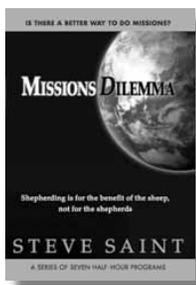


# Book Reviews & Notes

*Missions Dilemma: DVD and Workbook*, by Steve Saint  
(ITEC, 2008)

—reviewed by Carol Lewis



It is estimated that 1.5 million US Christians travel overseas annually to participate in a short-term mission experience. Scholars, clergy, and laypeople alike are increasingly questioning the value of these trips, questioning if indeed, they are worth the investment of time and money (approximately \$2.4 billion annually) that they require. Recent research

has found that STM trips generally result in few long-term effects among receiving peoples.

Now, Steve Saint weighs in on the debate in his new 7-part DVD series, which was designed to build on concepts found in his book, *The Great Omission* (2001). Each session begins with introductory remarks from Saint, follows with interviews of “receivers,” and concludes with comments from a studio audience. A workbook accompanies the series. Each chapter summarizes key points of the sessions and provides thoughtful, penetrating questions, designed to spark group discussions.

Saint presents his viewers with a “missions dilemma.” “Missions is broken,” he says, “Are we willing to do what we can to fix the problem—no matter what the cost? Are we going to conduct missions as we have up to the present—or are we finally ready and willing to wrestle with key issues to make it better?” He asks goers to consider how they would feel “. . .if missions was done to them like they do it to others.”

Author, speaker, son of a martyred missionary, Steve Saint knows missions “from the inside (the receiver’s view) out.” His goal is to help his audience begin to hear and appreciate that point of view as well. Short-term trips, he says, are harmful to receiving peoples. Why is that? We parachute into places and begin to solve people’s problems before we know anything about them. “We need to see things the way ‘receivers’ see them,” he says. In “Missions Dilemma,” Saint helps us hear their point of view.

The DVDs are well supported by interviews with receivers who give their point of view on missionaries and their work. Saint acts as a bridge between receivers and goers, taking his viewing audience deep into the Ecuadorian jungle where he grew up, educating his western visitors on how the Waorani people see them and “their mission.”

Saint’s questions are tough, but he is personable and connects with his listeners without loading guilt on them. He doesn’t overload his speech with missiological jargon, but uses layman’s terms. His goal is always clear: To help goers understand missions from the receivers’ point of view. Gently he leads viewers through a process of discovery to open eyes, minds and hearts to the unintended effects of their work. He asks, “Try to imagine how your visit looked to them.”

This series will be a good resource for missions pastors, missions committees and laypeople who would truly like to do missions better and are looking for a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of their short-term overseas programs. Considering, however, our natural reluctance to be self-critical, coupled with the emotional and financial investment Christians bring to this topic, going through “Missions Dilemma” will be a sobering exercise for many. And so Saint prefaces the series with a warning: Processing this material will be uncomfortable.

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*Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India, 1863-1937: Contending with Marginality*, by Chandra Mallampalli (RoutledgeCurzon, London and New York, 2004, 305+xiv pp.)

—reviewed by H. L. Richard

This excellent historical study outlines the roots of the marginality of Christianity in India, opening up many issues for discussion on what Christianity is and should be in India today (the book does not even hint at what the author thinks on these current issues). As Mallampalli himself introduces,

How different streams and offshoots of Christianity within the Madras Presidency came under the umbrella of a single “Indian Christian community” is a question that pervades this study. (pg. x)

The book is in three parts, the first looking at legal constructions of religious identity in India. The second considers how differently Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians reacted to political trends and how they positioned themselves in emerging India. Caste and conversion and community are the focus of the third section.

