



**Judith Becker, Brian Stanley, eds..** *Europe as the Other: External Perspectives on European Christianity*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013. 277 pp. \$78.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-525-10131-5.

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This collection of conference papers promises a postcolonial take on familiar themes in European studies and in mission and imperial history. Namely, it seeks to answer: What were the meanings of “European” and “Christian” in the context of intercultural and transnational interactions? Homing in on Christianity as one of the constituent features of what it means to be “European,” the contributors to this volume eschew the usual explorations of how Europeans defined themselves against the “Other” and instead “offer a ‘reverse-perspective’” that emphasizes “how those considered to be the ‘Other’ conceived of Europe” (p. 16). As the editors point out, this outsider view of Europe was inextricably tied to perspectives on Christianity, since, to the indigenous people studied in this collection, Europeans were by definition Christian, and Christians were inescapably foreign and almost always generically European. Nevertheless, this volume attempts to complicate the distinction between insider and outsider by insisting that non-Europeans could function as insiders and Europeans could become outsiders if they adopted the proper perspective.

Most of the chapters in the volume analyze case studies of Africans, Asians, or Europeans as they encountered and critiqued European Christianity. This fine-grained approach allows for a broad survey across the chapters of the diversity

of “outsider” experiences with European Christians. The contributions generally examine two classes of interaction: those that occurred when non-Europeans traveled to Europe, and those that occurred in Africa or Asia as locals observed Europeans in their own lands. Non-Europeans, these contributions show, appreciated, critiqued, adopted, and rejected features of European Christianity. In doing so, they not only contributed to the development of Christianity, but also complicated ideas of the connection between Christianity and the adjective “European.”

Judith Becker’s opening chapter departs from the “reverse-perspective” by analyzing how British and Continental (mostly German) missionaries during the 1830s came to reconceptualize their own Christianity as “European” through contact with indigenous people. For Becker, it was only when European missionaries from different nations experienced the mission field and cooperated with one another that they began thinking of themselves, and of their common cultural background, as generally European rather than distinctly national. “Europe” thus served as a useful point of comparison for their home audiences when missionaries described the cultures and landscapes of their new environments. In addition, mission societies tried to explain and justify the missionary endeavor by appealing to the his-

tories of European colonialism and of European conversions to Christianity, which ultimately deepened the missionaries' own association of Christianity with "Europeanness." Although missionaries would have insisted that the character traits of a genuine Christian were culturally non-specific, Becker argues that missionary discourse on Christian and non-Christian traits, habits, and values reveals a process through which Christian values took on an additionally European emphasis. The ultimate result, Becker claims, was that Christianity became European through contact with the Other, and yet as a result of this particularization, it became in turn "something that could be regarded as the 'Other'" (p. 52).

Of course, if Christianity could be regarded as the Other, the question remains, who regarded it as such? Two chapters, by R. G. Tiedemann and Thoralf Klein, examine Chinese responses to Christianity and Christian missionaries. China offers an especially interesting case for analysis in part because of the relatively constant hostility to, or at least suspicion of, Christianity by many Chinese—particularly scholarly elites—from the time of the first Jesuit missions to China in the sixteenth century until the twentieth. R. G. Tiedemann surveys the broad sweep of Christianity in China, beginning with the first missionary endeavor, by Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri in 1582, and ending with prominent anti-Christian movements of the 1920s. According to Tiedemann, Chinese elites had always regarded Christianity and its missionaries with suspicion, but after the Opium Wars even ordinary Chinese began to think of both missionaries and Chinese converts as a danger to "the cultural and moral principles of Chinese society" (p. 116). In addition, Christians in China received no relief after the fall of the Qing dynasty. As radical nationalists flourished in the 1920s, they not only disavowed Confucianism, but also repudiated Christianity for its perceived links to Western imperialism and for its seemingly irrational creed. In response, a group of Chinese Protestant leaders began to articulate a

uniquely Chinese theology and ecclesiology. In this way, at least one group of Chinese churchmen—apparently small enough that Tiedemann may overstate their importance—developed a kind of Chinese liberal theology and an opposition to "Western" denominationalism that effectively worked to indigenize Christianity and distance it from the Western Other.

Thoralf Klein, on the other hand, restricts his focus to a period following the Opium Wars and ending the 1920s. His contribution uses texts and images to analyze the epithet "foreign demons" and how it was applied in particular ways to European and North American missionaries. Klein points out that to the Chinese, ghosts or demons were identified as strangers, and thus the terms were primed for application to foreigners from as early as the sixteenth century. However, he attempts to map out how the application of "demon" to foreign missionaries was a form of "othering" that evolved over time. Klein argues that this anti-Christian discourse treated Christian missionaries and Western culture as interchangeable in the mid-nineteenth century, but that the Boxer rebellion and the anti-imperialist student activism each developed a more detailed critique that specified missionary roles within and contributions to the presence of Western culture and political power in China. Klein's arguments are in places speculative and tentative, yet he offers a thought-provoking conclusion that the best way of conceptualizing this demonizing discourse is perhaps as a kind of "Occidentalism" in which "anti-Christian caricatures must be seen not only as a reaction to 'Western' dominance, but also as the outgrowth of a Sinocentric tradition that dates back to Chinese antiquity" (p. 148).

