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MISSION STUDIES
to the International Association for Mission Studies (1972–present)
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**List of Contributors**

**Kyo Seong Ahn** (PhD, University of Cambridge) is Professor in the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary in Seoul, Republic of Korea. His research focuses on church history, mission history, ecumenism, Asian Christianity, and disability.

**J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu** (PhD, University of Birmingham) is Professor of Contemporary African Christianity and Pentecostal Theology at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana. His research areas include Christianity in Africa and Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality.

**John Azumah** (PhD, University of Birmingham) is the Founding Executive Director of the Sanneh Institute at the University of Ghana in Accra, Ghana. His research focuses on world Christianity as well as Islam and Christian–Muslim relations in the Global South.

**Pavol Bargá** (PhD, Charles University) is an Assistant Professor and Researcher at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. His research focuses on theology and culture and theological anthropology.

**Eugene Baron** (PhD, University of the Western Cape) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Practical and Missional Theology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. His research focuses on South African Mission History, Critical Race Theory, Reconciliation, and Post-colonial Mission.

**Stephen Bevans** (PhD, University of Notre Dame) is a priest in the Roman Catholic missionary congregation of the Society of the Divine Word and Professor of Mission and Culture, Emeritus, at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA. He is a member of the WCC’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and writes on mission theology and ecclesiology.

**Nico A. Botha** (DTh, Missiology, University of South Africa [Unisa]) is a retired Professor in Missiology at Unisa in Pretoria, South Africa, and Emeritus minister of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. He is currently Postgraduate Supervisor and Research Fellow at Unisa, and Director of the Institute for Urban Ministry.

**Joanildo Burity** (PhD, Essex University) is a Lead Researcher and Professor of the Professional Masters in Sociology at the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation, and Professor of Postgraduate Programs in Sociology and Political Science at the Federal University of Pernambuco, in Recife, Brazil. His main research interests are religion and politics, religion and collective action at national and transnational levels, and identity and culture.
Chen Yongtao/陈永涛 (PhD, University of Helsinki) is Professor of Christian Theology and Chinese Christianity at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, China. His research focuses on Gospel and culture, contextual theology, and Chinese Protestant Christianity.

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia (PhD, University of Nijmegen) is on the Faculty of Theology of Australian Catholic University (Melbourne), while serving as Honorary Fellow of University of Divinity (Australia) and Visiting Researcher of Radboud University (Netherlands). His publications include Asian Christianity and Theology (Routledge) and World Christianity Encounters World Religions (Liturgical Press).

Gina Colvin Ngā Pūhi, Ngāti Porou (PhD, University of Canterbury) is an educator for Praxis New Zealand and maintains her research interest in Indigenous eco-spirituality.

Gemma Tulud Cruz (PhD, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen) is Senior Lecturer in Theology at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, Australia. Her research expertise is on migration theologies.

Rosemary Dewerse (PhD, Auckland University) is Tumuaki (General Manager), Education and Training Centre, Waka Whakakitenga, Aotearoa New Zealand. A missiologist and educator, she is committed to learning from indigenous peoples and to humble and courageous intercultural engagement.

Tomas Sundnes Drønen (PhD, School of Mission and Theology) is Professor of Global Studies and Religion at VID Specialized University, Norway. He currently holds the position as Dean of Faculty of Theology, Diaconia, and Leadership Studies, and his research focuses on religious change in central Africa.

Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga (PhD, University of Notre Dame) is a Research Fellow in the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, Australia. Her research focuses on Catholic communities in eastern Africa.

Martha Th. Frederiks (PhD, Utrecht University) is Professor of World Christianity at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Her research interests include African Christianity, religion and migration, and Christian–Muslim relations. With Dorottya Nagy, she recently published World Christianity. Methodological Considerations (2020), and Critical Readings in the History of Christian Mission (2021).

Michael W. Goheen (PhD, Utrecht University) is Professor of Missional Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, USA, and Director of Theological Education at Missional Training Center, Phoenix, USA.

Seija Jalagin (PhD, University of Oulu) is a Lecturer in the Department of History, Culture, and Communication Studies at the University of Oulu, Finland. Her research focuses on Protestant missions and, more recently, on forced migrations.
Mechteld Jansen (PhD, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) is Full Professor of Missiology and Rector of the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam-Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research focuses on migration and mission, secularism, and Godtalk.

Todd M. Johnson (PhD, William Carey International University) is the Eva B. and Paul E. Toms Distinguished Professor of Mission and Global Christianity and co-director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, USA. His research focuses on global Christianity and international religious demography.

Kapya J. Kaoma (ThD, Boston University) is a Zambian Anglican priest, interdisciplinary scholar, and Visiting Researcher at Boston University Center for Global Christianity and Mission in Boston, USA. He has authored and edited books including *Creation Care in Christian Mission, The Creator’s Symphony,* and *God’s Family, God’s Earth.*

Edward Kessler (PhD, University of Cambridge) is Founder President of the Woolf Institute and Fellow of St. Edmund’s College, Cambridge, UK. His research focuses on relations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Kirsteen Kim (PhD, University of Birmingham) holds the Paul E. Pierson Chair in World Christianity at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, USA, and serves as Associate Dean for the Center for Missiological Research. Her research interests also include intercultural theology (especially Korea and India), religions and development, and pneumatology.

Paul Kollman, CSC (PhD, University of Chicago) is Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, USA. Past President of the American Society of Missiology and current President of the International Association for Mission Studies (to 2022), he studies African Christianity, missiology, and world Christianity.

Lap Yan Kung (PhD, University of Glasgow) is an Associate Professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. His research focuses on public theology and the yoga movement in China.

Pan-chiu Lai (PhD, King’s College London) is a Professor of Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China.

Septemmy Eucharistia Lakawa (ThD, Boston University) is the President of Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Jakarta (Jakarta Theological Seminary) in Jakarta, Indonesia. She is Associate Professor of Mission Studies, Feminist Theology, and Trauma Theology.

Karen Lauterbach (PhD, Roskilde University) is Associate Professor at the Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Her research focuses on Christianity and social change in Africa, with a particular focus on Ghana and Uganda.

Atola Longkumer (DTh, Senate of Serampore University) is a visiting faculty member at South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS), Bangalore, India. Her
research interests include Christian mission and religions, Indigenous cultures, and women and mission.

**Annemarie C. Mayer** (STD, Dr. habil., Tübingen University) is Professor of Dogmatic Theology and History of Dogma at the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Trier, Germany. Her research focusses on ecclesiology, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue (in the Middle Ages), and missiology.

**Sandra Mazzolini** (PhD, Gregorian University) is an Italian ecclesiologist and Dean of the Faculty of Missiology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, Italy. She has collaborated with other academic institutions and published various contributions to specialist journals, reviews, and collected works.

**Dorottya Nagy** (PhD, Utrecht University) is Professor of Theology and Migration at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and President of the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies (CEEAMS). Her research projects are key-worded by missiology, methodology, migration, contextualization, world Christianity, and Europe at large.

**văn Thanh Nguyễn** (STD, Pontifical Gregorian University) is Professor of New Testament Studies and the holder of the Francis X. Ford, M.M., Chair of Catholic Missiology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, USA. He has authored several books and numerous articles, including “Acts” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*.

**Samuel Nwokoro** is a PhD candidate in Islamic and Christian-Muslim Studies at the School of Divinity, Edinburgh University. His research focus is on Melkite Christianity in Umayyad Syria.

**Val Ogden** (PhD, University of Wales) is an ordained minister serving Methodist, ecumenical, and community contexts in the UK, and Associate Tutor with the Lincoln School of Theology, University of Durham. She is inspired and shaped by service in the United Church of Zambia, Pacific Theological College, Fiji, and multicultural Britain.

**Gheorghe Petraru** (PhD, University of Bucharest) is reverend, full-time Professor, PhD Coordinator in Systematic Theology, and former Vice Dean of Dumitru Stăniloae Faculty of Orthodox Theology at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi, Romania. He has taught mission studies and ecumenism since the early 1990s and fundamental theology since 2003.

**Peter C. Phan** (ThD, Pontificia Universitas Salesian; PhD, DD, University of London) is the Ignacio Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA. He has authored and edited thirty books on systematic theology.

**John Mansford Prior** (PhD, University of Birmingham) is a post-graduate Lecturer in Inter-Contextual Theologies at Ledalero Institute in Maumere, Indonesia. His research centers on theological thinking within and beyond local, regional, and global cultures.
Dana L. Robert (PhD, Yale University) is the Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission, and Director of the Center for Global Christianity and Mission at the Boston University School of Theology, Boston, Massachusetts. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Marie-Hélène Robert (PhD, Lyon Catholic University) is a Professor of Missiology and a Research Fellow in the Sciences and Humanities Confluence Research Centre (UCLy), Lyon, France. Her research focuses on ecumenical mission in Europe. She is a Sister of the missionary congregation Our Lady of the Apostles.

Miikka Ruokanen/罗明嘉 (PhD, University of Cambridge; PhD, University of Helsinki) is Professor Emeritus of Dogmatics, University of Helsinki, Finland, and Professor of Systematic Theology, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, China. He is also Guest Professor, Renmin University of China, and Advisory Professor, Fudan University. He has authored twenty books on systematic theology.

J. Jayakiran Sebastian (Dr. theol., Hamburg University) is Dean and H. George Anderson Professor of Mission and Cultures at United Lutheran Seminary, Gettysburg and Philadelphia, USA. He writes on the ongoing relevance of the early teachers of faith, baptism, unity, and conversion, Dalit theology and praxis, and contemporary missiological thinking.

Brian Stanley (PhD, University of Cambridge) is Professor of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, UK. He is a historian of modern Christian missions and the growth of Christianity as a world religion.

Muthuraj Swamy (PhD, University of Edinburgh) is Director of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide, and Project Manager for Theological Education for Mission in the Anglican Communion, London, UK. His research focuses on World Christianities, interreligious relations, and peace and reconciliation.

Mika Vähäkangas (ThD, Helsinki University) is director of Polin-institute of Åbo Akademi University and Professor in Mission Studies and Ecumenics at Lund University, Sweden. He focuses on African Christianity and encounters between Christian faith and power structures. He is Extraordinary Professor of University of the Western Cape and Research Fellow of Stellenbosch University.

Henning Wrogemann (Dr. theol., Dr. habil., University of Heidelberg) holds the Chair for Science of Religion and Intercultural Theology at Protestant University Wuppertal, Germany. His research focuses on intercultural and interreligious hermeneutics, theology of mission and dialogue, Islamic mission (da‘wa), and Christian–Muslim relations. He is author of the trilogy Intercultural Theology (IVP 2016–2019).

Gina A. Zurlo (PhD, Boston University) is Co-director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, USA. She is the co-editor of the World Christian Database (Brill) and co-author of the World Christian Encyclopedia, 3rd edition (Edinburgh University Press).
PART I

MISSION STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE
MISSION studies, or missiology, is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry into Christian mission or missions that utilizes theological, historical, and various social scientific methods. It represents more than a century of scholarship related to the theology, history, and methodology of the propagation of Christian faith and the development of Christianity worldwide. The decline of the historic denominations in the West has led to an emphasis on mission and evangelism by Catholic and Protestant leaders worried about numerical growth, while at the same time there has been a rise of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches and of churches in the Majority World for which mission and evangelism are their raison d'être. Scholarship in the field was recently stimulated by the 2010 centenary of the World Missionary Conference (Edinburgh 1910) and also by new mission statements in this century by global Christian bodies.

Academic developments contributing to the regeneration of mission studies include the application in the West of mission methods pioneered in other continents (inculturation, contextualization, liberation, interfaith, church growth, power encounter, etc.); the realization that mission sending is not only “from the west to the rest” but “from everywhere to everywhere,” including from Brazil, South Korea, Nigeria, and other Christian centers in the Majority World; and the rise of the study of world Christianity and recognition of Christianity as a world religion, which has highlighted Christian diversity and the geographical and cultural rather than the denominational dimensions of ecumenism. In addition, the growing interest in “religions” more generally includes missional dimensions, such as their growth, role in public life, relevance for development, potential for politicization, and appreciation of the importance of finding new
ways of co-existence among expansionist faiths. Responding to these developments, there has been a spate of academic publications discussing mission studies or missiology so far this century.3

The structure of this Handbook and the content of its chapters analyze the current state of the field of mission studies. The themes and approaches exhibited here also chart areas of growth that will shape the development of mission studies in years ahead. In this chapter, we shall first explain how the structure of the Handbook mirrors the field’s structure and concerns. Then we will provide a cross-cutting analysis of current trends in mission studies that emerge across the chapters.4

**The Study of Christian Mission**

Part I of the Handbook outlines the origins and development of mission studies and its main methods. As Brian Stanley documents in his chapter, mission studies originated in research to support and shape modern Christian missions to the non-Christian world. It used biblical, theological, historical, and pragmatic arguments to justify missions and social scientific methods to increase their effectiveness. What Paul Kollman describes as the study of “Christian efforts to expand Christianity” later combined the empirical study of missions with a theological concept of mission (singular)—*missio Dei* or the mission of God—that expanded the possibilities for the nature, conduct, and scope of missions. While this construct integrated the subject, at the same time mission studies utilized an increasing variety of methods and developed theories of culture, context, space, and spirituality, such as those discussed by Dorottya Nagy. Each of the following six parts of the volume is undergirded by chapters on theory and method as they relate to different subdisciplines within mission studies: theology, practice, history, cultural studies, religious studies, and social studies.

The chapters in Part II deal with biblical and theological questions that today are to the fore, although they have not always been integral to mission studies. Mission—derived from the Latin *mittere*, to send—is closely associated with biblical terms such as apostle, evangelize, convert, disciple, witness, service, and worship. Today, the motif of mission can be seen running through the whole Bible but, as vănThanh Nguyễn shows, the challenge is to develop a missional hermeneutic that is both critical and contextual. Doctrinal statements have been made by global Christian bodies about two closely related terms: evangelization and mission. Sandra Mazzolini examines these and suggests how their relationship may be better understood. In the late twentieth century, especially following the work of David Bosch, it became customary to discuss “mission as . . .”. Bosch dealt with thirteen such different theological definitions as part of an “emerging paradigm” of mission.5 Stephen Bevans surveys several such theologies of mission—mission as proclamation, *missio Dei*, mission as liberation, and mission as inculturation—before introducing three themes that are trending today. Although in the West, mission was once largely the concern of specialist societies or agencies, the
church is central to much contemporary mission theology. This development owes much to Orthodox ecclesiology that integrates liturgy and life, which is elucidated here by Gheorghe Petraru. Not only did mission studies take a theological turn in the mid-twentieth century but, as Henning Wrogemann explains, especially in the German-speaking world, mission studies has increasingly developed as “intercultural theology,” which focuses less on the delivery of a message and more on the local appropriation of the Gospel, emerging theologies from different contexts, and theological mediation between regions and continents.

Although theology of mission has advanced considerably, mission studies is rooted in the study of practice rather than of concepts. Beginning Part III, John Prior investigates how, although its origins are different, mission studies increasingly overlaps with the discipline of practical theology. Both fields use social science methods, and today both are concerned for the mission of the church everywhere. Michael Goheen considers the practice of mission from the point of view of the structures and agents through which it is carried out. The focus on professional missionaries and missionary societies from the West has shifted to local congregations, and hitherto hidden contributions to the spread of Christianity by women and bi-vocational workers, for example, have been recognized.

