The title speaks of ‘missions’, the blurb and, indeed, the dedication, of ‘mission.’ Here already is a clue to the ecclesiological conundrum, posed by the fact that, as Wilbert Shenk states in his Foreword, ‘all these (missions) were stepchildren to the churches that declined to acknowledge them as being legitimately integral to ecclesial life.’ By a strange irony, it was the multifarious missions, sent into all the world first by their European, then increasingly by their American parents, which insisted on that very unity, which the churches continued to proclaim as a mark of the Church, but which they failed to manifest, or even to seek, in their lives.

The first part of the book is historical, commencing with William Carey’s ‘pleasing dream’ in 1806 of a ‘general association of all denominations of Christians, from the four quarters of the world’. He was ahead of his time, but he had antecedents in the co-operation between the Anglican Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and German and Danish missionaries, which bore missionary fruit in the eighteenth century and ecumenical fruit in the twentieth. It was the very success of these and similar American efforts, which provoked resurgent denominationalism in the 1830, a pattern that was to be repeated. The second half of the century witnessed unprecedented missionary expansion and co-operation, but this was co-operation between missions, which by and large were reproducing the disunited diversity of the sending churches. Many settled for ‘comity’; no one asked ‘the natives’ what they thought. The main ecumenical reaction came neither from the churches nor from the missionary societies, but from a number of disparate, mainly lay-led, movements: the Evangelical Alliance, the YMCA and YWCA, the Student Volunteer Movement and the World Student Christian Federation, which provided leadership, both charismatic and systemic, in the persons of John R. Mott and J. H. Oldham. We enter the age of the great worldwide conferences, which, propelled first by ocean-going liners and then by cheap air travel, were to be typical of the twentieth century. Will they survive the rising cost of fossil fuel in the twenty-first?

Pride of place goes rightly to Edinburgh 1910. Now, when ecumenical conferences are shying away from decision-making in favour of celebration, it is worth noting that Mott insisted that it should not be primarily inspirational, but ‘devoted to the most vital questions of missionary opportunity and policy’. Edinburgh established the International Missionary
Council (IMC) as the first ever permanent ecumenical organization and the precursor, together with the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The ecumenical movement survived two World Wars and brought the ‘younger churches’ as equal partners to the top table just in time for the revolutionary, post-imperial and liberationist tendencies of the past half-century and for the phenomenal rise of Pentecostal and Independent churches.

Part Two gives ten models of unity, beginning with the Roman Catholic Church and its transition from hostility to co-operation with, if not membership of, the WCC. This model is coherent in that it consistently links mission to unity. Perhaps for that very reason it is rather like a bar magnet; the way in which power operates within it attracts at one pole and repels at the other. Only the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the United Methodist Church (and I would add the Moravian Church) offer similarly ‘unity through a Global Church.’ The next alternative is ‘World Conciliarism’, exemplified by the integration of the IMC and the WCC at New Delhi in 1961 with both rightly insisting on the indissolubility of the link between mission and unity. Many, however, felt that that was followed by a period of neglect of what the veteran missionary and ecumenist Lesslie Newbigin called ‘the duty of the church to bring the Gospel to those who had not heard it’. Fundamentalists picketed every WCC Assembly from 1948 to 1999 and even founded their own rival council, the International Council of Christian Churches.

The noble and influential New Delhi statement on unity spoke of ‘all in each place’, which is in tension with its own ‘in all places and all ages’. This tension takes visible and structural form in the rival claims on local churches to loyalty to what have come to be called Christian World Communions (CWCs), another of the models of unity. Anglicans may be surprised to find the Lambeth Conference of 1867 cited as ‘the first world gathering of representatives of a particular faith tradition’. They were soon followed by the Reformed 1877, Methodists 1881, Congregationalists 1891, Baptists 1905 and last but not least Lutherans 1923. It is significant that none of these bodies had an ongoing programme or secretariat until the formation of the WCC, an interesting example of action and re-action. The Lutheran World Federation, by far the largest and most powerful of the CWCs, even adumbrated its own concept of unity, reconciled diversity in place of conciliar fellowship or organic union. This formulation may be criticised grammatically, for making diversity substantive and reconciled merely adjectival, and theologically for the implication that the actual state of