

Book Reviews

Review of *For God and Globe*. Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War*. xi, 250pp. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015.

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“The evangelization of the world in this generation.” Inspired by the ambitious slogan, known at the time as the missionary watchword, thousands of eager American students ventured abroad as Christian missionaries beginning in the late nineteenth century. The Protestant foreign missionary movement—led by figures such as John R. Mott (1865-1955; 漢名: 穆德), chairman of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)—established a vast organizational network that encompassed the entire world. Through the building of numerous schools, churches, and hospitals in East Asia and beyond, the movement gradually constructed an institutional infrastructure that underpinned America’s overseas “moral empire.”



By the 1920s, however, the same missionaries began to question their idealistic championing of America as a model for the world to emulate. Deeply disturbed by rising racial prejudices at home, and influenced by their direct exposure to global currents of anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and racial unrest abroad, missionary reformers developed an increasing sympathy toward the plight of non-Western peoples. Michael G. Thompson’s *For God*

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and Globe elucidates this crucial turning point in America's foreign missionary enterprise with the innovative framing device of "Christian internationalism," which allows him to bring fresh theoretical insights to the history of interwar missions and its wider implications on international relations.

The expert analysis of Thompson—who currently teaches at Australia Catholic University—offers a robust and compelling theoretical framework with which to explain the emerging system of early twentieth-century U.S.-East Asia relations. Unlike conventional histories that take for granted the idea that Protestant foreign missions was simply an extension of U.S. state power which provided an ideological cover for expansionism, Thompson argues that Christian internationalism of the 1920s functioned as a check against the racist and imperialist tendencies of America—against what Sherwood Eddy (1871-1963; 漢名:埃迪), another influential YMCA leader who worked alongside Mott, pointedly called the "white peril." Defined as a movement of thought originating from the missionary experience, Christian internationalism took shape through the proliferation of new enterprises dedicated to facilitating Christian reflection on the ethics of international relations: e.g. world conferences, travel seminars, new forms of print and periodical culture, and ecumenical study commissions.

Such unique origins gave it an intellectual character that was distinct from other emerging internationalisms of the interwar period. Unlike the Wilsonian liberal internationalism that predominates the scholarship on this period, missionary-rooted Christian internationalism was distinguished by its lack of focus on international law and international institutions. It stressed instead the importance of non-state, person-to-person interactions, positing the centrality of cultural, and especially racial, issues in international relations. Moreover, in contrast to the Euro-centric emphasis of legalist and institutionalist internationalism, Christian internationalism derived its insights from its lived experience in the Asia Pacific region, which, along with the Middle East and Africa, was the main target of missionary efforts in the early twentieth century. Given this background, it becomes easier to understand why the YMCA network, cultivated by the likes of Mott and the famous Japan missionary Sidney Gulick (1860-1945), was instrumental in the formation of the world's first international non-governmental organization (INGO) dedicated to cultural diplomacy and race relations in the Pacific: the Institute of Pacific Relations.

In addition to helping to explain the rise of pioneering Asia Pacific-focused INGOs, Christian internationalism itself constituted a formidable, if often neglected, influence on the international stage. To illustrate this, *For God and Globe* divides its chapters into two parts: the first part consisting of three

chapters discussing the intellectual impact of *The World Tomorrow*, a New York-based journal financed and ran by missionary internationalist leaders Sherwood Eddy and his associate, Kirby Page (1890-1957), from 1926 to 1934. Through charting the rise and fall of the journal—which represented a diverse coalition including Christian socialists, Christian pacifists, black interracial activists, Quakers, YMCA and YWCA leaders, and Socialist Party leaders—Thompson argues that its editors, and Page in particular, formed the leading edge of a current of missionary-connected criticism of U.S. imperial power that has been largely forgotten in the historiography. According to Thompson, *The World Tomorrow* played the role of a “foreign policy counter-public” (a term borrowed from communications theory signifying a discursive position that sets itself up against the mainstream public opinion), that used didactic, middlebrow forms of writing as well as mass survey techniques to formulate a critique of U.S. nationalism and hegemony. The radicalness of its political stance and methodology is crystallized in a notable 1931 letter to the editor from General Douglas MacArthur, who voiced his severe disapproval of the journal’s constant questioning of the (to him, self-evident) assumption of America as a “Christian” nation.

The second part of the book comprises four chapters centering on ecumenical world conferences as a site of collective deliberation that gave rise to a new, distinct strand of internationalism. The section opens with a discussion of Peking 1922, the first ecumenical world conference that specifically set aside a portion of the program schedule to the consideration of international topics, resulting in the adoption of a declaration for racial equality known as the “Peking Resolutions.” Such efforts, complemented by a parallel movement for world ecumenism as manifested at a conference in Stockholm in 1925, ultimately culminated in Oxford 1937. The Oxford ecumenical meeting, Thompson argues, gave expression to a postliberal consensus based on a blending of the theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth which advocated for the supranational and transracial solidarity among Christians worldwide. In the final two body chapters, Thompson demonstrates how this consensus, formed at a Christian conference in England, crossed the Atlantic to influence American wartime internationalist politics. In doing so, he argues that the message of Oxford 1937 impacted the development of a framework in which realists and pacifists were able to cooperatively articulate a shared Christian internationalism—notably leading to the establishment of John Foster Dulles’s Commission on a Just and Durable Peace—while also being altered by the vision of Dulles that laid the foundations for his later, highly influential reading of the Cold War as a battle between rival faiths.

Overall, Thompson’s work does an excellent job of identifying Christian

internationalism as an important social and political movement with a missionary-based heritage, and showing its development alongside—and mutual influence with—the more traditional, state-based American internationalism. His nuanced treatment of the intellectual distinctions between complex, often overlapping, strands of internationalist thought opens up room for future scholars to engage in more sophisticated analyses on the international politics of this period of transition. It is slightly disappointing that most of his substantive content focuses on Euro-American examples, despite his stated argument that much of the impetus for this movement came not from the Atlantic, but from the Asia-Pacific context. This, however, only serves to underscore the great potential of his theoretical framework in enabling us to reorient our thinking about the relationship between the United States and East Asia during the interwar period.