The remaining six chapters in Part III consider a diverse range of mission practices. Edmund Chia argues for a sacramental approach in mission, in which spirituality, mission, and liturgy mutually inform one another in life and praxis. Juxtaposed to this, Marie-Hélène Robert scrutinizes the kind of mission that proselytizes in the sense of seeking converts from other Christian communities. The chapter negotiates the twin poles of evangelism and common witness in pluralistic societies. Proclaiming the message is another traditional mission practice that has come under scrutiny in recent mission studies, especially in a digital age. In Val Ogden’s treatment, the mission impulse becomes more about helping others to find a voice and the prophetic function of truth-telling. As the colonial era ended, the institutions typically founded by Western missions—schools, hospitals, and agricultural programs—gave way to projects of international development. Tomas Sundnes Drønen shows how contemporary interrogation of the relationship between faith and development gives greater recognition to the role of faith communities in their own development. Lap Yan Kung’s focus could be seen as an example of the latter. Mission as social action is contentious for many Christians, but Kung sees it as a question of “the meaning of the Gospel in relation to human flourishing.” In the last chapter in this section, Septemmy Lakawa and Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga highlight the mission of healing, often practiced by women, and apply this to the experience of trauma. A case study of Indonesian women shows how the ongoing, embodied process of healing is helped through the use of poetry and dance.

In postcolonial contexts, much of the study of mission uses historical methods, utilizing sources from the colonial period missionary movement from which it is possible to uncover colonial mission’s underside, the experience of the missionized and indigenous agency. Such efforts also include the recovery of the spread of Christianity in the first millennium not only westwards into Europe but also eastwards as far as India and China as well as south into Arabia and as far as Ethiopia. Accounts of more recent
world missionary movements, such as of African American missions to Africa and migrant workers evangelizing the West, are still being written. Part IV takes a historical perspective beginning with a chapter by Seija Jalagin that sets the highpoint of Western missions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the wider study of world or global history. Jalagin finds that mission history is marginalized and, if considered at all, it is connected only with colonialism, despite the significant and multidimensional impact of missions locally in many cases. The second chapter, by Kyo Seong Ahn, analyzes the contested relationship of modern colonialism with Christian missions from a non-Western perspective to show the relevance of nationalism and social change. He adds the further complication that colonization was not only practiced by nominally Christian nations, taking the example of Japan. Jayakiran Sebastian’s focus is the way in which the formerly colonized have been processing their experience and the questions it raises for mission after independence. He applies postcolonial theory to biblical hermeneutics, to the concept of mission, and to mission studies itself.

The postwar history of mission was dominated until the 1990s by the Cold War. Pavol Bargár offers a view of mission in the hostile conditions of communist rule, specifically in the former Czechoslovakia, and how mission practice and theology was rethought in dialogue with Marxist ideology. The demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the beginning of the current age of economic globalization not only redrew world maps and opened new regions to Western mission but also revealed the extent to which Christian churches were globally widespread and more numerous in the global South than in the faith’s traditional heartland in the global North. Dana Robert introduces a new field of enquiry emerging from mission history—the study of world Christianity—and its symbiotic relationship to mission studies. Indeed, the essays in this volume all reflect the “world-Christian turn,” which cannot be directly correlated with Western missions.

Mission studies shares many of the habits evident in world Christianity scholarship: concern to represent diverse Christian experiences stemming from various regional contexts, ecclesial traditions, and social locations; interest in foregrounding experiences of those marginalized in church, society, and scholarship; and a practice of linking historical, social scientific, and theological approaches to analyze Christianity.

The second half of the Handbook deals with three further academic fields that are often utilized in mission studies: cultural anthropology and cultural studies, religious studies, and studies of society of various sorts. Although the disciplinary distinctives may be clear, culture, religion, and society are not easy to tease apart in any particular case of missionary engagement. Hence, some chapters arguably would also be at home elsewhere in the Handbook.

Many early ethnographers were Western missionaries, and concepts of culture have played an important part in mission studies since its inception. In Part V, Karen Lauterbach treats the relationship between mission studies and the anthropology of Christianity with a particular displaced Congolese community in Uganda in mind. This example draws attention to lived Christianity as a shaper of culture and to the mobility and interconnected nature of the community. Peter C. Phan argues that the missionary motivation for studying culture is usually the desire to inculturate or contextualize the
faith in local cultures, without which the Gospel cannot be received. He introduces theologies of inculturation and “interculturation” that apply to the increasingly multicultural societies of today. In a novel approach, Gina Colvin and Rosemary Dewurse give voice to Christian Māori and Aboriginal women whose Indigenous communities were dispossessed and suffered the attempted eradication of their cultures. These Indigenous women challenge mission practices and mission studies with a perspective from the margins.

The next three chapters investigate some other cultures in which mission is being done and developed in varied ways. First, Miikka Ruokanen and Chen Yongtao trace the planting of Christianity in Chinese soil from the early East Syrian mission through Catholic and Protestant missions from Europe to the Sinicization of the faith in contemporary China. Second, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu emphasizes that, despite missionary perception of a disconnect between Christian mission and African religio-cultural traditions, Christianity is at home in Africa where belief in a Supreme Being is widely shared, and Christian practice has been shaped in distinctive ways that appeal to Africans and address their concerns. Third, Mechteld Jansen argues that secularisms are not necessarily the enemy of Christianity but also cultural contexts in which Christian faith can also be contextualized and in which public witness can take place to the “mutual exorcism” and mutual benefit of both Christians and secularists.

Mission studies and religious studies both trace their origins to the late nineteenth century and to Western Christian encounters with the other. However, they have evolved different approaches that have at times been anathema to one another. Atola Longkumer notes their ambiguous relationship before drawing attention to the role of missionaries in laying the foundations of the study of Indigenous religions, which has been neglected compared to interest in “world religions.” Much recent debate in mission studies had been about religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, a topic which is treated by Annemarie Mayer, who charts the struggle to understand theologically the persistence of other religions and also the rise of the dialogical approach to mission.

The other four chapters in Part VI of the Handbook look in greater depth at Christian mission in relationship to people of particular faiths: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Edward Kessler shows how, despite increased understanding since the Holocaust, the issue of mission is particularly problematic in Jewish–Christian relations. In the case of Muslims, Samuel Nwokoro, working with John Azumah, shows how Christian mission grapples with the fact that Islam, too, is a missionary religion, and with the realities of intolerance in both directions. Muthuraj Swamy ponders the lessons for Christian mission of how the colonial encounter with the peoples of India was at least partially responsible for the construction of the religion of Hinduism, which now challenges the existence of religious minorities in India, including Christianity. When it comes to Christian mission among Buddhists, Pan-chiu Lai examines political factors in Asia arising from a long history of interaction that shapes how members of the two faiths see one another, and urges that political circumstances should be taken into account in contemporary Christian mission.
In order to disseminate the Christian message and make disciples of other peoples, social science methods have also been pressed into service since the origins of mission studies. Moreover, from a social scientific perspective, Christian mission has been a significant factor in various social movements and in social change of various sorts. From the Latin American context, Joanildo Burity shows how engagement with social sciences has connected theory and practice and encouraged a more self-critical attitude in mission while also generating interest in religion in social sciences.

Issues of social cohesion and relations between different communities are at the forefront of mission concerns today. Five more chapters in Part VII consider how mission studies addresses particular social issues. Race is receiving renewed critical attention in public discourse and academic analysis, and mission studies is no exception. This issue is tackled by Nico Botha and Eugene Baron, who critically examine an earlier debate on the topic within the International Missionary Council between 1910 and 1958 from the perspective of South Africa and contemporary race theory. As far as gender relations are concerned, although the Western missionary movement offered opportunities to women that they did not have at home, their contribution is still largely unrecognized. In her chapter on gender, Gemma Cruz uses feminist theology to make sense of women’s experiences in mission and to identify the past and current work of women in mission, which challenges how mission is defined. Another social phenomenon, migration, has been a partner of mission through the centuries, both positively and negatively, argues Martha Frederiks. As well as examining this history, she interrogates the conception of migration, the methodological problems for researching it, and the way it is treated theologically in relation to mission. The challenges of globalization with its dynamics of money and power in the modern missionary movement are the concern of Mika Vähäkangas, who points to imbalances and dependency as well as to other findings: the reciprocal effect of mission on the sending countries, mission initiatives from the margins, and new understandings of the relationship between money and power. In respect of climate change, which is the last social issue here, Kapya Kaoma argues that it has brought about a paradigm shift in theology of mission by the introduction of ecological thinking and attention to God as Creator. Furthermore, such a cosmic perspective on salvation results in the inclusion of creation care as part of mission.

Finally, one of the primary uses of social science methods in mission studies has been to collect statistics to measure the state of the spread of Christianity, its demography, and impact. In the final chapter in this volume, Gina Zurlo and Todd Johnson reflect on this method, now digitized, and its sources, and give an overview of current quantitative data related to Christian mission and the growth of world Christianity.

Current Issues in Mission Studies

In addition to reflecting the current structure and disciplinary diversity of the field, the content of this Handbook’s chapters also reveals emerging concerns that will
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define mission studies moving forward. Certain themes, issues, and methodological orientations cut across the chapters in this volume, linking with each other chapters located in different sections and analyzing diverse topics. Some concerns have deep roots in the study and practice of mission, but they have taken on fresh salience in twenty-first-century contexts. Others have emerged in recent years. Six trends stand out as particularly indicative of future directions in mission studies.

First, ecumenism remains an important area within mission studies, but new emphases are emerging in response to theological developments and emerging historical experiences within the world Christian movement. The Christian missionary movement has historically been both a catalyst for ecumenical rapprochement and a site where intense denominational rivalries have played out. Contemporary mission studies wrestles with this dual legacy. As Brian Stanley's chapter points out, the crystallization of missiology as a coherent, disciplined field of inquiry was itself linked with missionary ecumenism developing since the nineteenth century. Given the field's historical connection with the ecumenical movement, the absence of a chapter on ecumenism in this Handbook might seem an oversight. In practice, though, the theme of ecumenical relations is picked up in most chapters in this volume, illustrating how concern for ecumenism is woven into nearly every area of missiological reflection and practice. This volume's authorship, intentionally representing a range of Christian traditions, itself reflects missiology's ecumenical interconnections.

Inter-church rivalry and proselytism directed at fellow Christians are sources of scandal that undercut mission's credibility, reflecting a situation of fragmentation within the Christian community in history and widening the breaches between particular Christian bodies. Several essays in this volume grapple with this issue to identify sources of the problem and ways to move forward. Writing from an Orthodox perspective, Gheorghe Petraru shows how inter-Christian proselytizing efforts are rooted in impoverished ecclesiologies. Sandra Mazzolini proposes a biblical–anthropological foundation for evangelization that prioritizes relationships and opens up space for confessional diversity. Concerned with the practical and theological ramifications of Christians proselytizing fellow Christians, Marie-Hélène Robert encourages developing an ethic of common witness. Edward Kessler urges extending to the Jewish community the call to joint witness, in recognition of the genealogical relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities and their shared vocation to work to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Other chapters signal the shifting relationship to denominationalism—and, by extension, ecumenism—within missiology and the wider world Christian movement. For instance, Miikka Ruokanen and Chen Yongtao highlight the postdenominational tendencies of Christianity in China, where denominational divides have been seen as foreign Western baggage. They direct our attention to the potential for Chinese Christians’ missionary efforts to contribute to ecumenical reconciliation through cultivating the development of postdenominational churches around the world. Yet where denominational identity has historically been implicated in the formation of other sorts of collective identity—ethnic, political, national, etc.—or linked closely
with local theologies and practices of evangelization, denominational salience will likely remain a vibrant part of Christian and missionary experience. Missiology will need to identify other suitable paths toward ecumenical rapprochement in these contexts.

Second, reflecting on non-Christian religious traditions and how to engage them missiologically forms a substantial emphasis in mission studies, and the desire to live faithfully and engage productively is generating new approaches to other traditions. The study and practice of Christian mission has always entailed—even prioritized—engagement with non-Christian individuals and communities. Yet rising emphasis on interreligious dialogue and its relationship with mission, interest in partnering across religious traditions to promote peacebuilding, and awareness of the power dynamics at play in both encounters between religious traditions and the academic study of religion(s) have shaped Christian missiological engagement with other religious traditions. Contemporary mission studies is concerned to articulate an ethics and spirituality of collaboration, and it explores interreligious engagement as an opportunity to deepen Christian witness. It also probes how comparative study of other traditions can yield fruit for both academic inquiry and faith-filled Christian life.

Within this context, several chapters in this volume—many of them outside the part dedicated to Christian mission and religions—consider the challenges and opportunities that religious diversity and secularism pose in general for mission studies. For example, Annemarie Mayer probes questions about how missiology ought to engage theologically with the factual plurality of religious traditions, suggesting that mission should be understand more in terms of cultivating the ability to relate to others than of expanding the church numerically and geographically. Mechteld Jansen extends the call for relating to religious “others” to missiological engagement with the variety of secular cultures, arguing that Christian mission and secularism(s) can purify each other from the dehumanizing forces each can harbor. Meanwhile, Stephen Bevans and Val Ogden wrestle with the challenge of maintaining mission’s prophetic edge while engaging productively with religious, cultural, and ideological difference. Ogden cautions against trends toward uncritically eschewing strong Christian confessional language in favor of more inclusive approaches geared toward building interreligious and secular coalitions. She argues that dimming Christian confessional language risks jeopardizing religious freedom and undermining advocacy and accountability. Bevans proposes a “missiology of attraction” as a way forward.

Other chapters explore the relationship of Christian mission with specific religious traditions, highlighting how interaction with Christian mission has shaped those traditions, and vice versa. Muthuraj Swamy challenges mission theology and practice to grapple with both the intrareligious diversity among people labeled “Hindu” and the ways in which contemporary constructions of Hinduism as a coherent, singular world religion fuel varieties of Hindu nationalism corrosive of religious and cultural minorities. Pan-Chiu Lai shows how interpretations and practices of Buddhism and Christianity—two missionary religions with well-developed theological accounts of religious diversity—have been mutually transformed through encounters in the
context of mission. These missionary encounters have helped change Buddhism into a modernized religious tradition with global reach, and generated varieties of inculturated Christianities contributing to Christianity's synergy as a worldwide movement. Recognizing how some Christians have fruitfully interpreted Christian theology in light of Buddhism, Lai suggests that it is more appropriate to view Buddhists as "partners" in mission, rather than mission's objects. Arguably, mission has historically been the primary locus of what today is described as comparative theology, "the practice of rethinking aspects of one's own faith tradition through the study of aspects of another faith tradition," and comparative theological analysis remains a priority among missiologists.

