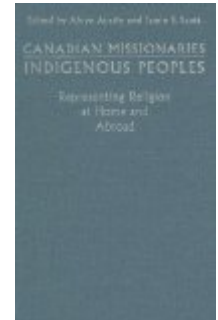


Alvyn Austin, Jamie S. Scott, eds.. *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. viii + 326 pp. \$68.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8020-3951-4.



Reviewed by Jennifer L. Bonnell

Published on H-Canada (February, 2006)

In her chapter exploring the life of Arthur Wellington Clah, a Tsimshian Christian evangelist in nineteenth-century northern British Columbia, Susan Neylan concludes that, "religious encounters between Natives and missionaries were dialogic meetings in which both parties changed through the process of translating and communicating their opinions and positions" (p. 101). Her words provide an appropriate summary of the complex forms of encounter and interaction discussed in Alvyn Austin and Jamie S. Scott's new collection, *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad*. Described by the editors as "a conversation between more traditional mission studies and contemporary scholarship in post-colonial and cultural studies" (p. 4), the collection brings together the works of twelve authors from a range of disciplines, including Canadian Aboriginal history, Chinese and Japanese history, religious studies, anthropology, and international relations, among others. As the title suggests, the collection focuses on aspects of the mission experience in Canada and abroad (in China, Japan, and the South Pacific particularly) from the 1820s

to the 1940s. While Catholic missions receive some coverage in France Lord's examination of the missionary collections of French Jesuits, the focus of the collection rests overwhelmingly with Protestant missionaries and their converts.

Editors Alvyn Austin and Jamie Scott describe their purpose as an attempt "to inform the reader about the complexity and multivalent nature of the missionary experience" (p. 4). Here they seek to move beyond the one-sided focus of earlier mission histories, which discussed the influence of "us" on "them," or, more fruitfully, explored the gendered and racialized assumptions that guided missionaries in their work. Austin and Scott take their cue instead from the groundbreaking work of John Webster Grant, whose *Moon of Wintertime* (1984) introduced the concept of "encounter" between the dominant culture and Native populations (p. 5). By juxtaposing the perspectives of missionaries with those of their converts, Austin and Scott attempt to simulate a conversation between colonizer and colonized, and in doing so, create a more nuanced history of missions. While they are not the first to do this—works by Myra

Rutherfordale (*Women and the White Man's God*, 2002) and Jean and John Comaroff (*Of Revelation and Revolution*, 1997) set precedents--the diversity of articles in this collection and the interdisciplinary scope of its contributors makes it a very strong contribution to the field.

Given my personal interest in public history and museums, I found the focus on material history in the third part of this volume particularly interesting. Here Austin and Scott tap in to the growing scholarly interest in missionary collections. Key works in this expanding field include Nicholas Thomas' *Entangled Objects* (1991) and collections by Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (*Colonialism and the Object*, 1998) and Michael O'Hanlon and Robert Welsch (*Hunting the Gatherers*, 2000), among others. These studies demonstrate, as Austin and Scott do, the significant contribution of artifacts to mission studies. Sources from material history not only enrich the evidence base for this field, they provide another means of "representing encounter" beyond existing documentary sources. Perhaps more significantly, objects may allow for greater interpretation of the Native side of the conversation than documentary sources often allow.

The book is divided into three sections. Part 1, "The Home Fields," focuses on the experience of Canadian missionaries and their converts in Canadian Native communities. Part 2, "Over the Seas and Far Away," looks at the experience of Canadian missionaries and their converts abroad, focusing particularly on China and Japan. Part 3, "Bringing It All Back Home," explores the souvenirs and "curios" that missionaries took from their work in domestic and foreign contexts.

The first part of the book uses the mission fields of Canada as a testing ground to outline themes and metaphors that resonate through the rest of the collection. Issues of race and gender are prominent here, as different articles juxtapose the discourse of evangelizers with Aboriginal perspectives on the Christianization process. Jamie S.

Scott's article traces the Christian metaphor of cultivation as it flows into practice among missionaries and state officials in nineteenth-century British North America. Focusing on three texts--two by Anglican missionaries and a third by a Conservative MP, on the subject of residential schooling--Scott shows how the church and state shared mutually reinforcing goals of settlement (with its implied possession and cultivation of land) and education (with its own discourse of improvement and "moral cultivation" of Aboriginal minds) in their policies towards Aboriginal peoples. Myra Rutherfordale explores the related metaphor of motherhood in her study of Anglican women missionaries in northern British Columbia, the Yukon, and the North West Territories from the 1860s to the 1950s. In her analysis of the diaries, letters, and public reports of about 130 women missionaries and missionary's wives, she shows how these women were positioned (and positioned themselves) as "mothers" of aboriginal women and children, and of the church itself. Rutherfordale suggests that this maternal identity, and the moral authority it implied, gave women a sense of status and responsibility, and allowed them access to non-traditional roles within the traditionally masculine mission environment.