Perhaps the "outsiders" best positioned to critique European Christianity were those who not only embraced the religion, but who also had the opportunity to visit Europe and see a supposedly Christian society up close. David Killingray and Kokou Azamede examine African Christians who

visited or resided in Europe. Killingray catalogues the efforts of British mission organizations to send Africans back to Great Britain throughout the nineteenth century in order to train them for further mission service. The paucity of sources written by those Africans means that he examines this educational phenomenon from the perspective of the missionaries and their organizations. Although missionaries to Africa commonly held that the best mission worker was an African who remained close to his ethnic group but was firmly converted in heart and mind to Christianity and “Christian civilization,” missionaries nonetheless debated the wisdom of sending Africans to Great Britain. On the one hand, the costs were high and a number of the students died, and on the other hand, some mission personnel worried that exposure to European society would engender an assertiveness in their African converts that they interpreted as adopting “ideas beyond their position” (p. 174). In the end, Killingray notes, efforts to send African converts back to Britain for education and training had largely ceased by the beginning of the twentieth century. The combination of misgivings in missionary circles about the endeavor, the founding of more training institutions in Africa, and an increasing colonial emphasis on “white domination and black subservience” meant that probably no more than 150 Africans participated in such programs (pp. 194-195). Thus a potentially rich source of commentary on and critique of Europe from an outside perspective was cut short.

Similar to, but more fruitfully than Killingray, Kokou Azamede examines African converts’ reflections on European Christianity after visiting Europe. In one of the volume’s most valuable and interesting chapters, Azamede restricts his focus to Ewe people of West Africa who converted under the work of the North German Mission Society and were sent back to Germany for further training. Azamede notes that while official reports recorded entirely positive experiences of European Christianity, the private correspondence of

the Ewe students reveals a much more nuanced picture of their attitudes towards the Christianity they observed during their stays. In some cases, students chafed against strict rules that governed their interactions with Europeans; in others, they noted that racial discrimination at the hands of Europeans made a mockery of their ostensible spiritual equality. Occasionally they observed what they saw as hypocrisy among the missionaries, but even more so, a number of the Ewe students simply concluded that the missionaries’ version of Christianity was not entirely appropriate for their Ewe cultural context. For example, one of the students, Hermann Yoyo, concluded after deep consideration that the mission’s prohibition of polygamy among converts reflected a European cultural tradition rather than an essential Christian teaching. Yoyo was “searching for a cultural alternative, while entering a transcultural process” as he sought a way to reconcile polygamy and Christianity (p. 215). However, his uncompromising stance on the issue led Yoyo to resign from the mission—regardless of how well considered his thesis on this issue, the mission refused to bend on polygamy. Azamede’s interpretation of these clashes as an attempt on the part of the Ewe students to “enter the new age of modernity” is unconvincing, yet he nevertheless demonstrates clearly that the Ewe students could be thoroughly convinced of Christianity’s validity while critiquing elements of the faith delivered by the mission as European impositions on a faith that could be readily adapted to other cultural contexts (p. 218).

In the final chapter, Andrew F. Walls further develops some of the themes Azamede explored, particularly the possibility of selective appropriation of European culture. Walls examines two converts who were each formed in both the British colonial and Scottish mission environments. The Revs. Tiyo Soga from South Africa and Behari Lal Singh from India both received Western educations and spent some time in Great Britain. Moreover, the colonial worlds in which

each lived presented environments in which the European Other was in some sense unavoidable. According to Walls, both Singh and Soga were uniquely suited to interact creatively and fruitfully with this context. They were “negotiators” who “had met the Other at close quarters in Europe, knew it well in its strengths and its weaknesses; they had appropriated what they saw as its strengths, without losing their original identity” (p. 248). Walls shows that “outsiders” could be very sophisticated observers of Christianity and European culture, distinguishing between what was Christian and what was merely European, taking what seemed useful from each and retaining from their own cultures what was of enduring value. Ultimately, Singh and Soga represent the rich promise possible in contact with the European Other. The two ministers, Walls notes, were “proprietors” of the contemporary discourse of civilization; in both cases, “they do not obliterate the past, but refine it” (p. 254).

This collection promises a compelling way of reconceptualizing European identity by viewing European Christianity through the eyes of the “Other,” yet a number of the essays fall short of that lofty goal. Some contain a wealth of useful description, but precious little analysis. Perhaps such shortcomings are not unexpected in a collection of conference papers; nevertheless, many were thus more tantalizing than stimulating or challenging. Additionally, the theoretical framework of “insiders” versus “outsiders” was too vaguely conceptualized and applied. In particular, the inclusion in some essays of “critical” Europeans as outsiders stretched this binary into a distinction without a meaningful difference. Finally, the volume’s commitment to a “postcolonial” approach to the encounter between European Christianity and non-European Christians in some chapters seemed artificial, more like a theoretical veneer covering otherwise standard historical inquiry than truly new readings of such encounters. Nevertheless, the topics of these contributions represent potentially rich sources of future re-

search. Hopefully the authors of this collection will continue in the years ahead to develop these ideas more fully into substantial and insightful treatments.

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