A few chapters also signal rising attention to the "missionary" habits of other religious traditions as a source of comparative insight. For instance, Kyo Seong Ahn shows how studies of colonialism and mission have broadened in scope to include analysis of other religious traditions' missionary enterprises and their colonial entanglements. Meanwhile, Paul Kollman highlights comparative missiology—that is, comparative analysis of Christianity and other traditions' modes of expansion and self-conscious efforts to self-advocate—as one of the leading edges of mission studies for the third millennium of Christianity. Some promising efforts have already been made, both in terms of rich accounts of non-Christian religions' theologies and practices of outreach and comparative historical and sociological analysis of religious traditions' patterns of diffusion. Comparative missiological analysis remains a fertile area for growth moving forward.

Third, mission studies is in the process of critically extending, reframing, or transcending the missio Dei paradigm. Many chapters invoke the concept of the missio Dei, or the "mission of God," which rose to prominence in Anglophone missiology especially following the 1991 publication of David Bosch's landmark volume, Transforming Mission. Developed as a way to center mission in God's salvific self-revelation in which the church is called to participate, the concept operates in the background informing many chapters' arguments. Some authors explicitly extend and explore the implications of missio Dei. For instance, vănThanh Nguyễn, interpreting the Bible through a missional hermeneutic, employs missio Dei as a tool for political critique of empire. Yet the concept suffers from limitations. Kapya Kaoma, for example, suggests reframing the concept as "mission of the Creator" to support an eco-centric missiology. Nico Botha and Eugene Baron press on how the International Missionary Council discourse that generated the missio Dei paradigm in the 1950s largely failed to interrogate racism and the church's complicity in it; this absence has implications for how we approach the paradigm today. Employing a postcolonial hermeneutic, Jayakiran Sebastian critiques the dominance and uncritical acceptance of the missio Dei paradigm within missiology, suggesting that missiology informed by postcolonial studies might instead speak of a "mission to God."

Missio Dei was at first construed as a reworking of salvation history through a predominantly biblical approach set within a wider Johannine framework of the sending of the Word and the Spirit within the purposes of God. The conviction that mission
resulted from the initiative of God rather than from human enterprise gave hope as Western world missions faced the challenges of a post-colonial world, secularization, and the Cold War. It facilitated the recognition that mission was integral to the life of the church wherever in the world it was, so that there could no longer be a distinction between the “older” and the “younger” churches or between church and mission. Furthermore, by seeing mission as an attribute of God, *missio Dei* brought mission into the heart of theology. Bosch documented the wide reception of the concept and the emergence of a remarkable consensus across different ecclesial and theological traditions that all churches everywhere should be what is today described “essentially missionary” or “missional.”

In this setting, the renewal of trinitarian theology encouraged greater systematic development of mission theology and *missio Dei* in particular. While the turn to theology has had benefits, such as greater coherence of the discipline of mission studies, a more integrated understanding of the missionary task, greater humility on the part of Western missions and churches, and a more relational approach to others, it also introduces difficulties. One of these is that *missio Dei* constructed as a trinitarian theology is a theology from above, even a universalizing abstraction that idealizes mission, and may float free of realities on the ground. From 2011 to 2013 several statements on mission emerged from global bodies that between them represent most of the world’s Christians: The Cape Town Commitment (Lausanne Movement), Together towards Life (World Council of Churches), and *Evangelii Gaudium* (Pope Francis). One thing these documents share is an emphasis not on doctrine but on mission as discipleship that is, respectively, loving, authentic, and missionary. This attention to following the mission of the earthly Jesus is identified as one of the trends in mission theology by Stephen Bevans in his chapter in this volume. It is also reflected in other contemporary missiological scholarship, and it encourages some to move beyond the *missio Dei* paradigm altogether. Interrogating the possibilities afforded and limits posed by the *missio Dei* concept—and developing alternative paradigms—will remain an ongoing project for missiology.

Fourth, *mission studies increasingly prioritizes the grassroots as locus of mission and lay agency as generative of missiological insight.* The field has long recognized that lay actors, although rarely identified as “missionaries,” have played critical roles in disseminating Christianity. Scholarship on historical and contemporary catechists, “Bible women,” and other non-ordained evangelists has proliferated, and many of the essays in this Handbook highlight these actors’ contributions. New theological developments, shifting demography, and emerging academic interpretive frameworks have all contributed to this interest. Awareness of mission as the church’s core identity—and hence, the identity of all the baptized—implies attentiveness to all Christians’ missional activities. Scholarly currents like subaltern studies and community development coupled with awareness of how Christianity’s center of gravity has shifted toward the global South have also buoyed attention to the agency of those often marginalized from missional centers of power, such as women, non-Western Christians, and minorities. This shift in focus has helped to move certain topics, such as healing, deliverance, and
witchcraft accusations, from the periphery to the center of mainstream missiological inquiry.\footnote{21}

In this volume, Pavol Bargár illustrates how lay involvement in mission can flourish in spaces where ecclesial institutions formerly responsible for mission are weakened, as in Czechoslovakia under communist political rule. We might also add that globalization, human mobility, and digital technology challenge traditional ecclesial and missional structures as well as afford opportunities for grassroots leadership in mission. Highlighting how local congregations and lay people are today the primary agents of mission, Michael Goheen calls for cultivating structures suited to supporting this broad-based missional activity. Other chapters probe how to bridge the gap between grassroots missional practices and academic missiology. John Prior presents practical theology as a vehicle for grassroots theologizing to transform the study and practice of mission. Meanwhile, Henning Wrogemann’s chapter is suggestive of possibilities for intercultural theology to mediate between the contexts of academic missiology and the everyday theologizing of congregations and lay Christians. Missiology must continue to nurture habits and structures that support lay agency and help mission studies to engage with grassroots missional theology and practice.

Fifth, mobility has become a central category in mission studies, posing new insights into agency, locality, and interreligious and intercultural relationality. Both agents and recipients of mission can be mobile, and mobility is increasingly recognized as a key theological context in which mission is practiced and understood.\footnote{22} Mobility has been a feature of Christian mission since the earliest experiences of the church recorded in the Christian Bible, and the circulation of people, objects, and ideas has disseminated Christianity worldwide.\footnote{23} As Seija Jalagin highlights in her chapter, within the frame of world history, Christianity is fundamentally a religion “on the move,” and Christian mission has long been a form of transnationalism and globalization. Yet the pace of mobility has accelerated in recent decades as travel becomes more accessible, income inequality increases, urbanization intensifies, and violence and climate disasters drive people from their homes.\footnote{24}

Increased mobility has given rise to new configurations of mission, such as short-term missions, and it has reshaped how missiologists and other scholars think about mission’s locales and actors. For example, migration increasingly places religionists of varied traditions in proximity to each other—sometimes in places formerly more religiously homogeneous—offering new opportunities for interreligious engagement. Samuel Nwokoro and John Azumah’s chapter foregrounds these dynamics, analyzing how contemporary Western Christians’ missiological engagement with Muslims occurs especially in the context of ministries to Muslim migrants and refugees in Western countries. Cross-border movement and internal migration have given rise not only to missiological reflection on evangelizing mobile populations, but also to mission by migrants and refugees. For instance, Gemma Cruz shows how migration contexts afford opportunities for lay evangelism, especially by female migrant workers often otherwise marginalized from ecclesial power centers. Tomas Sundnes Drønen highlights how African migrants in Redeemed Christian Church of
God congregations in Europe sponsor social ministries seeking to contribute to the European societies where they have made their homes. Such activities are shifting conversations about the dynamics of power and directionality within mission and global development.

Employing a mobility lens in mission studies yields theological and methodological insights, too. For example, Martha Frederiks identifies theology as a tool for meaning-making amid change and uncertainty, surveying theologies of hospitality, neighborliness, and “reverse mission” that have emerged in the context of migration. Mobility also reframes many issues of traditional missiological interest. For instance, Peter Phan points out that contemporary mobility and globalization pose new opportunities and challenges for mission as inculturation, for they shift cultural dynamics and reveal inculturation’s complex, multi-directional nature. Critical of what she sees as missiology’s tendency to prioritize time over place and locality (e.g., “the age of migration” rather than “human mobility”), Dorottya Nagy suggests that awareness of human mobility invites us to theorize space, place, and locality more robustly. Pursuing her invitation stands to enrich mission studies moving forward.

Sixth, mission studies is becoming increasingly aware of how dominant modes of academic knowledge production limit the field. The limitations of knowledge production affected the compilation of the Handbook. On the one hand, considering that practice in diverse contexts is the starting point of the reflection that has become mission studies, the need for the study of mission to follow the rules of the Western academy may be regarded with suspicion by activists and practitioners. On the other hand, Anglophone academic publishing is constrained by conventions that hinder the inclusion of contributions from the other linguistic, educational, and cultural contexts in which reflection on mission is carried out. Several essays in this Handbook offer critiques of missiological knowledge production and chart ways forward.

The primacy of the written word as an academic medium sidelines the perspectives of many who prioritize oral, visual, and visual–kinesthetic communication. In some respects, mission studies has a long track record of attending to oral cultures, as Atola Longkumer points out in her discussion of missionary-scholars’ efforts to establish the academic study of Indigenous religions. Yet the prioritization of textual sources and communication in missiological scholarship has marginalized those who prioritize non-textual communication, limiting the extent to which their perspectives and expertise can shape scholarly conversations. In its better moments, mission studies recognizes these limitations and has begun taking steps to address them. For instance, the 2018 annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology incorporated American Sign Language interpretation and featured several breakout sessions on “Deaf Missiology.” More recently, the December 2020 issue of the Australian Journal of Mission Studies focused on mission in the context of orally-preferred cultures, including both written responses and transcriptions of oral responses from Oceania and Africa. The issue also included a series of sketches by an artist from Vanuatu, Graham Louhman, depicting scenes from salvation history within local motifs. Although the issue’s editorial notes the “contradiction” inherent in presenting oral narrations in printed text, it
accepts the written medium as necessary for inserting these perspectives into broader text-preferenced missiological conversations.  

Like the journal issue, a Handbook like this one cannot hope to escape the constraints of textual communication. Yet creative uses of sources—and expansive sensibilities about what count as relevant sources to engage—offer ways to draw a wide range of actors, experiences, and insights into missiological conversations. Gina Colvin and Rosemary Dewerse insert Indigenous women’s voices into mission studies through analyzing Adnyamathanha and Māori storytelling and biblical exegesis. Critical of the academy as a colonial institution that consolidates Western norms and “others” Indigenous persons and perspectives, they invite attention to the missional insights emerging from Indigenous women’s decolonizing work. Drawing on post-disaster pastoral processes in Indonesia, Septemmy Lakawa and Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga adopt an embodied and aesthetic approach to reveal communal dance, poetry, and song as a locus for trauma healing and missiological reflection on it. Meanwhile, Karen Lauterbach utilizes ethnographic research among Congolese migrants in Uganda to show how mission studies can be deepened by appreciating the precise ways in which mission is integral to the fabric of everyday Christian life. As Lauterbach argues, attention to how mission is experienced, theologized, and practiced by ordinary Christians in everyday life can “enhance epistemological diversity and openness” in mission studies. These sorts of bottom-up approaches stand to help address the colonial heritage threaded throughout mission studies. The inclusion of more audio-visual material both as a source and as a medium of missiological research—possibilities that digital publication increasingly affords—can assist in this process.

**Conclusion**

This Handbook shows how what started as a means to plan Western Christian mission(s), prepare missionaries, and increase missionary effectiveness has grown into an interdisciplinary field of enquiry that includes the critical study of the theology, practice, and history of mission, as well as its impact—cultural, religious, and social. Mission Studies deals with all eras, peoples, and regions, including contemporary missionary movements arising from the Majority World. It studies the agents, motives, methods, and goals of mission, and assesses its results. “Mission” has also been developed as a theological term deriving from the trinitarian nature of God and the sending of the Son and Spirit—*missio Dei*.

Mission studies emerged at the height of Western imperial dominance and successfully rethought itself for the new world order after the Second World War. As the global context evolves, mission studies continues to adapt. In particular today, as Christian demographics shift so that there are now more Christians outside the West than in it, mission studies is being taken up from the perspective of those who received Western missions or were otherwise impacted by them. The churches of the Majority World are
also active in mission in their own localities as well as transnationally and internationally. Christians the world over aim to fulfil the post-resurrection commission of Jesus to his disciples that is related differently in each of the four gospels. As long as there are Christian churches, mission in this sense is destined to continue for its practitioners, who interpret it in terms of evangelism, healing, church planting, community service, international development, and many other activities. Although the rationale, methods, and aims may change, mission studies informs discernment of the times and the prophetic vision that undergirds constructive plans for Christian engagement with the contemporary world and participation in the kingdom of God.

However, as the list of contributors to this Handbook shows, the study of what Christians are doing in the world is not only of internal interest to Christian scholars but also to other academics, including scholars of religions, development, languages and linguistics, cultural and social change, communication and networking, and colonial, post-colonial, global, regional, and migration studies. The study of the history, motives, and operations of missions and missional churches is especially useful to policy makers in contexts of religious plurality, social need, and conflict. This Handbook, which is compiled by scholars from all continents and representing all the major streams of Christianity as well as secular and other religious perspectives, offers a window into the self-understanding and circumstances that motivate and shape Christian mission in all its varied forms.

Notes

3. For example, the Edinburgh 2010 centenary project resulted in the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series of thirty-five collaborative volumes on mission studies and world Christianity, edited by Knud Jørgensen, Kirsteen Kim, Wonsuk Ma, and Tony Gray. Other sources of recent Anglophone missiological scholarship include titles in the American Society of Missiology’s Scholarly Monograph Series and those on the lists of ten (formerly, fifteen) “outstanding books in mission studies” published each April in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*. For more on missiological journals—including ones beyond the Anglophone academy—that have supported recent growth in mission studies scholarship, see also Paul Kollman’s chapter in this volume.
4. Initial ideas for this Handbook were gathered at a meeting at the fourteenth assembly of the International Association for Mission Studies in Seoul, South Korea, in 2016. However, its structure and the selection of contributors and topics are the responsibility of the initial editors, Kirsteen Kim and the late Knud Jørgensen. Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga, who joined the team later, has helped to realize the vision while also contributing her own distinctive perspective to the content. Because mission is a practice as well as a theory, it is
highly responsive to context. Consequently, particular efforts have been made to reflect the diversity of world Christianity in the selection of the contributors and the regions of their expertise.


7. Authors in this volume understand the nature of world Christianity and its relationship to mission studies in different ways. For instance, Henning Wrogemann’s chapter presents the field of world Christianity as primarily historical in orientation, contrasting it with intercultural theology understood as additionally encompassing social scientific and religious research methods. In our academic contexts, we find that world Christianity scholarship exhibits considerably wider disciplinary breadth.


16. For recent discussion of the theology of missio Dei, see, John G. Flett, The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); David Martin Whitworth, Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A

17. For example, Michael J. Gorman, Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John (Eugene: Cascade, 2018); Samuel Wells, Incarnational Mission: Being with the World (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).

18. For further discussion of what comes after missio Dei, see Michael W. Stroope, Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017); Kirsteen Kim, Beneath Missio Dei (forthcoming).


23. For evidence of the significance of migration for mission in the precolonial period as well, see Jehu J. Hanciles, Migration and the Making of Global Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).


