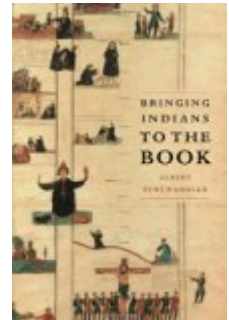


Albert Furtwangler. *Bringing Indians to the Book*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005. xii + 226 pp. \$22.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-295-98523-7.



Reviewed by Mary Wright

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This book's title is a misnomer, for it is less about Native people than missionaries. Perhaps *Bringing the Book* would be more apt. Careful exegesis of Euro-American Protestant missionaries' (and to a lesser extent explorers') writings support Albert Furtwangler's theory that literacy divided the missionaries from the Indians they meant to convert, yet underpinned their evangelical strategies. Books and writing both fueled divisions among the missionaries and provided emotional and spiritual refuge for those overwhelmed by their cultural isolation. Furtwangler uses Bernard DeVoto's *Across the Wide Missouri* (1947) in a telling beginning of the analysis. If Patricia Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1988) had been his jumping off point instead, the reader could be assured indigenous people or others of non-Euro ethnicities present in the American West would have been incorporated into a measured discussion of the important issues of colonization. Instead Furtwangler, as was typical of historians of the American West (such as DeVoto) from these

earlier times, focuses on the Euro-American colonist: the *white man*.

Section 1 considers William Clark's historic role in bringing missionaries to the Pacific Northwest. In a journey of several thousand miles to visit Clark, a party of Nez Perce and Flathead (Salish) Native men traveled to St. Louis and asked for Black Robes. Furtwangler investigates how word of their visit spread and includes, in an appendix, the letters first published in *The Christian Advocate* telling of their quest. Even with muddled endorsements from Clark, whom Americans perceived as the expert on the West, the report of the Indians request first fueled the mission campaigns of the Methodists (Jason Lee) and then American Board (Marcus Whitman) missions targeting the Pacific Northwest. Somewhat later Catholic missionaries, headed by Father Pierre de Smet, S. J., were dispatched from St. Louis, but this came from actual contact with the Native men and the burial of two of them in the Catholic cemetery. With that twenty-twenty hindsight allowed to historians, Furtwangler finds that hyperbole and wishful thinking underlay the Protestant

mission launch in response to the Indian's request.

Furtwangler does not consider the Northwest missions as part of a new world-wide Protestant missionary movement. American missions of the same era--among the Cherokee villages of America's southeast or those to the Hawaiian Islands--could have offered interesting comparisons and contrasts. And, of course, Protestant missionary efforts in India, China, Africa, and other imperial targets could also have been useful. The tendency to retreat to letter, report, and journal writing, which Furtwangler observes for Oregon missionaries, was actually a common response to cultural isolation, and the need to shore up the ragged and exposed vestiges of their self-defined European civilization. Similarly, tying Christianity to the book was a universal Protestant approach.

Section 2 compares the Lewis and Clark expedition's time in the Northwest to the Protestant missions, and finds similar geographic locations, whether a nightly camp or a developed mission farm. Differences emerge between the two groups, however, regarding goals, organization, leadership, views of Natives, and whether one was passing through or assumed neighbor status. For example, Plateau peoples welcomed Clark's ability to heal eye irritations, but forty-odd years later killed missionary Dr. Marcus Whitman for fear of his evil medical practices during an epidemic. Lewis and Clark employed the Great-White-Father-and-his-Red-Children paradigm, while former missionary and U.S. Sub-Agent for Indian Affairs Elijah White promoted the formal principles of the ten commandments and American law at the 1842 Nez Perce Council.

The missionaries' communication needs also differed significantly from those of Lewis and Clark. Missionaries found Chinook Jargon, the Northwest trade *patios*, difficult to use since it had few words to express Christian theological concepts. The American Board missionaries tried learning the Native languages, constructing lexi-

cons so it could be written, translating Bible passages, and then printing some of these on a hand-operated letter press obtained from the Hawaiian missions. Here, too, few Native words could stand-in for those of Christianity, since the Indian world view did not contain such concepts as sin. The small number of speakers for each language was also discouraging and support for English-based evangelizing gained ground. In the mission schools, English was the preferred language taught by the missionary wives or at the boarding school run by the Methodists. Larger questions regarding language are addressed in Section 3 (see below).

In section 4, Furtwangler glosses examples of colonial ambitions as well as the use of race. Jason Lee and the Methodists chose to establish their mission in the fertile Willamette Valley in western Oregon, rather than the arid and mountainous Plateau where the Flathead (Salish) and Nez Perce Indians resided. First, Lee had his eyes on settlement. What better place to establish the mission than where 90 percent of the indigenous people had died in epidemics just a few years earlier? Moreover, the American mission could counter-balance the virtual monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company in the region. Secondly, the flathead-ed Chinook people mentioned (and sketched) by Lewis and Clark were the real focus of the missionaries and those who supported them. Rev. Jason Lee included young Northwest Indians (whose foreheads had been compressed to designate their free status) in his New England fundraising and recruitment campaign. Had Furtwangler further examined this racial issue, he would have discovered Phrenology, the then-current belief that the shape of the head could be read to indicate the brain's areas for intelligence and personality characteristics, which Lee successfully tapped. This widespread movement and the desire to scientifically prove European racial superiority motivated the avid and grisly collection of American Indian skulls for measurement

through the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth.