Studies by Gail Edwards and Susan Neylan present an Aboriginal perspective on the Christianization process. Susan Neylan's article on Arthur Wellington Clah, a Native Christian evangelist in late-nineteenth-century northern British Columbia, provides an intriguing example of the complex subjectivities that arose out of Native-missionary encounters. Drawing from Clah's extensive journals and other writings, Neylan shows how he adapted his Christian beliefs to the local and cultural context in which he preached, incorporating Aboriginal metaphors into a syncretic and highly idiosyncratic form of evangelism. Clah's dedication to Christian principles and his belief in the spiritual equality of all peoples extended into the political realm, Neylan finds, when he used his Christian beliefs to challenge

government appropriations of Tsimshian lands in the 1880s. Gail Edwards continues this exploration of dual identities in her portrait of the Methodist missionary William Henry Pierce, whose mixed blood (part Tsimshian, part Scottish) secured him an ambiguous role as both "Aboriginal Other" and "missionary hero" in nineteenth-century Methodist literature (p. 69). Interestingly, Arthur Wellington Clah has a place to play in this story, too—as Pierce's maternal uncle, he likely passed on his dedication to Christian beliefs, and both men shared the experience of tutelage under the famous Anglican missionary William Duncan.

The second part of the book takes the tensions and themes established in domestic missions and explores them within foreign contexts. The four chapters in this section alternate, like those in the first section, between biographical studies of individuals and broader mission histories, and between the perspectives of missionaries and their native converts. Margo Gewurtz, for example, picks up on themes discussed by Neylan and Edwards when she attempts to "reveal the Chinese side of [the] partnership" in her study of Chinese Christian converts in a Presbyterian mission in North Henan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In her analysis of mission membership rolls and accounts of conversions, she finds that opportunities for enhanced status may have motivated marginalized individuals, in particular, to convert. Like Edwards and Neylan, however, Gewurtz finds that this status is constrained within the mission by established hierarchies of race and gender. Chinese women converts, for example, were rarely named in membership rolls; they stood "at the bottom of a pyramid whose apex was the male missionary" (p. 147). The subject of gender gets additional coverage in a chapter by Ruth Compton Brouwer, which explores women's roles in international missions bureaucracy between the wars. Brouwer focuses on the careers of three professional women and their contributions to the modernization of missions after World War I. Reflecting Myra

Rutherdale's findings in the Canadian context, Brouwer traces the development of new opportunities and roles for women in mainstream Protestant missions in this period. This adoption of new professional identities did not, however, translate into a critique of gender roles more broadly. Instead, missionary women continued to uphold established gender roles, stressing the importance of marriage and family as stabilizing forces for young women.

The third part of this collection is perhaps the most interesting, in that it introduces objects into the documentary record of encounters between missionaries and Native peoples. As France Lord comments, "although there has been considerable study of exhibitions and museums in nineteenth-century Canada, the specific field of missionary exhibits has hardly been touched" (p. 206). Not surprisingly, the missionary collections discussed here reflect the goals, interests, and assumptions of their collectors. France Lord's chapter on the Quebec Jesuits, for example, shows how their collections served the purpose of generating support, both financial and otherwise, for their missions abroad (in Alaska, from 1907-12; and later in China, from 1918-50). "Curios" displayed in the Chinese Art Museum near Quebec City satisfied visitors' appetite for the exotic while sales of foreign handicrafts in the museum shop financed mission activities.

Beyond their practical purpose, collections also reinforced the difference of the exotic "other," and therefore the need for missions as assimilating and evangelizing forces. Barbara Lawson comments in her chapter on Canadian mission collections from the New Hebrides (today's Vanuatu, in the South Pacific): "missionaries used objects to authenticate experiences in distant locales and to establish a visual impression of 'heathenism' more dramatic than could be achieved with the written word" (p. 256). This Victorian fascination with the exotic is especially clear in Arthur Smith's article on the collections of the

Canadian Presbyterian missionary Joseph Annand. Through an analysis of Annand's artifact collections, together with his extensive journals and correspondence produced during his forty years (1873-1912) in the South Pacific, Smith pieces together the assumptions of British superiority and Native cultural backwardness that guided Annand's collecting. The "curios" he collected (including clubs and spears, sacred objects, and everyday household objects) from rapidly shrinking indigenous populations were for Annand not so much testaments of indigenous customs and practices as relics of the heathen practices he sought to eliminate (p. 268). Collections such as Annand's tell us more about the collector, Smith concludes, than the cultures from which they were drawn.