Christians have devoted serious reflection to the task of sharing their faith with others throughout the centuries of church history. Although the propagation of the faith has not occupied the same level of priority for all Christian traditions in all periods, questions of why, how, and where mission should be conducted have been the subject of debate in almost every century. To that extent, “mission studies” in the broadest sense is as ancient as the Christian faith itself. Institutions founded with the specific intention of training missionaries for service overseas are rather more recent. The College of Propaganda in Rome was founded in 1627. The first Protestant missionary training academy was the Seminarium Indicum in the faculty of theology at the University of Leiden, established in 1622 as a training college for missionaries for the Dutch East Indies; it closed after only ten years. The Netherlands can also claim to have produced the first academic theorist of missions in the person of Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), professor of theology and oriental languages at the University of Utrecht. However, the emergence of mission studies as an identifiable body of scholarly knowledge and field of shared theological discourse is a much later trend that can be dated somewhere between the closing years of the nineteenth century and the First World War. There were two main reasons for the emergence of the serious study of mission during this period.

First, in the course of the nineteenth century, Protestants—and, later, Catholics—embarked with new determination on ambitious attempts at the evangelization of the
world beyond the historic heartlands of Western Christendom. As they did so, they encountered serious and often unanticipated challenges to their existing patterns of belief and practice. The varied and sometimes contradictory responses they made to the challenges raised by encounters on the mission fields were then communicated across transnational print networks of discourse and information. These networks would supply the raw material for the emerging field of research we now know as mission studies. For many years—in fact, until the 1970s—the Protestant and Catholic networks were almost, but not entirely, distinct.

There was a second important factor that applied more often to Protestants than to Catholics. The nineteenth century was also the age in which, beginning in Germany, Christian thinkers increasingly thought of their historic faith, and the Scriptures on which it was based, as the proper object of systematic, ‘scientific’ inquiry and critical scrutiny. As theology and biblical studies became ‘scientific’ disciplines pursued by professional scholars within universities and learned societies, some prominent spokespersons for the world mission of the church began to call for the same rigor of critical analysis to be applied to the fundamental questions of the mission enterprise. What were the theological foundations of Christian mission? What were the theoretical principles on which it should be conducted? What were the chief obstacles that it faced in different parts of the world, and how might they be overcome? In the Roman Catholic Church, the strength of the Vatican’s hostile reaction against the historical criticism of the Munich school of Ignaz von Döllinger, or the biblical criticism of the French modernists, imposed strict limits on the development of new schools of theological ‘science’. As a result, critical debate on the underlying theological issues raised by overseas mission experience took longer to develop than it did in Protestant circles. However, such debate did emerge in the first half of the twentieth century in some Catholic university faculties of theology, notably in Münster in Germany, Louvain in Belgium, and the Pontifical Urban University in Rome.

In this way, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the emergence of what was widely described as “the science of missions.” A parallel and closely associated development was the growth of the discipline of the science of the so-called ‘world’ religions, often called the “history of religions” or “comparative religion.” Christian missionaries were frequently the key pioneers of this development. In Germany, where these trends first emerged, Missionskunde (“study of missions”) or Missionslehre (“teaching of missions”) were the terms that most often appeared in the titles of new learned journals, such as the Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft (1884), or publications such as Gustav Warneck’s Evangelische Missionslehre (1892–1903). They would eventually be supplanted by the term Missionswissenschaft (“science of missions”), which had first been employed as early as 1832 by the German church historian Johann Danz. However, the term became widely used for the science of missions, alongside its French equivalent, science missionnaire, only from the second decade of the twentieth century. German Catholics began to employ the term Missionswissenschaft from 1911, when the Catholic theological faculty of
the University of Münster established a chair in *Katholische Missionswissenschaft* and began publication of the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*. The first holder of the chair and editor of the journal was Joseph Schmidlin (1876–1944), an Alsatian Catholic who is generally regarded as the father of Catholic mission studies.4

Schmidlin pioneered the pursuit of Missionswissenschaft in the Roman Catholic Church. His Protestant predecessor, the German Lutheran Gustav Warneck (1834–1910), appears to have used the term less frequently, though he shared many of its presuppositions and latterly held a university chair bearing this title. Warneck was the first editor of the first learned periodical of missionary science, the *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, from its inception in 1874 until his death in 1910. He was also the author of the first encyclopedic treatment of the subject, *Evangelische Missionslehre*, which was first published in five serial parts between 1892 and 1903.5 It was concerned primarily with German missions, and was never translated into English. As professor of Missionswissenschaft at the University of Halle from 1896 to 1908, Warneck has the distinction of holding the first full-time chair of mission studies in a German university. The United States followed a decade later, when in 1906, the former China missionary Harlan P. Beach was appointed to the newly established D. Willis James chair in missions at Yale Divinity School, the first such post to be housed in an American university.

Strictly speaking, Gustav Warneck was not the first academic to hold a post devoted to the study of Christian mission. At the University of Erlangen in 1864, the former director of the Leipzig Mission, Karl Graul, was appointed to lecture on the study of missions, but died before he could take up his post. The University of Utrecht had a professor of missions from 1878. In Edinburgh in 1867, the pioneering Scottish Presbyterian missionary to Bengal, Alexander Duff, was appointed to a chair of evangelistic theology at the Free Church of Scotland’s New College. Duff held the post until his death in 1878, but his prolix teaching seems to have failed to enthuse the Free Church’s students. It also failed to impress later German commentators. Joseph Schmidlin roundly dismissed Duff’s non-theoretical approach as “awkward and unscientific, almost childishly naïve.”6 This was not anti-Protestant bias, for Schmidlin was a great admirer of Warneck as someone who had pointed the way for Catholic scholars of mission to follow. With their resolutely practical emphasis, Duff’s lectures at New College were emphatically not to be reckoned as a first fruit of Missionswissenschaft, as the new German scholars of mission understood the term. As will be emphasized later, it was not until after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 that the hitherto Germanic ideal of missionary science became more widely, though never universally, adopted in the Anglo-American Protestant world. Although Thomas Smith was appointed in 1880 to succeed Duff at New College, he was no more successful as a teacher and resigned two years later. The chair of evangelistic theology lapsed entirely in 1909, with an occasional series of Duff Missionary Lectures delivered by visiting lecturers, surviving to this day in New College as the only direct legacy in Edinburgh of Duff’s pioneering post.
The Role of Protestant Missionary Ecumenism

The decisive impetus for the construction of a transnational Protestant community devoted to serious reflection on Christian mission derived from the widespread conviction among Protestants that world mission was a common spiritual enterprise. This demanded structured cooperation between those of different denominational and national backgrounds. Well before 1910, Protestant missions formed national and even transnational bodies that gave institutional expression to their concern for cooperation in mission. This was notably the case in continental Europe and North America, where Protestant ecumenism was considerably further advanced than in Britain, which was ecclesiastically polarized between the Church of England and the Nonconformist denominations. On the European continent, there were well-established regional or national ecumenical bodies representing Protestant missions in Scandinavia (from 1863), Germany (from 1885) and the Netherlands (from 1887). A conference of representatives of mission boards from Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland was formed as early as 1866, generally meeting every four years thereafter. In North America in January 1893, twenty-three Protestant foreign missionary societies of the United States and Canada had formed an annual conference. By 1910, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, as it became known, was a well-established feature of the North American Protestant landscape, representing over fifty missionary societies.

This accelerating momentum of Protestant cooperation in mission increasingly followed a course that crossed national frontiers and, indeed, the oceans. International conferences on Protestant missions were convened in New York in 1854, Liverpool in 1860, London in 1878 and 1888, New York in 1900, and, of course, Edinburgh in 1910. The accent of most of these gatherings was primarily on the exchange of information and on inspirational encouragement towards closer collaboration, but the dynamics of cooperation were pushing Protestants to ever-deeper levels of shared missionary reflection. At the Centenary Missionary Conference held in London in 1888, Gustav Warneck submitted in absentia a plan for the formation of a standing central committee, to be based in London, with representatives elected by national missionary conferences in “every Protestant nation.” It would promote cooperation, arbitrate in comity disputes, and organize an international missionary conference every ten years. In his paper, Warneck also suggested that the various ecclesiastical systems of the European and American churches should be viewed as mere scaffolding that would assist in the construction of indigenous churches, but would eventually be discarded. Here, in embryo, was a statement of the case for constructing a shared Protestant science of missions, though only at Edinburgh in 1910 would a concerted effort be made to take Warneck’s ideas forward.
The first exploratory attempts at formulating a Protestant science of missions can thus be dated to the closing years of the nineteenth century. These endeavors became more systematic and productive of lasting institutional expression in the wake of the 1910 Edinburgh conference. The World Missionary Conference had originally been entitled the “Third Ecumenical Missionary Conference,” since it was conceived as the sequel to the gatherings in London in 1888 and New York in 1900. The title was abandoned in 1908, because it was acknowledged that it could not be used truthfully of a conference in which no representatives of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Oriental Orthodox churches were present.

Almost from the outset, the Edinburgh conference was planned, as the Rev. W. H. Findlay, a former Methodist missionary in India and a member of the British executive committee, put it, “to be a Grand Council for the Advancement of Missionary Science.” Foreign missions, once so widely ridiculed, had come of age, and their most thoughtful advocates believed that the time had come for the application of the rigorous methods of modern social science to the challenges and problems that missionaries faced on the field. The conference secretary, J. H. Oldham, a thirty-four-year-old Scot who had served in India with the Young Men’s Christian Association, held this conviction with peculiar force. Oldham was insistent that the call to urgent evangelistic action which would issue from Edinburgh must not be based on emotional and stereotypical depictions of the plight of the “heathen world.” Rather, it should proceed from the “ascertained and sifted facts” minutely analyzed in the weighty reports of the eight preparatory study Commissions presented to the conference. Oldham’s hope was that the eight Commission reports would become standard works of reference on world mission, distilling the best results of field experience and laying the foundations for the emergence of a new “science of missions” that would inform all future practice.

Missions were becoming a matter of induction and experiment, in which method was everything. For nine days, the delegates endured word-heavy sessions that began at 9:45 in the morning and did not conclude until 9:30 at night. They listened to some 300 consecutive speeches of seven minutes each during the daytime, and twenty-four evening addresses of up to forty minutes each.

In the long term, probably the most significant legacy of the World Missionary Conference to mission studies was the inception of the International Review of Missions. The new journal was initiated by the Continuation Committee, which the conference set up on June 21, 1910. When the Continuation Committee met in May 1911 at Auckland Castle in England, they resolved to establish an “International Missionary Review,” which would “look steadily at the missionary work of the Church in its whole range
and variety, with a view to penetrating to its deepest meaning." The inaugural issue of the *International Review of Missions* (IRM) appeared in January 1912. In a preface, J. H. Oldham, as editor, expounded his vision for the journal. He declared its primary purpose to be “to further the serious study of the facts and problems of missionary work among non-Christian peoples, and to contribute to the building up of a science of missions." The original draft of the preface, more than the published version, makes plain that Oldham conceived the aim of the *Review* as the encouragement of a “scientific” approach to Christian missions. This would make the critical insights of both Germanic and Asian Christian thinkers available to an Anglo-American missionary community that had hitherto been pragmatic, rather than deeply reflective in its perspectives.

The first aim of the journal, explained Oldham, was to make the study of missions into a scientific and experimental discipline, by distilling “large guiding principles” from “a thorough and fearless examination of the facts” and testing “all methods with a view to securing the highest efficiency." Oldham’s original draft emphasized this even more strongly. “The tremendous task to which the Edinburgh Conference pointed,” he wrote, “cannot be accomplished without severe intellectual labour.” The *IRM* would bring Christian thinkers and scholars of Europe and North America into fruitful relationship. For this to happen, Oldham envisaged that articles written in languages other than English would be translated regularly. However, missionary problems were not to be studied “exclusively from a western point of view.” Prominence would be given to contributions from indigenous church leaders in the mission fields. Echoing a sentiment expressed at Edinburgh 1910 by Bishop Charles Gore of Birmingham, Oldham wrote that “[e]ach nation has the capacity of apprehending more clearly than any other some particular element or aspect of the whole.” The *IRM* was to be a channel whereby the special gifts of theological insight granted by God to each national church could be shared with the whole. There were regular articles in the early volumes of the *IRM* from Asian Protestant leaders, among them prominent speakers at the Edinburgh conference, such as Cheng Jingyi, the first (joint) secretary of the China Continuation Committee, and the Japanese Congregational minister, Dr. Harada Tasuku. Mission studies were ceasing to be a purely Western discourse, though the process of transition would prove a long one.

However, just as no indigenous African voices were heard at the Edinburgh conference, there appear to have been no articles in the first decade of the journal written by authors native to Africa. African Christians were not yet regarded as participants in the academic community of missionary science. As Oldham asserted in his original draft, what was of greater importance was to make available to Anglophone readers “the scientific work and strenuous thought of Continental students of missions.” If the *IRM* could “accomplish for Anglo-Saxon Missions even a part of what the *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift* has done for German Missions,” he observed, “its establishment will be abundantly justified.” Oldham clearly regarded Anglo-American mission leaders as somewhat limited intellectually. In order to further his goal of enabling them to benefit from “the special gifts” of intellect demonstrated by continental European mission leaders...
thinkers, each quarterly issue of the _IRM_ was to include an annotated bibliography of missionary books and pamphlets published not only in English, but also in German, French, Dutch, and Scandinavian languages. This bibliographical function of the _Review_ was integral to its overall purpose. The early years of the periodical also gave prominence to articles and reviews of publications written by continental European (especially German) mission thinkers, in contrast to their relative marginalization at Edinburgh 1910. Just occasionally, the early _IRM_ printed articles by Catholic authors. The July 1914 issue contained an article by Father Friedrich Schwager, a member of the Society of the Divine Word, and a co-editor of the _Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft_, on “Missionary Methods from a Roman Catholic Standpoint.”

The _IRM_ was thus intended to nurture a truly ecumenical—though originally, predominantly Protestant mind-set—based on a common belief in Jesus Christ as “the way, truth and life” for all people; a new vision in the redemptive purpose of God for humanity; and a shared faith in “the power, goodness, and availability of God.” The purpose of the _IRM_ was to be more than a talking shop for the practitioners of the new missionary science. With its sights on what would later become known as the _missio Dei_, it was to become an instrument of God’s salvific purpose to establish the kingdom of God with power—as Randall Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had so memorably reminded Edinburgh 1910. When, in April 1969, the _International Review of Missions_ made the small but significant change in its name to the _International Review of Mission_, the transition in emphasis from a Western-oriented to a _missio Dei_ understanding of Christian mission could make justifiable appeal to the original theological vision which had inspired Oldham as the first editor of the journal.

**THE VARIED LEGACY OF EDINBURGH 1910 FOR THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF MISSIONS**

Two of the eight commissions that prepared the agenda for the Edinburgh conference had made explicit the hope that the conference would establish the science of missions on a secure and lasting intellectual basis. Commission VI was devoted to “The Home Base,” and included a chapter entitled, “The Science of Missionary Societies,” plus no less than 226 pages of bibliography intended to provide a comprehensive resource of “missionary intelligence.” This made the Commission VI report much the longest of the eight World Missionary Conference reports.