Section one highlights how three major pieces of legislation by the British government and their interpretation by colonial courts contributed to the marginalization of Indian Christians. Mallampalli points out that

while missionaries attempted to appropriate British liberal values to the cause of converts, princes and British officials

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were far more concerned about protecting Hindu institutions from the potentially disruptive effects of conversion. (pg. 21)

Laws related to converts were first about the loss that high caste Hindus endured due to social ostracism after conversion. The *Lex Loci* act of 1850 was ostensibly to protect the civil rights of those who renounced or were excluded from their religion. The Indian Succession Act of 1865 brought Indian and European Christians into the same legal category. As Mallampalli points out,

It was not merely by grouping them with Europeans, however, that the Succession Act marginalized Christians from Hindu society. By treating them as a homogeneous group, the judiciary denied to Christians what would eventually become a defining characteristic of Hinduism, unity in diversity. As the legal definition of "the Christian community" became increasingly narrow, the legal definition of "Hindu" became increasingly elastic. (pg. 51)

The Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872 was the third legislative enactment that guided the courts towards establishing Christianity as a religion in contrast to Hinduism and Christians as a separate community, despite evidence to the contrary.

Efforts to regulate Indian Christian marriages by means of a single Anglican law often violated the actual consciousness of Christian converts from villages. Such Christians, often having converted in groups, retained many features of their caste community...The Madras High Court's application of the Indian Christian Marriage Act, as we shall see, had the effect of separating a "Christian community" from the domain of "Hindu caste society" recognized by the courts. (pg. 61)

Mallampalli does an excellent job of illustrating and demonstrating his points by analysis of various court rulings.

Section two focuses on political developments, highlighting the marginalization of Protestants from political involvement while Roman Catholics gained a political voice by emphasizing their status as a separate community. Chapter six on the "The Protestant Disavowal of Christian Communalism, 1910-1933" gives a survey of a seminal chapter in Protestant history in India. The marginalization of Protestants is especially ironic in that

A survey of the principle Christian newspapers of the early twentieth century reveals two dominant concerns among Indian [Protestant] Christians: the desire to Indianize Christianity, and the call to a greater degree of Indian patriotism. (pg. 111)

A critical issue that needs to be addressed is how and why, in South India, Indian Protestant elites had come to be excluded

from the very imaginings of cultural identity to which missionary labor had contributed. (pg. 110)

One major problem Mallampalli identifies is that Protestants focused on all-India, Sanskritic developments to the neglect of local vernacular affairs which were the driving force in south India where Christianity was strongest. Protestants took the seeming high road and refused to seek communal representation in politics, yet this contributed to their becoming voiceless. International Christian notions of a unified church and a spiritual calling also contributed.

Indian Protestant notions of what it meant to Indianize Christianity were centered upon forms of worship, control over church administration, and theological issues. Far less did they advocate a Christian vernacular tradition as a means to Indianization. In this respect, Protestant elites even departed from the groundwork laid by prominent Indian Christians of the previous century. (pg. 116)

*This project of trying to appear more Hindu remained a largely cosmetic one*, since it lacked a vernacular base upon which to nurture a truly translated religion. In spite of the homage they paid to national culture and national issues, educated Indian Protestants remained enclosed within the scope of their own concerns, which were defined by church structures, ecumenical networks and church-related activities. (pg. 118)

Roman Catholic Christians took almost the exact opposite approach of the Protestants.

Catholic leaders stressed the distinctiveness of their culture, the strength of their community boundaries and the need to organize themselves for political action. (pg. 134)

Initially Protestant Christians were deemed among the chief enemies of the Catholics, but eventually situations forced compromise in this area. Yet at the Round Table Conference in London in 1932 there was a total division in Christian objectives. The Protestants, as already noted, refused communal representation. Mallampalli summarizes the Catholic position.

Catholic opinion surrounding the Round Table Conference was marked by three dominant features. These were: (1) anxieties over the preservation of Catholic identity; (2) a desire to emulate the politics of Indian Muslims; and (3) an acceptance of communal politics as a mode of political engagement that was as legitimate and just as "Indian" as Indian nationalism itself. (pg. 144)

Mallampalli demonstrates that *the high minded Protestant position led to even greater marginalization than the Catholic position*, as the latter joined the fray with many other

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interest groups seeking the best outcome for their particular community.

