

11-1-2005

Missions, nationalism, and the end of empire

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Recommended Citation

Cole-Arnal, Oscar (2005) "Missions, nationalism, and the end of empire," *Consensus*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 2 , Article 15.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol30/iss2/15>

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shaped by the specific context of the Italian Renaissance, a study of this type serves as a broader reminder to pastors, students, and general readers of the way in which the arts can contribute to the development and understanding of Christian faith, especially in our modern visually-oriented culture.

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Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire

Brian Stanley, Editor

Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003
313 pages, \$46.19 Softcover

At a time when Christians become increasingly aware of powerful religious alternatives to Christianity both at home and abroad, churches must give more seriously critical attention to the meaning of their missionary work. Part of this task involves a serious examination of the history of Christian missions in a world that has passed from colonial imperialism to newer, more complex relations between western countries and the southern poorer nations that constitute the overwhelming majority of the world's population. This history leaves a legacy that, if unexamined, will continue the toxic behaviour of our past efforts. At the same time we can learn from more positive examples that emerge from our former practices. I believe that Brian Stanley's *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* makes a positive step toward such a fruitful analysis.

To be sure, the book suffers from virtually all examples of its type. It is a product of an academic conference where papers were presented by a variety of scholars on the common theme of missionary history. Consequently the entries reflect a fairly wide variety of topics (some

of more or less interest to any given reader) and quality. Since this latter judgment on quality remains fraught with a fair degree of subjectivity, I leave such assessments to readers who pick up and utilize this book. Suffice it to say that Dr. Stanley gathers all these articles under the most relevant theme of “the nature of the linkages in the mid-twentieth century between the Christian churches (and in particular their missionary bodies) and the dynamics of anti-colonial nationalism and decolonization in the non-Western world.” (1-2) Further, his introductory article sets a fine tone for the remainder of the book. In addition, all the articles hold faithfully to this broad theme of the interface between anti-colonial nationalism and the Christian faith, and it is a great credit to the book that Christian voices from the once colonized world have their place within this work.

The various articles include specific topics surrounding India, Africa and China, with additional pieces dealing with missionary attitudes in the interwar West. Especially chilling was Hartmut Lehmann’s study of the highly nationalistic, partly racist, perspectives of German Protestant missionaries between the two world wars. Given the number of Chinese and other Asian students at our seminary, my interest focussed on the articles dealing with China and its missions under both the People’s Republic and its Guomindang predecessor. I found both of these pieces to be of high quality.

My major criticism of this fine book remains a matter of debate. I am rather nervous of the notion post-colonial, precisely because I believe passionately that colonialism remains alive and virulent. Instead of direct colonial rule, which is virtually defunct, we now have a rapidly expanding economic neo-colonialism that manifests itself through the juggernaut known as corporate globalization. This involves a combination of the growing monopolization of the planet’s resources by trans-national corporations and their backing by puppet regimes, usually sustained by the military might of the United States. Without awareness of this, Christian missionaries are doomed to be extensions of this new lethal imperialism. Though a fine book, Stanley’s *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* needs to focus more clearly on this vital and cruel reality.

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