However, of greater importance in the long term was Commission V, which drew attention in its report on “The Preparation of Missionaries” to the haphazard and unsatisfactory nature of existing provision for the training of missionary candidates on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, it highlighted the need to systematize and raise the educational standards of the missionary training offered to women, which was frequently offered in small, privately run, and poorly resourced institutions.
In the United States, one immediate response to the report was the formation in 1911 of the Hartford School of Missions (later known as the Kennedy School of Missions) at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. It was not accidental that the Seminary’s president was Dr. W. Douglas Mackenzie, the chairman of Commission V, and that one of the Commission’s members, Edward Capen of Boston, was secretary of the new school. The school proudly advertised itself in the early numbers of the *International Review of Missions* as “an interdenominational graduate school for Special Missionary Preparation as recommended by Commission V of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference.”

Through the expertise of Duncan Black Macdonald, professor of Semitic languages in the seminary, the Kennedy School of Missions became a leading center for the study of Islamics, a subject that had received scant attention in missionary training prior to 1910. By the early 1950s, the Kennedy School had more missionary candidates or missionaries on furlough enrolled on its courses than any other theological school in the United States. The Hartford example illustrates the extent to which mission studies have often paved the way for the academic study of world religions.

It is also not accidental that in the years following 1910, chairs of missions were established in a number of leading American seminaries or university schools of theology, including Boston University (1910), Drew Theological Seminary, Madison (1914), Emory University (1914), Princeton Theological Seminary (1914), Union Theological Seminary, New York (1918) and the University of Chicago Divinity School (1920). The creation of the chair at Union Theological Seminary followed the establishment in 1914 by John R. Mott, the chairman of the Edinburgh conference, of the nearby Missionary Research Library, which was funded by the Baptist oil magnate and philanthropist, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. From 1929, the Library was housed in the seminary itself, where it remains to this day (though now incorporated in the library of Columbia University). Its *Occasional Bulletin*, founded by R. Pierce Beaver in 1950—reviving a very intermittent *Bulletin* that first appeared in 1928—developed into one of the most widely circulated periodicals in mission studies. In 1976, editorial and management control of the periodical was handed over to the Overseas Ministries Study Center, located in Ventnor, New Jersey until 1987, and from then, to 2020, in New Haven, Connecticut. From 1977, it appeared under the new title of the *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research*. From 1981 to 2015, the journal was entitled the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, before assuming its current title, the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, in 2016.

Similar initiatives were taken on the European continent in the wake of the Edinburgh conference. Julius Richter, co-vice-chairman of Commission I, and a member of the Edinburgh Continuation Committee, was appointed the first professor of missions at the University of Berlin, a post he held from 1914 to 1930. In Hamburg, a lectureship for missions was created (significantly) within the Colonial Institute in 1912, which, in 1919, was incorporated in the University of Hamburg. In Scandinavia, the University of Copenhagen established a lectureship in History of Missions in 1918, which became an associate professorship from 1923 and a full professorship from 1939, though only as a personal chair for the holder, Lorenz Bergmann. The University of Lund had a
lectureship in history of missions from 1919, and the University of Uppsala a full profe-
sorship in history of missions and Far Eastern religions from 1930.38

In Britain, however, there was no such response within the university sector. The
most tangible fruit of Commission V’s recommendations was more modest: namely, the
opening in 1912 of Carey Hall as an addition to two existing Nonconformist training
colleges (Woodbrooke and Kingsmead) located in the Selly Oak district of Birmingham,
on land leased by Edward Cadbury, of the Quaker chocolate manufacturing family.
Carey Hall was a pioneering, collaborative venture in the training of women
missionaries, involving three societies from different denominations: the Baptist
Missionary Society (specifically its new Women’s Missionary Association), the London
Missionary Society, and the Women’s Missionary Association of the Presbyterian
Church of England. In 1936, the Selly Oak Colleges, which had grown into a federation of
eight colleges, provided the sole location in Britain for a chair of missions: the Cadbury
chair, established to provide intellectual leadership in the training of missionary
candidates. In 1971, this chair became jointly owned by the Selly Oak Colleges and the
University of Birmingham; it was held by the Swiss scholar of Pentecostalism Walter
Hollenweger until 1989. Only from 1990, during the tenure of Professor Werner Ustorf,
did the chair of missions pass entirely into the hands of the University. Despite the
public impact of the Edinburgh conference, mission studies have made late, and still
very limited, inroads into British universities.

FROM THE SCIENCE OF MISSIONS TO THE
HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGIONS AND
“WORLD CHRISTIANITY”

The plea made by the Edinburgh conference for the recognition of the study of missions
as a truly scientific enterprise thus did not meet with a universal welcome in academia.
Moreover, where university chairs in missions were established, there was a percep-
tible trend for them to broaden in scope or even evolve into something else altogether.
A survey of American universities and seminaries conducted in the late 1940s found
that in the interdenominational schools and universities, the predominant emphasis
was now on the study of religion. Only in the denominational seminaries did a clear em-
phasis on missions survive in the curriculum.39

The shift in the focus of the global aspects of the theological curriculum to the his-
torical and comparative study of religions was most marked in theologically lib-
eral institutions. Thus, for Archibald G. Baker, the holder for many years of the chair
of missions at the University of Chicago Divinity School, the application of scien-
tific methods to the study of Christian missions led inexorably to the conclusion that
Christianity was simply “one religion among many.” Religion should be understood as
“a phase of cultural development.” Baker accordingly defined Christian mission as “a cooperative quest for truth and a cooperative activity for the good of mankind.” It is no surprise that by the academic year 1947–8, of 177 courses available at the Divinity School, only one concerned missions, and that was an elective topic in the field of history. Nevertheless, the trend was not irreversible. In 1955, the Divinity School appointed R. Pierce Beaver, the former director of the Missionary Research Library, to a new chair in missions that had an explicitly historical emphasis. It was a bold step, given that “the very concept of the Christian mission itself was viewed with condescension, if not disdain, by many in the university faculty and student body.” Beaver occupied the chair with distinction until his retirement in 1972, but there would be no more posts in mission at the University of Chicago.

As the twentieth century unfolded, it gradually became plain that the only realistic means of maintaining the study of missions in modern research universities or mainstream seminaries was to place the subject in the broader perspective of ecumenical or historical studies. Eventually, this broader perspective would be defined in terms of the historical and social scientific study of the growth of “world Christianity.” This was a phrase that first made its appearance as early as 1929, in the context of the increasingly global scope of the developing ecumenical movement. Its academic use with reference to scholarly analysis of the diverse phenomena of a rapidly expanding non-Western Christianity is more recent, becoming sporadically evident only from the late 1980s. Thus, at Princeton Theological Seminary, the chair of comparative religion and missions was redenominated in the late 1930s as a chair of ecumenics, to which the influential former Scottish missionary in Latin America, John A. Mackay, was appointed. Today, ecumenics is bracketed with history as a subject area within the Princeton faculty. Missions no longer appears in the list of faculty posts, but world Christianity does, with the Mackay chair in World Christianity being reserved for visiting professors. At Yale Divinity School, the title of the chair in missions was changed in 1927 to the D. Willis James Professorship of Missions and Oriental History. Under the long and influential tenure of Kenneth Scott Latourette (1921–53), the focus of the post became primarily historical. There was a natural synergy with the rich archival and library resources of the Day Historical Library of Foreign Missions, established in the Divinity School in 1891. The Library, now known simply as the Day Missions Library, has developed into the most comprehensive resource for the study of missions and world Christianity anywhere in the world. The historical emphasis of mission studies at Yale was perpetuated under Latourette’s successors, Charles W. Forman (1953–87) and Lamin Sanneh (1989–2019). The title of Sanneh’s post was broadened to Missions and World Christianity, though the pairing with a chair in history in Yale University remained.

Similar trends can be observed in Scandinavia. The most eminent scholar of mission in post-war Sweden, Bengt Sundkler (1909–95), secured a niche in the Swedish university world by occupying a chair of church history with mission history at Uppsala University from 1949 to his retirement in 1974. In 1956, Sundkler initiated Studia Missionalia Uppsiensiens, the first scholarly monograph series on the history, theology,
and anthropology of Christian missions. Some 120 volumes later, under the broader title of Studia Missionalia Svecana, this remarkable Swedish series is still going strong.

Despite the continuing general assumption of the historical profession that the missionary movement was no more than an epiphenomenon of Western imperialism, the strictly historical—as opposed to theological—study of missions has maintained a precarious foothold in a small number of Western universities. Avowedly Christian, and more explicitly theological approaches to mission studies have been largely confined to seminaries—mainly those of conservative inclination. Increasingly, the study of Christian mission in the university sector finds its place as part of the developing academic fields of world Christianity; and, still, more recently, the anthropology of Christianity is the application of anthropological methodology to the analysis of Christian belief and practice, including missionary practice. One notable example of the former is the Centre for the Study of World Christianity in the University of Edinburgh. The Centre traces its origins to the University of Aberdeen, where in 1982, the leading Scottish mission scholar and historian, Professor Andrew F. Walls, established the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the non-Western World. The original emphasis of the centre was on the assembling of documentation on the growth of non-Western Christianity. The collection of archival and library material began to attract research students, and the centre became one of the world leaders in pioneering academic studies of world Christianity. In 1987, the centre moved to the University of Edinburgh, where it continues to flourish, under the new name (since 2009) of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity.43

**Terminology: The Origins and Varied Fortunes of “Missiology”**

The terms used in the twentieth century to describe the continuing study of missions varied according to national context. The term Missionswissenschaft has survived in German usage to the present: it continues to feature in the title of leading journals of mission studies, such as the Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft and of the German society for mission studies, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Missionswissenschaft. However, in English, its strict linguistic equivalent, “missionary science,” carried more explicit connotations of disciplinary hubris, not to speak of an uncritical positivism alien to Western cultures which no longer placed such unquestioning confidence in the possibility of finding out the ‘facts’ of a particular field of study. The English phrase appeared only rarely after the 1930s, and stood no chance of surviving the postcolonial and ideological upheavals of the 1960s and beyond. In Anglophone usage, it was increasingly replaced, either by “missiology,” or simply by the neutral term “mission studies.”

The invention of the concept of missiology has been attributed to the Dutch Jesuit, Ludwig J. van Rijckevorsel, in 1915.44 However, the term appears to have entered
common currency through a Francophone tradition emanating from Louvain in Belgium, where the Mission Society of Scheut and the Jesuits jointly instituted a series of *semaines de missiologie* in 1919. The initial emphasis of these study weeks was more practical than theoretical, and the university premises were used simply as a convenient location. Nevertheless, the contributions of the Belgian Jesuit Pierre Charles (1883–1954), professor of theology at Louvain, were crucial in deepening the level of reflection offered during these weeks. Between 1926 and 1929, he published his talks in a monthly series of *Dossiers de l’Action Missionnaire*. These were republished in expanded form in 1938 as a “*manuel de missiologie*.” Charles continued to direct the *semaines de missiologie* until 1950. As the influence of the Louvain weeks spread, the terms *missiologie* and *missiologia* were adopted quite rapidly by European Catholic scholars, though they attracted a good deal of criticism. The French Protestant intellectual Raoul Allier dismissed the word “missiology” in 1928 as a barbarous hybrid combining Latin and Greek forms. In 1946, the English Dominican, Father Ian Hislop, similarly branded the term as “clumsy and pretentious.” As late as 1955, the leading Norwegian missiologist Olav Myklebust could observe that missionary scholars still expressed their dislike of the “horrid word,” “missiology.”

Nevertheless, after the Second World War, “missiology” made inroads among Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly in the Netherlands and among American Evangelicals, who increasingly represented the dominant force in American Protestant mission thinking. The Netherlands remains one of the few countries where university teaching posts in missiology can still be found, such as in Radboud University, Nijmegen, or the Protestant Theological University located in Amsterdam and Groningen. Even in the Netherlands, however, missiology is a disappearing discipline in the university sector. At the University of Utrecht, for example, the chair of mission held from 1986 to 2003 by Jan A. B. Jongeneel became first an associate chair in Missiology: World Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, and then from 2014, a chair in World Christianity, in the tenure of his successor, Martha Frederiks.

From the 1950s, the term “missiology” also appeared sporadically in the Southern Hemisphere, notably in South Africa. The faculty of theology at the University of Pretoria, where the history of missions had formed part of the curriculum since 1938, had a Department of Science and Religion and Missiology from 1953 until 2018. The University of Stellenbosch established a post in missiology in 1959. Through the creative initiative of the young Afrikaner missiologist, David Bosch (1929–92), the Southern African Missiological Society was formed in 1968, and a journal, *Missionalia*, began publication in 1973. The term became more widely known in North America after 1972, as a result of the formation of the American Society of Missiology (ASM) in June that year, and the consequent publication of the Society’s journal, *Missiology*, from January 1973.

Even though *Missiology* carried the sub-title, “An International Review,” in the hope of attracting an international readership, in Britain, the term “missiology” still made little or no headway. In 1996, when the present author assumed the directorship of an American-conceived and American-funded, but Cambridge-based, international research project that had been given the title of the North Atlantic Missiology Project
(NAMP), he found that, in British academic circles, the term missiology was little understood. He consequently abandoned the title as soon as he could.50

THE CONVERGENCE OF PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC MISSION STUDIES

Missiology was established as a journal with the intention of bringing together conservatives and liberals, theologians and anthropologists, and, perhaps most significantly, Protestants and Catholics.51 Of the thirteen members of the first editorial board, two were Catholic mission scholars of some distinction: Eugene Hillman and Louis Luzbetak. The gradual rapprochement of the hitherto discrete bodies of Catholic and Protestant scholarship on missions was a hallmark of the years after the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65. One of the principal legacies of Vatican II was to redefine Catholic ecclesiology in explicitly missiological terms; henceforth, much Catholic thought viewed the church less as a hierarchical institution and more as the whole body of the faithful sent into the world on an apostolic commission.

The first post-war initiatives to establish organizations of mission studies on an international basis were Protestant in origin, but drew the attention of some Catholic missiologists. The Norwegian, Olav Myklebust, drafted a formal proposal in 1951 for the creation of an “International Institute of Scientific Missionary Research.” Some Catholics as well as Protestants welcomed his ambitious proposal, but nothing came of the idea. Ironically, the IRM, the product of an earlier generation’s enthusiasm for the science of missions, declined to publish an article commending the proposal. Two European conferences on mission studies were convened in April 1968 and August 1970, which attracted a few Catholic scholars, such as the Indian Jesuit and liberation theologian, Samuel Rayan, who spoke at the second conference in Oslo on “Mission after Vatican II.” The Oslo conference resolved that an international association for mission studies should be created. The International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) held its inaugural assembly at Dreibergen, the Netherlands, in August 1972. There were significant numbers of Catholics present. By August 1978, when the fourth IAMS assembly took place, the extent of Catholic participation was extensive enough for the venue to be the headquarters of the Maryknoll Fathers, Brothers, and Sisters in New York.52 The three related Maryknoll mission organizations, and their publishing house, Orbis Books, would henceforth play a central role in shaping trans-confessional missiological discourse. It is striking that for a Catholic publishing house, some of Orbis Books’ most successful titles were those written by Protestant mission scholars, notably David Bosch’s Transforming Mission (1991) and three volumes of the collected essays of Andrew F. Walls, published in 1996, 2002, and 2017.53 The IAMS scholarly journal, Mission Studies, published from 1984 in succession to the previous IAMS Newsletter, was also thoroughly ecumenical from the beginning. By the early years of
the twentieth century, IAMS had become a thoroughly ecumenical body encompassing both Protestant and Catholic traditions of mission thought, and, on occasion, including Orthodox representatives as well. One of the most important facets of the work of IAMS has been its collaborative work on documentation, archives, bibliography, and (more recently) oral history, which has been focused on an international network known first as DAB, and then from 2003 as DABOH. The aim of the network has been to recover lost memories of mission for peoples that received as well as participated in missionary efforts; again, the historical emphasis of much recent mission studies is apparent.54

**The Diversification of Mission Studies Scholarship—Geography and Gender**

For much of the twentieth century, the community of mission scholars remained overwhelmingly Western and male in composition. Although the number of representatives of non-Western churches in international mission conferences steadily increased throughout the century, from the paltry total achieved by Edinburgh 1910, no more than 20 of the 1,215 official delegates were from the non-Western world;55 the near-monopoly of White males on mission studies scholarship remained intact for most of the century. It began to erode from the 1970s, as theological institutions in the non-European world gradually passed from the control of Western mission agencies into the hands of the indigenous churches, and as female voices became increasingly prominent in the whole discipline of theology and religious studies.