Section three takes the developing arguments into more deeply complicated and convoluted fields. Gandhi, Ambedkar and debates on religion and conversion are helpfully surveyed. The closing chapter of the book analyzes the Dalit situation.

...in the case of Catholics, a high emphasis on communal and institutional boundaries and belief in the legitimacy of communal electorates appears to have coincided with a tendency among Adi-Catholics [Dalit Catholics] to press for integration within the structures of the Church. By contrast, *the weakening of communal boundaries and disavowal of communalism by Protestant elites in the name of nationalism seems to have coincided with the emergence of a separate Dalit consciousness.* (pg. 172)

Mallampalli shows how elite Catholics resisted the efforts of Dalit Catholics, by far a majority, for equal status. Cases were taken to court and the courts tended to rule that *Christianity does not even recognize caste so no complaints on that basis are valid.*

*Protestants claimed to uphold the anti-caste position*, but an influx of Dalit converts and the politicizing of conversion created many tensions. Mallampalli focuses on the complex struggles of Bishop V. S. Azariah, and the situations of backslidden converts. For Azariah,

*The universality of Christian belief remained in constant tension with particularities of caste, regional and national identities.* The pan-Christian solidarity nurtured by his ecumenical involvement tempered his enthusiasm for Indian nationalism. (pg. 186)

The Dalit poet Gurram Joshua exemplifies the post-Christian experience that molded Dalitism.

In such cases, Dalit converts to the Christian religion neither reverted to past ritual observances nor fully appropriated the Christian identity engendered by ecclesiastical structures. Instead, *their persistent experience of untouchability lead them into a social space that was marginal to both "Sanskritic" and "Christian" worlds.* (pg. 188)

*Unable to identify themselves completely with the agenda of any particular "religion," they remained nested in the consciousness of their backward status.* When the Christian ethos of their post-baptismal experience "receded" from the picture, what remained were not devotees of a different "religion," but persons shaped by many systems, none of which had fulfilled promises of its own rhetoric. This journey from "Christian consciousness" to a particular jati [caste] (for example, "Madiga") or "Dalit" consciousness was

fueled by the failure of both Church and Government to recognize and respond to the disadvantages faced by Dalit Christians. (pg. 190)

In a succinct and impressive conclusion Mallampalli summarizes his findings. *The dynamics of religious change and debates on conversion as carried on in India today are thoroughly colonial.* "Ironically, it was courts of law established under British rule which solidified the very prejudices against Christians that are invoked by the Hindu Right today" (pg. 196). "Civil disabilities" of high caste converts had first led to laws that identified a separate Christian community; the influx of Dalits changed the parameters. Now

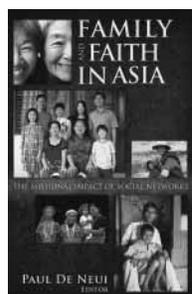
it was not the loss of status, but the supposed acquisition of status through the act of conversion [to Christianity], that disqualified them [Dalits] from obtaining state assistance. (pg. 200)

His closing comments highlight the difference of Christianity in teaching no set system of personal law.

The absence of fixed cultural criteria, which define a Christian, has greatly enhanced the potential for Christians to adapt to any variety of cultural, linguistic or societal contexts. This process of adaptation, however, has been undermined whenever imperial structures, whether colonial or nationalistic, have institutionalized false assumptions about the cultural fit of a given class of people. It is hoped that *this book will serve as a case study of the institutional sources of marginality and alternative strategies for political integration for many classes of disadvantaged minorities.* (pg. 202)

*Family and Faith in Asia: The Missional Impact of Social Networks*, Paul de Neui, ed. (William Carey Library Publishers, Pasadena, CA, 2010, 352 pp.)

