

## Book Review

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**Ghiloni, Aaron J. (ed.)**, *World Religions and Their Missions*, Peter Lang, New York, 2015, pp. 336, ISBN: 978-1-4331-2284-2 (hbk).

All books about world religions have a starting point, an editorial view point. In this case the editor's perspective on world religions is developed from the stance of one very mission-oriented religion—Mormonism. This is very clear in Chapters 1 and 9 where Ghiloni develops the framework used to organise the presentation of material in substantive chapters. The religions to be described are selected as 'missionary' religions and each is viewed entirely through the lens of mission. Little to no attention is paid to styles of worship, mystical experience, structures, beliefs, or for that matter what it is like to be a practitioner of a religion. Just mission—faith sharing with a view to recruitment. Since I do not find mission to be central to my faith, nor do I observe it to be in the faith lives of those with whom I have had the privilege to journey, I am not drawn to this approach. It will be more comfortable to those for whom mission is central.

Each chapter about a religion is organised around standard questions. What is X's mission? Why is mission done? How is it done? By whom? Where? While this may seem a bit forced, any comparative study of religions will use a framework to structure the description to facilitate comparison. The choice of mission is defended in the first of the two integrative chapters at the end of the book. The other offers a framework for interreligious dialogue that sits strangely in a book about missionary religion.

While mission has become more observable in recent developments in Atheism it can hardly be seen to be central to the lifeworlds of most atheists. While Baha'is teach, their motivation is not recruitment and so they fit less comfortably in the category of a religion with a mission. Similarly, among Buddhists proselytisation and seeking to convert are described as virtually non-existent. Convolved arguments are made to claim that because a religion spread, it must be due to mission work. The chapter on Hindus wrestles with the great complexity of the religions, faiths and spiritualities gathered by this referent, with a few engaging in mission often in response to Western Christian mission work. But again what is meant by mission in this context is not a shift of allegiance so much as the promotion of self-understanding and growth.

The chapter on Christianity sits most comfortably within the category of mission, which is after all a Christian category and mandated activity. It also presents a richly developed approach to forms of mission. Similarly the chapter on Islam (like that on Christianity one of the best in the book) lays out the core principles of Islam and the actions called for by *da-wah* (to call, invite, propagate) which is the linguistic equivalent of mission. The key features include teaching by appealing example and inviting. The rejection of compulsion honours both God's sovereignty and human free will. The chapter on Mormons is similarly comfortable being structured around the concept of mission. However, in this case another problem emerges.

By focussing on all efforts to bring people into faith this book misses the fact that natural increase (children born to members) accounts for most numerical increases in religions. Hence the description of Mormons, for example, misses all of the effort and the

structures designed to build the faith of members, which is one of the most distinctive features of each group. Given that natural increase accounts for the growth and decline of most groups at most points in their histories, this focus on mission to those outside the fold fails to describe essential aspects of each group. This is a classic case of the chosen focus illuminating some aspects and blinding the capacity to see others.

If the book had actually compared the ‘missions’ of religions it might have lived up to its promise. But aside from describing each in terms of mission there was no attempt to see differences in the aims of mission aside from recruiting those not already within the religion.

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