In the field of mission studies, women such as the Dutch-born Anne-Marie Kool, the British missiologist Kirsteen Kim, and the American Catholics Mary M. Motte and Angelyn Dries have become established authorities. Many of the Asian, African, and Latin American scholars who now began to feature in published writing on mission studies did not necessarily style themselves primarily as missiologists or even as mission scholars. They were more likely to describe themselves as contextual theologians, or as theologians of interreligious encounter, or simply as biblical scholars. However, as their own personal experiences and scholarly concerns were shaped by churches that were much more active in mission than were most churches in the northern hemisphere, mission themes and implications often featured prominently in their writing. Notable male examples include the Indian Jesuit Michael Amaladoss; the Vietnamese-born Catholic Peter Phan; the two Ghanaians: the Anglican John S. Pobee and the Presbyterian Kwame Bediako (1945–2008); Israel Selvanayagam from the Church of South India; and the Malaysian-born Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong. Leading contemporary women writers on mission from the Global South include the Nigerian Catholic biblical scholar Teresa Okure; the Kenyan Catholic Philomena Mwaura; the Hong Kong-born Anglican Kwok Pui-lan; and the Latin American Evangelical theologian Ruth Padilla De Borst.
The new generation of mission scholars represented by the above selection of names varied greatly in their theological and methodological perspectives. One thing they shared in common, however, was an almost total abandonment of the positivist language of “missionary science” that had proved so formative for the early development of mission studies in Europe and North America. No longer was the study of Christian mission a question of assembling, analyzing, and ordering the empirical ‘facts’ arising from the encounters of Western professional missionaries with the challenges posed by non-European faiths and cultures. Rather, the study of mission has become more of a corporate narrative exercise, in which Christians hear, exchange, and ponder the life stories of those who have sought to live the communal life of the Gospel, and to witness to its truths in a multiplicity of contexts. Mission studies have become less pragmatic, more theologically reflective, and more interdisciplinary and culturally diverse. Although the attempt to ground this area of Christian studies as a science acknowledged by the secular academy must be judged to have failed, the southward shift in the center of gravity of Christianity has meant that serious reflection on the task of communicating the Gospel has moved back closer to the life of the churches. That is where, ultimately, it belongs.

Notes

12. The following section of the article is a condensation of a longer article: Brian Stanley, “Edinburgh 1910 and the Genesis of the IRM” that was published first in *International Review of Mission* 100, no. 2 (2011): 149–159, and then as "Edinburgh 1910 and the Genesis


18. Report 'I' to Continuation Committee meeting at Bishop Auckland, May 16–19, 1911, Burke Library archives, Union Theological Seminary [hereafter UTS], MRL 12, World Missionary Conference Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 2.


23. The published version anticipated occasional articles published in German or French, an expectation that was not realized; see J. H. Oldham, ed., “The Editor’s Notes,” 2.


34. e.g., IRM 2, no. 1 (January 1913): ix; and no. 3 (January 1914): iii. The Hartford School was a development of an existing “Special course of instruction in foreign missions,” begun in
1904. The preliminary advertisement pages are not always included in digital versions of the IRM.


55. Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 91. To the nineteen names there listed, a twentieth should probably be added, that of the Eurasian Methodist from Madras, Grace Stephens. I owe this point to Professor Dana Robert of Boston University.
**Key Works**


“Mission studies” appears in the titles of journals like *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* and *Mission Studies*, and in the names of academic organizations such as the Korean Society of Mission Studies, the US-based Midwest Mission Studies Fellowship, the International Association for Mission Studies, and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. “Mission studies” also identifies fields of study and units within larger academic or ecclesial institutions—for example, as an academic area label at Nijmegen University and Boston University, and at the Crowther Mission Studies Library of the Church Mission Society. In such uses, the term “mission” performs as an adjective modifying “studies.”

Related terms in English identify similarly oriented entities: “missionary,” “missiology,” or “missiological,” or, sometimes, simply “mission.” Thus, there are the *Indian Missiological Journal* and the *Japan Mission Journal*, as well as *Missiology, the International Review of Mission, Missio Africanus Journal of African Missiology*, and the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*. In languages besides English, similar terms abound: *sciences de la mission* in French-language journals, like *Revue Africaine des Sciences de la Mission* from Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo; the Spanish journal, *Misiones Extranjeras: Revista de Misionología* (Foreign Missions: Review of Missiology); the Italian *Mondo e Missione* (World and Missions); and the German *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* (roughly, Journal for the Study of Mission and Religion). In all these cases, the implication is that the designated entities concern themselves with studies—a wide-ranging notion labeling multifarious informal and formal scholarly undertakings—that focus on mission, a term that has come to designate human efforts to spread Christianity.
This volume follows convention, identifying mission with historical attempts to extend Christianity. This chapter defining mission studies will have two parts. First, it will establish the domain of reference for the academic field or area conventionally meant by “mission studies.” Accepting that academic disciplines and sub-disciplines change over time, this chapter will outline the history of the study of mission, highlighting recent changes in its scope and the self-understanding of scholars involved.

Second, the chapter will look ahead to the future of mission studies. It will suggest its likely future, and also articulate what ought to be the scope and role of mission studies moving ahead, to orient it in a certain direction in intellectual inquiry more broadly. This chapter, therefore, will be retrospective as well as prospective, descriptive and also prescriptive. Anticipating likely transformations in the world Christian movement and in scholarship, the chapter seeks to establish a course to follow through appropriate articulation and self-limitation of the field, shaped by a desire for conceptual and disciplinary clarity.

Mission studies must operate at two levels to move forward. First, it should remain focused on the ordinary sense of the term “mission,” so that it never ignores its place in advancing understanding of human efforts at spreading Christianity. Secondly, mission studies must be open to new ways of defining Christian mission that acknowledge past realities retrospectively linked to mission, and new understandings of mission that expand its scope, as discerned by scholars both theological and non-theological. By remaining open to these two levels—an ordinary sense and an expanded sense, historically and theologically—mission studies can thereby reflect its development over time and maintain its relevance in academic and ecclesial realms.

The Scope of Mission Studies

For several reasons, the label “mission studies” naturally resists a self-evident, univocal definition. First, its use is often anachronistic due to historical changes in language and academic practice, since the word “mission” and its cognates in other European languages were not applied to efforts at spreading Christianity until the sixteenth century. In addition, the formal and self-conscious study of mission in academic life dates only to the nineteenth century, while the term “missiology”—the most popular term designating the theological discipline dedicated to studying Christian mission—only appeared in the early twentieth century. Since what came to be called “mission” was studied in a variety of ways before that term described it, implicit and informal mission studies occurred centuries before “mission” described its subject matter, and even longer before it was institutionalized within the academy.

A second challenge in defining mission studies precisely arises from the many other terms used to describe both the practice designated by mission and mission studies. This proliferation of labels means that mission studies often occurs when called something else, while certain terms that indicate links to Christian mission in some uses
do not do so in other uses. Examples of terms analogous to mission include a variety linked to “evangelical,” and others related to “apostolic,” and they range from traditional labels for Christian mission like “propagation of the faith” to more recent ones linked to “intercultural.” These days, much of what (until recently) was called “mission studies” or “missiology” at academic institutions, takes place in units designated as “intercultural studies,” or related terms. Thus, both Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary in the US grant degrees in Intercultural Studies, and universities like Göttingen in Germany and Trinity College Dublin in Ireland offer degrees in Intercultural Theology. In each case, much of the curriculum is clearly reminiscent of approaches and disciplines that in the past would have been part of missiology. To add to the confusion, other academic programs with no links to Christian mission, historical or otherwise, also can be called intercultural studies.

A third challenge to a settled meaning for mission studies consists in the considerable historical evolution that the meaning of Christian mission itself has undergone, with manifold theological and other semantic developments, even recently. The word “mission” had a prehistory within theology prior to being deployed to describe Christian efforts to spread the faith—part of speculative reflection on the Trinity, since the Son and Holy Spirit had “missions” from God the Father. In addition, since its sixteenth-century application to evangelizing efforts, the term’s content has never ceased to be subject to ongoing theological reflection. Thus, even when limited by the implied further adjective “Christian,” the field of Christian mission studies resists an obvious and self-evident definition.

Mindful of these challenges to defining mission studies precisely, it is nonetheless the case that the study of Christian mission within academic institutions began in the nineteenth century. Moreover, scholarship about mission has undergone considerable transformation since the middle of the twentieth century.

The Institutionalization of Mission Studies and Recent Challenges to the Field

Mission studies became institutionalized in the nineteenth century, shaped by Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1768–1834) influential decision to append the study of mission to practical theology, one of the four major fields in theological education that emerged in Protestant academic theology. With German Protestant Gustav Warnek (1834–1910), the academic subject of mission studies took on a life of its own, both as a practical discipline preparing missionaries, and as a theoretical discipline integrating Christian mission with other theological fields. Catholics soon followed, with Joseph Schmidlin (1876–1944) inaugurating the first Catholic chair in mission at Münster in Germany in 1910. The term “missiology” itself was coined to describe the now burgeoning academic discipline by the Dutch Jesuit scholar Ludwig J. van Rijckevorsel in 1915.

As a new academic field, missiology in the twentieth century continued serving as a preparatory discipline for those anticipating becoming missionaries, while also
developing as an embracing term for the study of mission history and the development of theologies of mission. This latter task drew mission studies into engagement with other areas of theology, including ethics, systematic and fundamental theology, and biblical scholarship, as well as church history more broadly. The twentieth century witnessed growing institutionalization of the field in many universities, as the study of mission took a formal place in seminaries and universities, especially across western Europe and North America.\(^5\)

Since the middle of the twentieth century, a number of historical transformations have raised challenges to the practice and study of Christian mission. The end of formal colonialism in much of the world, beginning in the late 1940s, the growth of Christianity in the once-colonized world, and its recession in the countries that initiated and oversaw colonialism, as well as important ecclesial events, like the expansion of the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church’s Second Vatican Council, have all generated novel circumstances shaping mission studies. Other later developments have also affected the field. These include the growth of ecumenism among many global Christian bodies, so that Catholic and Protestant missionary reflection occurs in a closer relation than before. Recent decades have also seen the proliferation of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity, as well as the splitting of global Protestantism, with many Christians resistant to the alleged non-evangelical instincts of the World Council of Churches and desirous of more unapologetic preaching of salvation through Christ. Other religions have also changed, with new energetic efforts at proselytism by adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism, and especially Islam. Other changes included the end of the Cold War with a resulting renewed openness to Christianity in the former Soviet bloc and the new growth of Christianity in places like northeast India and China. Finally, 2010 saw the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh Conference on World Missions, which occasioned considerable missiological reflection and important statements on mission by global Christian bodies, including the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, the Lausanne Movement, and various Orthodox bodies.\(^6\)

Scholars in mission studies have self-consciously sought to address such changes. This is reflected in the large number of articles and books focusing on missiology whose titles include words that mark their novelty. Epitomizing this trend were three volumes entitled *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization*, that came out in the 1990s, edited by James Scherer and Stephen Bevans.\(^7\)

### Changes in Mission Studies since the Mid-twentieth Century

Transformations in mission studies have taken many forms, reflecting changing evaluations of Christian mission itself and new scholarly approaches to the practice, theology, and history of mission.
One cause of the widespread felt need for newness in mission studies has been the criticism of Christian mission since the widespread decolonization of much of the world, beginning in the 1940s. Awareness has grown of the historical effects of colonization and often accompanying missionary evangelization on local populations, effects often seen to be deleterious to their flourishing. This awareness—though sometimes uncritical and reflexive—has generated criticism of mission, past and present, at times even leading Christians themselves to question missionary evangelization. This opprobrium has likely shaped the diminished frequency of mission in the titles of academic chairs and areas in universities across the world—and the growing preference for terms like “intercultural studies” or “world Christianity” for such units and positions.

Since the latter twentieth century, a second development has been a proliferation in the range of scholars who explore mission, bringing with them new interpretive frameworks. Missiology had long been the purview of seminaries and universities—many historically linked to Christian denominations—and it has been mostly there that chairs and academic units dedicated to mission studies have been located. Yet, in the wake of the end of the colonial period, numerous non-theologically inclined scholars have given heightened attention to Christian mission as a complex set of historical practices, with important implications for a variety of issues and disciplines. Missiology, though formally synonymous with mission studies, is rarely invoked overtly by scholars in those disciplines, perhaps because it seems too tethered to theology or too obscure for notice. Regardless, Christian mission has grown as an object of study in numerous fields, including literary studies, various social-scientific disciplines, history (including the history of science), and area studies linked to the colonized and colonizing world. Missionaries and their work have been studied for insight into the emergence of ethnic and linguistic identities, the nature of colonialist rhetoric, the classification of biological species of plants and animals, and for roles in galvanizing colonialist, as well as proto-independent and democratizing, political attitudes.8

Criticisms of mission, and growing awareness of the diverse impacts of missionary practice, have changed the ways many missionaries are trained. Insight has grown into the problems arising from differences in social power that arise between missionaries and those they meet, with resulting distortion of evangelization.9 Preparatory programs for mission increasingly include the study of anthropology and related disciplines, in the hope of fostering deeper appreciation for cultural and social difference within inter-personal and intercultural encounters typical in missionary evangelization.10

Closely linked to new types of preparation for missionaries, and of more importance for the larger field of mission studies, have been transformative approaches to theologies of mission developed since the mid-twentieth century.11 Demographic changes in the distribution of Christians on the globe have undermined the default “us/them” assumptions of past missionary practice and theology, in which mostly European missionaries brought Christianity to the rest of the world. Mission is widely considered to no longer be a unidirectional move from some self-appointed center, like Rome, Canterbury, or Constantinople, into a non-Christian milieu. Instead, mission has many centers, and is seen as moving “from everywhere to everywhere,” with major sources
of global missionary energy in Brazil, South Korea, and Nigeria. The rapid growth of Christianity in the once-colonized world has made such places sources of insights into theologies of mission, too, generating new ways of encountering and interpreting Scripture, new ways of reading the Christian past, and new mission methods.

