Book Reviews


This anthology deals with the Islamic, Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Protestant, Judaic and Asian religions’ missionary activity in the Pacific Rim combining the academic disciplines of political sciences, sociology, history, art history and anthropology. Organised into six sections, articles published between 1932 and 2001 are brought together: their original typeset, foot or endnote and bibliographic conventions have been respected. The author of chapter three provides an indigenous perspective; chapters ten and twenty-one contain original testimonies of religious believers. The useful introduction contains a general overview, updating and unifying articles that deal with disparate religions in a large, culturally varied geographical area.

The first section is devoted to Islam, a somewhat artificial subdivision as chapters three and four bear no other connection to Islam than that religions are discussed in regions where Islam is widespread and/or dominant. Chapter three describes Philippino religion before the Spanish conquest as an essentially monotheistic religion with a role for some lesser gods, spirits, sacrificial offerings and animism. Chapter four shows, using rich historical evidence, how secular clergy in Asia augmented its finances with its involvement in the galleon trade. Articles one and two really deal with Islam. The first contribution provides data on the spread of Islam in Indonesia, its syncretic character, characteristics of the Indonesian Muslim, Dutch attitudes towards Indonesian religion and the position of Indonesian Islam within the idea of Pan-Islamism. However, it leaves unexplained the motivations behind the early conversions and why Indonesian Islam differs from Islam in other regions. The second article explores the role of Islam in impeding or promoting Malaysia’s process of political modernisation. Initially, political parties were little concerned with religious matters but in the post-war period state governments became more involved.

The second part entitled ‘the Iberian Catholic period’ focuses geographically on Asia (chapters five, six and nine) and the Americas (chapters seven and eight), but does not deal specifically with Spanish and/or Portuguese missionary activities. The fifth chapter carefully accounts the missionising failures and successes of nineteenth-century French missionaries in Japan, considering their religious and educational plan, local political issues, and the role of the descendants of sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries Jesuit converts. Chapter six discusses how Jesuit missionaries (ca. 1550–1800) developed the methodology of accommodation (using references to Chinese literature and philosophy) to make the theology of the incarnation and the crucifix clear to Chinese people. The ninth article demonstrates that the monastic, Episcopal and tribunal phases of the Spanish Inquisition in the Philippines (1577-1821) showed similarities in evolution, organisation, goals, functioning and procedures with its Latin American counterparts,
but was often more lenient. The seventh article takes us to the other side of the Pacific Ocean examining aspects of evangelisation in sixteenth-century Mexico, including language issues, concept translation, syncretism, and the question of the use of physical and psychological force. Article eight utilises both historical and anthropological material to support the thesis that under Catholic missionary influence, the California Indians created a religion merging Catholic with customary elements. Hence the Californian missions were less successful than generally believed.

Discussing Judaism in South America and China, the third part starts with a seventeenth-century narrative of Aharon Levi, a Jew who fled to South America to escape persecution, but still found no religious freedom. Chapter eleven discusses how in the early 20th century a scandal surrounding the sale of Chinese antiquities brought to light a 500-year old synagogue in Kaifeng built by the so-called Plucking the Sinews Religion Jews.

Part four considers Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska. The author of chapter twelve deals with the establishment of the first Orthodox Christian Alaskan mission, its development towards an indigenous church and the decline of its importance amidst other Christian denominations. He argues for the 21st century church to continue its unifying programme without linguistic or ethnic uniformity. Using ethnographic data, participant observation and documentary evidence, chapter thirteen addresses eloquently how Russian Orthodox missionaries established (late 1890s - early 1900s) among the south-eastern Alaskan Tlingit Indians religious brotherhoods whose main goal was fighting indigenous customs incompatible with Christianity, promoting abstinence, and mutual aid. The motivations of both missionaries and indigenous people stand in contrast with the American protestant missionaries’ work.

Protestant denominations in Asia and Oceania form the fifth section. Strictly speaking, the Church of the Latter-day Saints does not belong to Protestantism, but it is considered in chapter seventeen with a nuanced vision through what transpired during their cultural exchange with the Maori people in New Zealand. Article fourteen uses in a heuristic, historic, and contextual way numerous historical sources to identify models, modes, roles, offices and functions concerning the Ministry in Methodism in Singapore and Malaysia. Chapter fifteen establishes that, in China between 1848 and1900, the educational programme of the first Methodist Episcopal Church was instrumental in its success and expansion. Exploring the motivations behind the German Hermannsburg missionaries and their backgrounds in chapter seventeen is an attempt to get a better understanding of why their efforts failed in Australia and met success in New Guinea. The author of chapter eighteen uses anthropological data and theory and historic sources to demonstrate that conversion to Protestantism brought the Hmong – an ethnic minority in Thailand, Burma, China and the Indochinese peninsula – not only economic advantages but also effectively enhanced the ethnic minority’s status.

The final and last part examines how the Asian migrants in the United States' west coast have continued to practice their religion, adapted it to their new living conditions and even influenced their adopted communities. Chapter nineteen looks at the settlement (late nineteenth century - mid 1980s) of Sikh immigrants in California. The next chapter takes a more global view on migration by considering the establishment of and relationships between different religions brought by various immigrant communities to three Californian urban centres (Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Sacramento) from 1850 until 1869. The twenty-first chapter gives the writings of Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the Asian Self-Realization Fellowship whose explicit goal was