—reviewed by Brad Gill



Amidst the buzz of new emerging "mission from" the burgeoning Asian church, it's refreshing to see this latest compilation of essays from the 2009 SEANET forum on "mission to" the Buddhist world. Their previous forums are published and have addressed different missiological subjects ranging from communicating the gospel into Buddhist contexts, to holistic ministries, to the urban challenge in Asia. But one has the

sense from this new volume that they feel they're hitting pay-dirt: that the family is the fundamental institution and primary determinant to how Buddhists will come to Christ.

Paul de Neui has corralled a distinguished list of indigenous voices around the familial life of Buddhist peoples. Rather than being a top-heavy Buddhist religious study, this selection of articles makes the social institution of family the lens through which to view the Buddhist world. It's fascinating to me, and endorsed again and again by these authors, that a Buddhist world that coheres in, around and through family life has so very little said on the subject in canonical Buddhism. Maybe it's understandable from a largely monastic religious movement, but a religion like Judaism, with its concrete legal and ethical prescriptions surrounding family, is a stunning contrast. But while Buddhism does not espouse a particular form of family life, these authors are quick to point out that the Buddhist "ethos," with its ethical precepts and guidelines, thoroughly undergirds and colors marital and household relations. In fact, this forum claims that historic impediments to the gospel like ancestor veneration or even new region-wide scourges like prostitution can only be understood in light of these Buddhist values and how they undergird family. Again, the plea of this book is that family is the key to unlocking the evangelization of the Buddhist world.

So the first half of the book is an analysis of the family as a social network colored through and through by "filial piety." The idea of the gospel getting effectively "inside" this Buddhist world is measured by how the family successfully responds and coheres under the impact of the gospel. Generally the authors recognize the alienation of the churches from Buddhist life, and how conversion so often isolates new converts from their honorific and deferential family background. Something is usually ruptured along the way. So a chapter like "A Day in the Life of a Sinhala Buddhist Family" takes the reader into the sensitive "folk" world of the Buddhist family. In the chapter "Duty, Obligation and Prostitution" one sees how the ethics of a Buddhist family can reinforce sex-trafficking. And the chapter "The Ritual of Reconciliation of Thai Culture" offers an indigenous model of family reconciliation to ease the conflicted realities of conversion. In my estimation, this section was superior to the final chapters on marriage, for each of these chapters is contextually sensitive to deeper realities of filial piety, working with it rather than against it in the conversion process.

Two chapters are dedicated to the deeply ingrained phenomenon of ancestor veneration. They contain a very illuminating historical review of the "rejectionist view" of ancestor veneration within Protestant mission. They also offer a thorough analysis of the promptings, motivations

and worldview behind this veneration. The reader can begin to understand how this veneration might be distinguished from "worship" and "idolatry." The diagrams in this section are very helpful in sorting out this historically difficult impediment to Christian witness.

This collection doesn't get stuck on some static Buddhist model of family, but sites throughout its pages the diachronic development of family throughout Buddhist Asia. G.P.V. Somaratna explores pre-Christian Sinhalese polyandry and polygamy and the subsequent sacramentalization of marriage under the impact of Christian mission in the 19th century, influencing the development of marriage institutions which often are assumed to be merely Buddhist tradition. Mitsuo Fukuda's "A New Family Model for Japanese People" traces the modern morphing of the Japanese family. He helps the reader appreciate how post-war urban, national and global forces shaped the Japanese family, and how this calls for a new model of ministry. This book is a well-rounded contextual study that includes both the persistent indigenous presence of Buddhism and the impact of the Western world in determining the social dynamics of family in Asia today.

This book is a great piece to put in the hands of the younger mind seeking to minister in Buddhist Asia. For it is family that so often roots the more ephemeral Buddhist thought in an ethical map of relations, a map that must be understood for effective service. But for any mission-minded person, this book is a fascinating and very concrete way to take on that foreign and mysterious Buddhist world. **IJFM**