Changing awareness of the directionality of mission has accompanied broadened definitions of Christian mission beyond attempts to convert others and expand the church. Two important changes have been noteworthy. One prominent trend links Christian mission more directly with God’s activity, the missio Dei, instead of foregrounding the singular role of their churches’ members as agents of mission. Articulated in theological reflection and official statements across many Christian bodies, this fundamental theological reorientation has led to locating mission more centrally in the church’s life in the world instead of portraying it as something occurring at the church’s peripheries.

A second trend in the theology of mission, also adopted by many Christians, connects Christian mission with the centrality of the Reign of God to Jesus’s life and ministry as portrayed in the gospels. Thus, a concern for emulating Jesus’ healing and other support for human flourishing has become part of what scholars and church bodies perceive as missionary activity, so that “mission” means more than increasing Christian adherence.

These changes have integrated Christian mission more tightly to discipleship itself, understood individually and collectively. They have also forged links between and among God’s mission, human development, and Christian mission. They have also, however, led to concern among some Christians—especially, but not only, Evangelicals and Pentecostals—that preaching salvation through Christ has been sidelined. Thus, there has also been a backlash of sorts, with some lamenting that Christian mission has been, in certain interpretations, reduced to human advancement.

Yet the divisions among Christians over the necessary centrality of proclaiming salvation through Christ should not overshadow the growing ecumenical consensus in the theology of mission. The integration of Christian mission more deeply with God’s active ongoing presence in the world as missio Dei, and the tighter connection of mission to Christ’s ministry, have meant a corresponding placement of mission at the center of church life for many Christian bodies. This transformation has affected mission theology itself, as well as Christian theology and church experience more generally.

One notable resulting innovation has been called the missional church movement, which has sought to explicate the implications for church communities everywhere of the centrality of Christian mission. Many credit Scottish missionary and later bishop, Lesslie Newbigin (1909–1998), with the foundations for the missional church movement, emphasizing as he did the missionary role of all the baptized and articulating the corresponding responsibilities for church communities to embrace mission in all their activities. Newbigin’s insights have inspired the Gospel in Our Culture Network, which has sought to foster such self-understandings among Christian bodies around the world, and sponsored much academic reflection on the missional church. The word “missional” has grown in mission studies’ academic discourse, indicating a concern for Christian mission beyond older more restrictive uses of the term “missionary.”
Different practices of cross-cultural and international mission in traditional mission-sending countries have also generated new horizons for mission studies. One place of growth has been in the scholarship linked to so-called “short-term missions”: that is, experiences linked to Christian faith that take believers from one part of the world to another, for periods ranging from a few days to a few months, in what are sometimes called “mission trips.” Often humanitarian in orientation, and carried out by congregations that are comparatively wealthy in relation to those they are visiting, such practices have generated criticism. Yet these practices have also produced new preparation programs, as well as analysis of the role of such experiences in the lives of participants, their effects on the communities to which such short-term missionaries head, and their relationship to the fuller discipleship of sending communities.13

Changes in mission history have also reflected larger developments in mission studies, becoming more ecumenical and seeing the impact of Christian mission in more comprehensive terms. In the early modern period, competing versions of universal Christian history linked to Protestants and Catholics told the story of the spread of Christianity differently. In particular, Protestant and Catholic historiography revealed divergent emphases in the historical unfolding of Christian mission: stressing or underplaying the role of the bishop of Rome, for instance, in the church’s evangelization.14 The nineteenth century continued the trend, with works that sought comprehensive historical studies of Christian mission, yet were invariably shaped by the divide between Catholics and Protestants. In 1846, for example, the French Ultramontane Catholic intellectual Baron Henrion (1805–1862) published Histoire Générale des Missions Catholiques. Anglicans, Lutherans, and Calvinists published histories of the missions as well, often focusing instead on the work of missionary societies linked to their churches. Different Catholic missionary groups did the same, continuing to the present day.

Comprehensive histories of Christianity that foreground missionary work written since the mid-twentieth century have usually been more ecumenical. These include the multiple volumes of Kenneth Scott Latourette, published between 1937 and 1945, and continue, in single volumes, by Stephen Neill (1964), Herbert Kane (1978), and even more recent overviews by Dana Robert (2009) as well as Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi and Justo González (2013). Historians of Christian mission have also been influenced by historians and social scientists who study colonialism, locating missionary practices in relationship to other social transformations. The work of historical anthropologists Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, for example, on the effects of missionary Christianity on peoples of southern Africa, has led many mission historians to see missionary evangelization as linked to encroaching global capitalism, colonial-era political domination, and cultural ruptures.

One important development in mission history, with implications for mission studies more generally, has been concerted ecumenical and international efforts to preserve historical records of missionary activity. This builds on previous historical preservation, since missionary societies (Catholic and Protestant) have long collected and collated their written, and other, archival materials. Interest in supporting historical research based on these sorts of primary materials is not new. Among Catholics, efforts to gather
scholarship on mission in a single place led to the Vatican-linked creation of Bibliotheca Missionum in 1917, under the direction of Robert Streit, OMI. It was renamed Bibliografia Missionaria in 1933 and discontinued only recently.\(^\text{15}\) In addition, both Catholic and Protestant missionary-sending groups developed periodicals to garner support for their work, in which the writings of missionaries often featured.

Over the past several decades, however, new ecumenical efforts have appeared at historical preservation. For example, since the early 1970s, the International Association of Mission Studies has sponsored a working group under the heading “Documentation, Archives, Bibliography and Oral History” (DABOH), which strives to “rescue the memory of the people of God.”\(^\text{16}\) The online Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB) represents another effort to capture the Christian past, often linked to missionary activity, using open-sourcing to gather voices from many sources.\(^\text{17}\)

Besides missionary writings and mission society periodicals, scholars of mission history value as important documentation the proceedings and statements of large missionary gatherings. These include the writings emerging from the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference and subsequent twentieth-century meetings that gathered global missionaries, mission organizers, and scholars. Documents on mission emerging from the World Council of Churches, as well as preceding organizations, like the International Missionary Council, as well as Catholic documents on mission issued by Vatican offices and the popes, also constitute important texts for mission history.

Recent Comprehensive Works in Mission Studies

Four influential overviews of mission studies produced since the early 1990s reflect these changes in approaches to the theology and history of mission and resulting implications for mission studies, more generally. All four are wide-ranging and broadly ecumenical in their approach, and their differences and evolution suggest the future of mission studies.

David Bosch’s 1991 *Transforming Mission* reflects decades of developing scholarship in mission studies. Bosch (1929–1992), a South African Reformed theologian, who courageously resisted the apartheid movement during his life, brought together insights from biblical research and offered an historical overview of changing historical paradigms for mission operative in different places and times in church history. These serve as a pre-amble for presenting a series of thirteen images or metaphors for mission—for example, mission as the quest for justice, liberation, or contextualization—that, together, constitute what he called an “emerging post-modern paradigm” for mission.\(^\text{18}\)

Slightly more than a decade later, two American Catholic priests and members of the Society of the Divine Word, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, published *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* in 2004. Compared to Bosch, their discussion of Scripture is briefer, their historical overview less paradigm-focused, and they engage critical theory less. Bevans and Schroeder summarize contemporary theologies of mission around three themes: mission as missio Dei, mission as preaching salvation
through Christ, and mission as participation in the Reign of God. They elaborate each of the three with reference to a wide and ecumenical variety of mission and theological scholarship. They also illustrate the growing consensus that theology must reflect the settings in which it is practiced, giving rise to the notion of contextual theology. Bevans and Schroeder conclude by presenting a model for mission as “prophetic dialogue,” which brings together the three themes, and is constituted by various elements that comprise their preferred model for mission moving ahead.19

Stanley Skreslet’s 2012 *Comprehending Mission: The Questions, Methods, Themes, Problems, and Prospects of Missiology* differs from the very influential *Transforming Mission and Constants in Context*, operating more as an overview of the somewhat inchoate field of mission studies than as an effort at constructing a new theology of mission from strands of ecclesial and theological reflection. Skreslet, an American Presbyterian, reconnoiters mission studies, moving beyond mission theology and practice to reflect the growing range of disciplines involved in the study of Christian mission. His comprehensive portrayal of the field includes chapters on the Bible and mission, mission history, mission and culture, mission and other religions, mission practices, and the missionary vocation. In carrying out what might—in an analogy to historiography—be called a “missiography,” he charts the “community of practice” that constitutes mission studies today, which constitutes an array of scholarly orientations.20

German Protestant Henning Wrogemann’s vast three volumes with the overall title *Intercultural Theology*, published first in German, and from 2016 to 2019 in English, represent a more recent attempt at an overview of the area marked out by mission studies. Reflecting academic terminology from continental Europe, Wrogemann very self-consciously avoids calling his undertaking “mission studies” or “missiology,” yet he also discusses (at length) the relationship between mission studies and his venture, finding many points of connection. Seeking a middle ground between those who want intercultural theology to replace mission studies, and others who defend mission studies and see intercultural theology as quite different, Wrogemann believes that a jointly-named field of intercultural theology/mission studies adequately protects the concerns of various positions.21 Wrogemann draws upon numerous scenarios from contemporary world Christianity and past history to advance his arguments, engages sophisticated critical theory, and reviews the history of theologies of mission—all in an attempt to develop an intercultural theology adequate to the realities of global Christianity today. Like Skreslet, he seeks an overarching perspective on the fields in question; yet he delves deeper into critical theory and presents a more complete scholarly apparatus, with myriad references to works in many fields. He also builds on Bosch, as well as Bevans and Schroeder, devoting the entire second volume to theologies of mission.

For Wrogemann, the diversity of today’s globalizing world forces theology to be intercultural and interreligious, and he advocates a theology of mission that he calls “oikumenical doxology.” He urges the inclusion of intercultural theology/mission studies as a distinct sixth discipline in theological studies, analogous to systematics, ethics, biblical theology, church history, and pastoral theology.22
Together, these four works help to define the scope of mission studies today, and they suggest a future for mission studies as well.23

The Future of Mission Studies

Since the mid-twentieth century, mission studies has both expanded into areas not previously considered part of the purview of missiology and adapted to new practices of mission with appropriate critical reflection. Over the same period, the theology of Christian mission—long central to missiology—has developed ecumenically sensitive and widely (though not universally) shared general assumptions that situate mission more centrally into the ongoing life of Christians and their communities. Mission studies has become a capacious term, while, at the same time, operating with a precise meaning in many of its articulations. Mission studies has a formal academic orientation: the self-conscious study of Christian mission within academic life. Yet it has also attended to matters not formerly recognized in the past as Christian mission.

Mindful of the probable future of world Christianity and academic scholarship, three trends should shape and define mission studies. First, the study of Christian mission will interest a growing diversity of scholars. Second, a mission-minded approach will be brought to bear upon more areas of Christian life and scholarship. Third, innovative comparative approaches—historical, intercultural, and interreligious, especially—will yield new insights into Christian mission, past and present.

The Ongoing Relevance of Christian Mission for Various Disciplines

Christian mission will continue to interest scholars outside religious and theological studies. In his *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America*, for example, historian David Hollinger explores how important social changes in the twentieth-century US drew strength from the contributions of US Protestant missionaries and their children. Shaped by their experiences in the mission field, he argues this group had an outsized influence on issues such as declining concern for religious orthodoxy in Protestant churches, race relations, policies in US higher education, and US diplomatic relations—especially with Asia.24 Other historians also study Christian missionaries with increased sophistication and make a variety of arguments. Emily Manktelow, for example, explores how missionary families shaped British colonialism.25

Anthropologists also engage mission-linked topics in new ways. Amy Stambach studies mission-sponsored education in eastern Africa to argue that missionaries,
Christian churches, and the contemporary nation-state have complex, overlapping interests in educational practices, with important consequences for Africa’s future. Anthropologist Webb Keane uses missionary practices to consider how certain Indonesians encountered with missionary Christianity not only new themes and symbols, but a new Protestant-inflected approach to causality as missionaries sought to counter what they perceived to be superstition. Keane develops the notion of semiotic ideology to describe how social change linked to missionary Christianity often entails not only new content, but also new approaches to reality itself. Keane and others help constitute an emerging field, the “anthropology of Christianity,” which takes seriously the various social changes that Christianity—often linked to mission—fosters in diverse situations.

Anthropologists and historians will continue to use mission-linked materials in their works. Yet the significance of mission and mission studies has also been recognized in a variety of other fields. In an important edited collection, Carine Dujardin and Claude Prudhomme explore the relationship between the developing science of missiology and various scientific endeavors in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. Several articles in the volume also make the provocative case that missiology operated as a particularly freighted discipline in European Christianity’s institutional relationship with science more generally. On the one hand, missiologists, seeking to establish their new discipline as a science, engaged scientists directly in a variety of disciplines, since missionaries and their writings brought new biological species, geological knowledge, and geographic awareness to Europe. Even more significantly, missiology became a way that both Protestant and Catholic authorities sought to engage science more generally, using the new field as an argument for the compatibility of science and religion in the face of religious skepticism.

New Missional Approaches

Mission studies scholars have continued to adopt a mission-based (or missional) perspective on increasingly diverse topics in Christian life and scholarship. Recent works in mission studies have linked Christian mission to social movement theory, human development, media studies, environmental stewardship, hip-hop culture, disability studies, and economics, and many have linked mission with business practices. As advances in technology and communication proceed, these will undoubtedly create new possibilities for evangelization and new realities—including ethical quandaries—into which a missional perspective will be sought by Christians.

Mission studies will also play a larger role in the historical study of Christianity moving forward, and not only in the study of mission per se. Increasingly, scholars recognize how reflection on practices of evangelization shaped Christian thought and action more generally, long before nineteenth-century institutionalization of any formal academic undertaking, and before the term “mission” labeled evangelizing efforts. They
recognize that often reflection on the spread of Christianity was implicit, even occurring unselfconsciously and, thus, going unlabeled.

Contemporary scholars in mission studies reflect upon the clear evidence already in the New Testament that the earliest Christian missionary efforts—described in St. Paul’s letters, reflected in Jesus’ instructions to his disciples in the gospels, and recounted in the Acts of the Apostles—were subjected to reflection. Similar evidence of reflection on mission shapes historical understandings of every succeeding period in Christian history. Studies of important early texts like the Didache—as well as first-millennium figures like Origen, Eusebius, Bede, Augustine of Canterbury, and Cyril and Methodius—draw attention to how mission concerns operated throughout Christian life and practice. Medievalists will continue to explore how mission reflection continued among Western Christians. Mendicant religious orders, like the Dominicans and Franciscans, each developed characteristic missionary approaches. The Franciscan Ramon Llull (ca. 1232–1315), a Spaniard, famously urged the acquisition of languages of non–Christians—especially others in the Mediterranean area, like the many Muslim groups—in order to facilitate missionary evangelization.

Historians of Christianity pay increased attention, as well, to the consequences of the appearance of the term “mission” to describe Christian evangelization. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) influentially deployed the term “mission” to describe Christian efforts at evangelization, especially those of the Jesuits, the Catholic religious order that he founded. Following Loyola’s inaugural deployment, the use of the term “mission” by Propaganda Fide, the Vatican’s office for organizing missionary activity founded in 1622, helped to cement its normalization in European languages, first among Catholics, and then Protestants. Its primary referent in trinitarian reflection was replaced, as mission in Christian language increasingly described efforts to spread Christianity, especially outside Europe.