Another discussion that emerges in these final chapters surrounds what Lawson calls the "symbiotic relationship" involved in missionary collecting. Here we return to the central theme of the book, the notion of the relationship between missionaries and Natives as a dialogic encounter, one that involved negotiation and adjustment on both sides. Lawson, more than the other contributors in this section, is particularly interested in uncovering the two-way nature of missionary collections. Building upon her earlier work in *Collected Curios: Missionary Tales from the South Seas* (1994), which noted but did not explore the dialogic nature of missionary collecting, Lawson shows how both Natives and missionaries had objectives in this exchange. Her subjects, Canadian Presbyterians Hugh and Christina Robertson, shared similar objectives to those of other missionaries: collections provided a useful visual representation of conversion, and stimulated support for missionary endeavors. Native islanders had their own objectives: for them, selling traditional objects was a way to acquire valued European goods. Lawson locates a degree of control of the trade among Natives who made certain objects available, while withholding others that remained valuable for practical uses. Collecting, she con-

cludes, "is a tangential process to social encounter": missionary collections can offer insights into relationships, rather than a "mere history of extraction by Europeans and other visitors" (p. 257).

An interesting and perhaps limiting aspect of these studies is that they investigate "traces" of collections. Collections are no longer intact: their contents are shared by different museums, or their provenance has shifted. As France Lord comments, the documentary record--both written and visual--becomes a vital supplement in piecing together the history of these collections: what they contained, in some cases; how they were exhibited; and how objects were originally described.

The final chapter by Linfu Dong shifts the focus away from the collections themselves, and the challenges they present, to focus squarely on the life and personality of the collector. In his biographical study of the Nova Scotian James Mellon Menzies and his missionary work in China in the early twentieth century, Dong describes a different kind of collector than we have seen in previous chapters. Following his acclaimed 1914 discovery of the "Waste of Yin," a site of ancient Chinese religious activity, Menzies amassed a large personal collection of oracle bones, relics of religious offerings from the Shang dynasty (1400-1200 BC). Menzies' professional and scientific approach, his apparent lack of interest in economic gain (for himself or for his church), and his insistence that the objects stay in China distinguished him from other missionary collectors. His reasons for collecting also differed. For him, archaeology was a way to prove the presence of God in ancient China. Rejecting the cultural superiority of the West, he believed that God had not forsaken China, and that Christianity could be revived there by adapting it to Chinese cultural norms. Although Dong's account is overly laudatory in places--for example, he describes Menzies as at once "quiet and modest" and "a man of commit-

ment, determination, and principle" (p. 283)--we nevertheless get the sense of a collector with a distinctly professional, twentieth-century mindset. His use of archaeology as a means to a "new evangelism" is particularly interesting, and suggests new directions of inquiry for studies of twentieth-century missionary collections.

This interdisciplinary collection is a valuable contribution to the field of mission studies, and to the fields of native, religious, and cultural studies more broadly. By pairing mission with native perspectives, and maintaining a consistent focus on issues related to gender and race, the editors are largely successful in their goals of adding complexity and multiplicity of experience to mission relationships. Greater clarity could have been achieved, perhaps, by naming the volume *Canadian Protestant Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples*, given the fact that only one chapter in twelve explores the Catholic mission experience. Perhaps the most important contribution of this book is its inclusion of perspectives from material history alongside histories of the missionary-Native encounter. This juxtaposition both enriches the evidence base for mission studies, and adds legitimacy to the new and growing field of missionary ethnography. The challenge, I suppose, lies in fleshing out any kind of "two-way conversation" between missionaries and the Native peoples they attempted to convert. While objects contribute another site of dialogue, the fact that they were collected and interpreted by missionaries brings us back to the dilemma of the one-way conversation: too often we can only imagine or speculate what the "other side" might have said.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-canada>

Citation: Jennifer L. Bonnell. Review of Austin, Alvyn; Scott, Jamie S., eds. *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad*. H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11396>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.