received many criticisms and challenges for not speaking out on the hardships of indenture, for not providing equal services to Africans, for interfering with Hinduism, and for practically taking over the educational system. Unfortunately, Teelucksingh does not analyze these social dynamics in depth, and in so doing, glorifies the Presbyterian mission in multiethnic Trinidad. A blind spot in his narrative is the way the achievements of the Presbyterians measure up to the achievements in the predominantly Hindu Trinidad community, where conversion to Christianity has been unsuccessful. Moreover, the book is not well organized, and the title is misleading. The focus is on Trinidad, not the Caribbean. One chapter on the Caribbean is sketched and out of place. The introduction lacks a clear thesis and the two-page conclusion is weak.

But the book is strong in two domains. First, it demonstrates how the application of the Presbyterian mission continues to have a positive impact on Indians in uplifting their private and public lives. The mission has liberated Indians from the exigency of rural life and prepared them to compete for opportunities in Trinidad and abroad. Secondly, the book answers a question that has permeated the minds of researchers and observers of Indians in the southern Caribbean: Why is it that Indians fare better in Trinidad than in Guyana and Suriname? Apart from oil wealth in Trinidad, the Presbyterian mission of conversion and its offer of quality education have single-handedly been responsible for the socioeconomic difference in the Indophone Caribbean. The mission was not as deeply involved in Guyana and Suriname as it was in Trinidad. Teelucksingh must be commended for bringing attention to the investments, challenges, and achievements of the Presbyterian mission among Trinidad Indians. The book deserves a place in the historiography of Caribbean Indians and will be useful to researchers, instructors, and students who are interested in how a Canadian Christian religious mission has been successful in transforming the lives of an immigrant group in Trinidad.

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