Meanwhile, a variety of Jesuits and others involved in mission in the early modern period creatively engaged the peoples whom they sought to evangelize, thereby shaping Catholic theology and practice. Such pioneers, first Catholics and later Protestants, are well known for responding to practical questions that arose during the evangelization of peoples newly encountered by European missionaries across the globe. Matteo Ricci in China (1552–1610) and Roberto de Nobili in India (1577–1656), both Jesuit missionaries, self-consciously experimented with methods of adaptation to elite social expectations in their respective lands. In Latin America, the Jesuit leader José de Acosta (d. 1600) categorized peoples by levels of civilizational achievement, advocating different missionary strategies for three groups. One scholar argues that the Jesuit international mission in the early modern period was the first effort in which Christianity’s interest in saving others took on a global dimension. Yet, adapting missionary approaches to different types of people not only showed a new level of reflection on mission: it shaped how the church approached such people groups. On the one hand, it accorded them all human dignity as potential Christians. On the other, it denigrated many for their alleged lack of “civilizational” achievements, thereby providing legitimation for discrimination and domination.
Protestant missionary activity also shaped broader church realities. Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), shaped by a growing Pietism in his native Germany, urged missionary activity to pursue the internal conversion of those evangelized. The Moravians, founded by Zinzendorf, thus are credited with introducing voluntarism—the expectation of personal self-conscious conversion among the evangelized—into mission. The voluntarism that Moravians introduced into missionary practice not only shaped mission but also led to a new form of missionary organization: the voluntary mission association. This new social reality had profound effects on Protestant Christianity in Europe and North America.

Beginning in the early modern period and continuing to the present, the primary referent of Christian mission remains efforts at spreading Christianity. Despite some questions about its future in theology—Michael Stroope calls mission’s place in the life of the church a “murky river,” and argues that it should be transcended—its future usage in this ordinary sense seems quite secure. At the same time, the historical origins of the term within trinitarian theology, and its larger connotations of any sort of sending, have never disappeared. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660), Catholic priest and reformer in Paris, founded a religious order that he called the Congregation of the Mission, more commonly called the Vincentians. He named it thus not to indicate that all went overseas to work among non-Christians, but to spur them to evangelical zeal, whether in Europe or outside. In addition, “missions” remained a term used by Jesuits, Vincentians, and others (Catholic and non-Catholic) for preaching campaigns, especially in rural Europe. That ongoing dual reality in term—with a primary referent and a broader application—continues to shape mission studies.

The Promise of Comparison

With an eye toward an increasingly interreligious future in light of globalization, Christian mission studies have much to gain from being put into a comparative perspective with other religiously motivated efforts at religious growth and expansion.

Christianity represents one of the three so-called world religions that are commonly thought of as “missionary”—that is, religions that conventionally embrace the spreading of their message through deliberate efforts that themselves take on religious significance. The other two, Islam and Buddhism, use other terms to describe such efforts. Also clearly missionary in their orientation are more recently appearing religious (or para-religious) bodies, such as the Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons; the Unification Church, sometimes called “Moonies”; the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or Hare Krishnas; the Divine Light Mission, which has become Elan Vital; and Scientology. Each undertakes self-conscious efforts at spreading their message. A potential area of growth in mission studies lies in insights deriving from comparisons with other religious bodies that have taken seriously the impulse to expand themselves through self-conscious historical practice. These religions’
analogous efforts to propagate themselves have been subjected to academic scrutiny like Christianity, though not to the same degree.

Already in the 1830s, about the same time that Christian mission appeared as a topic in European universities, Western scholars highlighted similarities among the missionary tendencies of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. By the late nineteenth century, this commonality was deduced in the construction of categories in the growing field of comparative religion, such as in an 1873 lecture at Westminster Abbey by one of the founders of the comparative religion, Max Müller. Other religions—for example, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Judaism—were sometimes called “national” or “indigenous,” to indicate their comparatively lower inclination to propagate themselves beyond a self-defined people group, compared to the missionary religions. Jesus’ so-called Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 served in scholarly comparative frameworks as a measuring stick for allegedly similar, self-conscious statements by the Buddha and Muhammad to spread their message. In addition, the third-century BCE Buddhist ruler King Ashoka and successive Muslim regimes between the seventh and sixteenth centuries were likened to Christian kings and later ecclesial bodies, like the Vatican and Protestant missionary agencies, all of whom used political and economic power to direct missionary activities to extend their faiths. The Buddhist “dispensation,” allegedly formulated by Ashoka at a council of monks as a plan to spread the dharma, and the Arabic term da’wa (literally “to invite”) were seen as analogous to the Christian missionary impulse.

In retrospect, scholars recognize that such comparisons often rendered a disservice to the histories and religious identities of these non-Christian religions. In the name of comparison, categories rooted in Christianity—especially Western Protestantism—served as self-regarding measures for implicit valuations and rankings of religious vitality, morality, and merit, to the detriment of accurate depictions of these other religions.41

Yet the mistakes of past comparative undertakings do not undermine possible insights that can arise from more limited comparisons into particular aspects of human efforts to spread religions—Christianity and others. Sociologists like Rodney Stark, following the traditions linked to Max Weber and historical work by A. H. Harnack and others, study the spread of Christianity on strictly sociological and historical lines. Similar research into the spread of Buddhism has been done by Jonathan S. Walters (who built upon Erik Zürcher’s influential work) and into Islam, by scholars like Richard Bulliett. Matthew Kuiper has examined the history of da’wa in Islam, showing that neither the Qur’an nor other early Islamic writings have a singular vision of da’wa. In fact, Kuiper shows that da’wa—not unlike “mission” in relationship to the New Testament—has a complex scripturalist orientation, thus inviting fruitful comparative work in the future.42 Drawing on such historical research, sociologist Robert Montgomery has sought to compare missionary practices of Christians with other analogous practices in other religions.43 Much more can be done.
Defining Mission Studies

Looking ahead, mission studies will necessarily continue to include at least three different kinds of academic products. First, comprehensive works that seek to cover the area designated by mission studies will continue. Bosch and Wrogemann will have successors, increasingly from the places where Christianity is growing, and from ever-more diverse voices. Second, there will continue to be academic writing that focuses on Christian mission—or some facet of mission studies—without seeking to be comprehensive. These will include historical studies in which missionary practice plays a prominent role, anthropological research in which mission-generated social change produces new cultural forms, and theological reflection that takes seriously mission as a central theological theme. Third and finally, numerous works will discuss Christian mission, yet not make it the center of their engagement, so that they will be relevant to mission studies without constituting works in mission studies per se. In its relationship to many works within these latter two categories—studies of particular facets of mission and studies that engage mission tangentially—mission studies will resemble many academic fields.

To accommodate this future, any operative definition of mission studies must remain aware of the historical and semantic changes and ambiguity linked to the word mission. It also must operate simultaneously on at least two levels. First, it needs to remain grounded in the actual realities of discourses and practices that are identified as Christian mission by Christians and others in the present. “Mission” can mean many things, since myriad human organizations, from banks to basketball teams, have “mission statements.” Yet when operating in its rather restricted and overt way mission refers to Christian efforts to expand Christianity, understood very broadly. This has been, over the past several centuries, the most common sense of the term “Christian mission.”

At the same time, however, mission studies must have a second level of operative possibility. It must also remain open to discourses and practices to be identified as Christian mission later, or to past mission-linked discourses and practices not previously viewed as such. It must also include scholarship that studies Christian mission under other labels, such as intercultural studies, contextual theology, and world Christianity. By paying attention to the obvious referents of mission studies, on the one hand, and also remaining open to the potential scope of its domain, on the other, mission studies can remain true to the ambiguities in the term mission itself. After all, mission had a history in theological language within the Trinitarian life of God—as the dynamism of God’s activity through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Today’s growing consensus around mission as rooted in the missio Dei is a return to the historical origins of the term, without disregarding the innovation of linking mission to human activity. What Ignatius of Loyola sought for members of his Society of Jesus—that they would all have a mission, like Jesus—is now common parlance as an assumption for all the baptized among mission scholars.
By maintaining these two levels, mission studies can thereby have a particular focus, while maintaining openness to the limitless possibilities implied by theological categories that have long been central to mission’s enunciation and its practiced enactment. After all, Christian mission can be understood not merely as efforts to spread Christianity, but also as human cooperation of any sort with divine action (understood as God’s mission) in the world. By defining mission studies this way, mission studies can properly remain grounded in empirical realities that are discernible and subject to analysis within many non-theological frameworks as well, while remaining open to considerations of God at work in the world—which, by definition, is subject to no constraints.

In Comprehending Mission, Stanley Skreslet adopts Andrew Walls’ definition of missiology: “the systematic study of all aspects of mission.”45 Looking into the future, one can imagine that Christian forms will continue to diversify, with new polities appearing linked to Christian identity and belonging in new social milieus. Mission will remain central, no matter the ecclesial forms that arise, and in any setting in which Christians embodying them live and reflect upon their faith and seek to share it with others.

Notes

6. For a fuller discussion of these changes, see the chapter by Brian Stanley in this volume.
8. For examples, see Patrick Harries and David Maxwell, eds. The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge about Africa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) and Dujardin and Prudhomme, Mission and Science.


dictionaries go back to the nineteenth century, including those of Warneck, Schmidlin, Edwin Bliss, and James Dennis. More recent efforts include one led by Karl Müller, another by Jonathan Bonk. Lamin Sanneh and Michael McClymond prepared a handbook on world Christianity that covers much of the same territory.


42. Matthew J. Kuiper, Da’wa and Other Religions: Indian Muslims and the Modern Resurgence of Global Islamic Activism (London: Routledge, 2018), 17–49.

**Key Works**

The multiplicity of terms referring to theory and method in mission studies/missiology shows at a glance how diverse and multidimensional, but also how fragmented missiology as an academic discipline has become in the last hundred years or so. It also shows that missiology, like any other academic discipline, contains a large range of methods and theories, which may consolidate or contradict each other. The question is not about finding the missiological theory and the missiological method for the discipline but rather how to create awareness about questions related to theory and method within missiological research.

Any conversation on theory and method is situational. Mission studies as a field of research implies multiple conversations on method and theory from various disciplinary angles, or in other words, scholars of different disciplinary belonging (history, social sciences, cultural studies, literature studies, political studies) do mission studies. Disciplinary belonging as regulated by academic formation inevitably groups researchers according to a shared academic culture. Interdisciplinarity happens to the extent that different academic cultures are able to communicate and collaborate with each other. Multidisciplinarity does not necessarily imply interdisciplinarity, and multiculturality within disciplinary boundaries does not necessarily imply interculturality.

With this contribution I intend to narrow down the conversation on theory and method to that group of scholars who do mission studies from a Christian theological disciplinary belonging, and who often identify as missiologists and/or intercultural theologians. An intradisciplinary awareness of methodology may lead to interdisciplinary communication and collaboration.

The present chapter is but one small contribution on method and theory in mission studies about and among those scholars who do mission studies from a
theological–missionological disciplinary belonging. A contribution on theory and method in mission studies in conversation with non-theologians would use different arguments and terminology, yet it would still be me as a theologian-missionologist writing it.

**Theory–Method–Methodology**

Theory and method belong to the realm of methodology, and thus to the realm of research. Scholars often use the terms “methodology” and “method” interchangeably, yet they are meaningful in different ways. Methodology refers to the logical reasoning and the theological/philosophical assumptions that underlie any academic work, whether articulated or not. “On the other hand, methods are the techniques and procedures followed to conduct research, and are determined by the methodology (e.g., sampling, data collection, data analysis, and results reporting, as well as theories, conceptual frameworks, taxonomies, and models).” The former understanding, that each academic discipline and sub-discipline has its well-distinguished “methods,” no longer seems to hold, because it is not the methods so much as the theoretical departure points and intentions, as well as institutional politics, which define disciplines and sub-disciplines, and in turn research along such disciplinary lines. Thus, methods are being clustered more and more across disciplines. Examples are the use of comparative methods, historical methods, empirical methods, hermeneutical methods, and mixed methods. Nevertheless, interdisciplinary usages of methods (and even more that of theories) contains the danger of interdisciplinary miscommunication and misunderstanding. Anthropologists well trained in ethnography may have questions about how missionologists claim to do ethnography. And vice versa: missionologists may question the hermeneutical methods anthropologists use to interpret theological data.

What complicates the question of method within missionology is that method is often used for answering the questions: “how to do mission?” or “how to be missional?”—questions which without their methodological embeddedness cannot even be interpreted. Method thematized within the discipline through such questions may reduce the discipline to its function of prescribing models through which “mission can be successfully done/accomplished/practiced.” Yet missionology, as any other academic discipline, and awareness about method within it, functions beyond teleological management. Speaking of method in this way helps examine “the prior conditions that make seemingly common sense knowledge” within theology. In this particular instance, the “prior conditions” are the scholar’s/the researcher’s methodologies, thus including method and theory. In short, “method” means a reflective/reflexive act: a “rigorous self-consciousness” about how one chooses the topics, tools, and way of getting from A to B in study, research, and education.

Theory, through its etymology, points to contemplation, observation, and consideration, aiming at an understanding of reality, and these abilities cannot be accomplished
in a hasty way. Nevertheless, such a short-cut definition should not dismiss the lexical ambiguities of the term and its usage, which might cause misunderstandings and miscommunication, but should rather point to the principle of ontological and epistemological plurality within the academic world. An exercise in reviewing the missiological literature of the last decades may demonstrate that while the concepts of “method” and “methodology” frequently appear, “theory” is a less prominent concept. It seems that the terms “theory” and “theology” are often used interchangeably within missiology/mission studies (e.g., theologies of mission). It would be a study of its own to find out why this is so, and what such an interchangeability of theory and theology might imply for mission studies/missiology. To what extent does theory imply an ongoing reflection on, attention towards, contemplation of God and thus an arrival at insights which then are worded in theologies and named theologies?

Method and Theory: Institutionalization and Contingency

A quest for theory and method, then, in missiology means a quest for a multi-sited consciousness (agents, academic embeddedness, interdisciplinarity, co-creating data through and beyond an etic–emic entanglement, and the conditions of data creating) in relation to both the intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary other. Missiology/mission studies discussed in this chapter as a theological endeavor has a body of accumulated knowledge which refers to a particular research focus; it has theories and concepts through which the knowledge can be organized, critically analyzed, and communicated (its own terminology, termini technici); it develops specific research methods according to research requirements; and desirably it has (preferably) clear institutional manifestation in the form of courses taught at universities/colleges/seminaries, departments/chairs, and professional associations connected to it. It is institutionalization through which disciplines reproduce themselves from generation to generation. Institutionalization, however, always contains an element of contingency and constellation. “We could have a very different set of disciplines if there had been different founders of disciplines or different scientific inventors at the time, or if they had been preoccupied with different scientific questions or problems.” Thus institutionalization and its contingency affect what theory and method mean within a discipline.

Contingency and constellation point to the open-ended nature of any academic discipline as being a product of socio-political and intra-disciplinary negotiations, even battles about content and the research agenda, not to mention the human resources within them. Thus any genealogy, including a colonial one, of missiology as a discipline