Besides under-using race and empire in his analysis, Furtwangler attempts to moderate the current view of missionary intolerance and repression. Extensive excerpts from three Methodist missionary observations of important Native ceremonies underscore the anthropological information they collected and how their perceptions of Native life were nuanced and differed by individual. Rev. Henry Perkins proved the most sensitive, but that individual's work is more appropriately framed in Robert Boyd's *People of the Dalles: The Indians of the Wascopam Mission* (1996). The missionaries themselves, of course, helped construct their own stereotype of intolerance even as they stereotyped the dark and (select from a long list of negative adjectives and insert here) Northwest Native life. They compared Native plight with evidence of God's blessings and over-emphasized the missions actual progress, all to increase (or maintain) financial support.

Section 3 contains the core of Furtwangler's theories on literacy and its importance to missionary-Indian contact. He successfully investigates three internal crises generated by missionary writings against others in the mission, but finds other issues more problematic. He misses the extensive scholarly discussion on ways of knowing; the construction of worldviews by oral and written cultures; the effects of the spoken or the written word on memory and learning; hearing cultures and anthropological listening; and much else of consequence. He admits there is a spectrum of literacy, but does not critically consider writing as an author-driven modification of experienced reality without necessarily any correction for opposing views. His comparison of the literate missionary culture and the Natives oral culture is devoid of such theoretical inquiries and thereby verges on cultural insensitivity.

However, Furtwangler illuminates the role reading and writing played in the missionaries'

management of their cross-cultural and imperial experiences. The missionaries submitted manuscripts to the religious periodicals of the day, wrote letters to home churches, friends and family, filed reports to their mission boards, and wrote in their personal journals. The written communiqués provided lifelines to the East no matter how tenuous; but these were individual private works, conversations, if you will, with one's own self that could ignore the surrounding community. In this sense, a cultural wall divided the Indians and the missionaries, but the Americans widened the rift with their reading and writing practices. For Native peoples and those with an oral culture, daily/seasonal/lifelong interactions produce thick intertwined ropes connecting the community. Deep knowledge from oral traditions taught by the elders, from shared spiritual rituals, and from the practice of seasonal, familial, and life-cycle ceremonies also affirm membership in, and the worldview of, the group.

Many missionaries later expanded their writing efforts toward book-length manuscripts for America's pious readers market. But more than religious story telling was involved. Furtwangler misses the opportunity to discuss this production of knowledge function the missionaries served for America's colonial purposes. Negative portrayals of Natives allowed Euro-Americans to see them as the other, place them outside the societal "rules," and so more easily extend American expansion in the West. Some writings, such as *An Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (1838) by Rev. Samuel Parker, became how-to primers for the Oregon Trail and immigration to the Pacific Northwest. A similar best seller might provide needed post-mission income and revise the missionary's historic role by replacing failure with God-decreed purpose.

The difference between the Book, evangelical techniques, and the practice of a religion—not illiteracy—may account for Native disinterest in the mission version of Christianity, something of little

interest to Furtwangler. In addition to the forementioned individual/community divide, mission practices shouted exclusion. Separate church services for Indians and missionaries; differing treatment of Euro-Americans and Natives; demanding work or pay before sharing the mission farms harvest or other mission goods; and incredibly high standards demanded of Indians for church membership kept the Natives at arms length. Those aspects of Christianity that interested Natives--hymn singing was extremely popular, for instance--were not important for the Protestants. Natives' enthusiastic response to the Wascopam mission camp meetings, with its exciting community and social aspects and its direct spiritual experiences, might not have come as such a surprise to the missionaries, if they had not segregated themselves so successfully from the Indians.

Furtwangler does not address some aspects of mission history even when they did involve the literacy-oral issue. Mission women's writing and experiences are not fully used despite their learnedness, for many attended America's first female academies. The importance of example, of modeling the Christian family and farm is downplayed by Furtwangler, as well as spoken instruction, the use of translators or interpreters, school teaching, bringing Indian children into the mission home (adoption), and the training of female servants and male farmhands in appropriate work roles. His focus is exclusively on literature. Furtwangler even misrepresents a strategy combining visual, written, and material approaches by the Catholics.

The universally titled *Catholic Ladder*, a mnemonic device, instructed Natives on Christian history and was gifted, in its early years, by Fathers Blanchet and Demers to leaders interested in recounting it to others. The popularity of this Catholic device with the Indians is downplayed and possible Protestant influences or precursory teaching aids on the Catholic invention are highlighted. He focuses on the hand-painted single

version of a *Protestant Ladder* and even uses it on the book's cover. Like the Protestant missionaries of old, Furtwangler finds little to commend Catholic mission efforts and excludes them nearly wholesale from his analysis of literacy and missions.

Furtwangler's focus on the Methodist missions should be stated explicitly or a more thorough use of the American Board, Jesuit and Quebec-directed Blanchet missions is necessary. What is and is not contained in a book is, of course, the author's prerogative. Furtwangler compounds the early nineteenth-century missionary's oversight by repeating their exclusion of non-literate, often Native, matters from the mission. Increased cultural sensitivity to Native perspectives and a balanced historic account of Oregon's missions should have greater emphasis in this book. This thin book might be assigned successfully in undergraduate Pacific Northwest or American West history classes, if Indigenous perspectives are included elsewhere on the reading list. Despite Furtwangler's Euro-American focus, the book covers important topics in a readable style and includes significant extracts from primary documents. More advanced classes in Comparative Religion, Anthropology, Linguistics, or American Indian Studies could also use it for discussion purposes with the same proviso.

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