BOOK REVIEWS


This is a valuable reference work on the history and theology of the ecumenical movement. It is a handsomely printed and durably bound volume. The names of its editors are a clue to the scholarly quality of its articles. Two of its general editors and at least forty-two of its contributors are representatives of the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition.

The *Dictionary* contains more than 600 entries arranged alphabetically, completely cross-referenced and indexed, and written by leading personalities in the ecumenical movement from a wide variety of Christian communions from various parts of the world. Important ecumenical themes, events and personalities are presented. The volume includes 130 photographic illustrations. Brief bibliographies at the end of each entry offer the reader suggested resources for further study. Methodist participation in the ecumenical movement is well documented.

While the cost of the volume may seem prohibitive to some, pastors, laypeople, scholars, and others interested in the history and influence of the ecumenical movement will find it an indispensable research tool.

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For Paul Olejar, this is both the story of an ethnic ministry and a "nostalgic tour of earlier times" in his own life. His father George Olejar (1882-1951), a Slovak immigrant, had no small part in the pastoral leadership of southwestern Pennsylvania's Coke Mission. George's fluency in eastern European languages, his skills as a musician, and his Slovak language magazine *Krestan (The Christian)* enabled him to communicate effectively with immigrant communities. Appointed to Mount Pleasant in 1915, Olejar was an important part of the fifty year (1883-1933) history of this home mission within the Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The author has gathered from a variety of documentary sources information about the people and events that comprised this ministry in the
coke region, but more importantly, he has reflected at some length on larger issues of purpose and motivation. Why were mine owners contributing land and money while many American-born congregations remained aloof? What attitudes toward immigrants both prompted the Mission and limited its success? What was the relationship between revival and cultural assimilation? How did the Mission deal with the ethnicity, social class, and religious traditions of these immigrants?

While Olejar tries to keep the spiritual impulse of the Mission uppermost, he is also clear about other factors which fed into the Mission's ethos and support. The Coke Mission was in many ways a half-way house for Americanization, social control, and conversion to an acceptable form of Christianity. By teaching and worshipping in Slavic languages and encouraging ethnic activities, the Mission preserved for a time the culture of the people it served. By teaching English and providing skills required by the American context, the Mission facilitated eventual assimilation. Olejar cites a District Superintendent's hope "that a glorious revival may sweep through the dense population of the valleys, bringing the foreigners of the Coke villages to the feet of Jesus," yet he also writes of the Mission's "profound influence" in turning "raw, sometimes boisterous coke area villages into models of civic deportment." This last effect probably explains the continued support of mining companies and mine owners for the work.

The Mission and its supporters also assumed that Catholic and Orthodox Slavs needed to be "Christianized," an assumption generally resented by the target population, some of whom doubted whether Protestantism was indeed Christian. Nor could Slavic immigrants understand the demand that temperance be considered a necessary mark of a true Christian. They were encountering a well established campaign for "Christianity and Civilization" by a core culture that insisted on defining America in evangelical Protestant, Anglo-American categories. Conversion implied much more than a spiritual relationship shared in community. It is no surprise, then, that the Coke Mission, like others of its kind, ran into a "solid block of opposition" from the immigrants' traditional churches.

Much of the success which the Mission did enjoy "came when the newcomers were addressed in their own language in full awareness of their traditions, beliefs, and social customs." Yet the numerical gains remained modest because mixed motives undermined the integrity of the work and the trust with which it was received. Olejar concludes:

In the lives, minds, and sensibilities of these newcomers tradition and experiences, centuries old held sway. This the nativists seeking to "Americanize" them to a particular model, totally ignored. At this point difficulties arose, even in the courageous and successful environment of the Coke Mission.

The image of the "Sentinel at the Crossroads" highlights the spiritual, evangelistic theme which Olejar sees as central in spite of these
complications. It is the sentinel of Christ who points the immigrant along the road that leads to life. The faith and sacrifice and practical help of missioners provide justification for the image. The image is tarnished by the fact that this sentinel was also employed by exploiting mine owners and sectarian Anglo-conformists.

An early proponent of the Mission believed that “from a social, national, and especially from a Christian standpoint, our duty is clear.” But Paul Olejar recognizes that this multiplicity of purposes actually limited both clarity and achievement. His is an important account which shows us something about ourselves and the way in which we have overidentified with certain cultural imperatives. It recovers a chapter in Pennsylvania’s fascinating ethnic and religious history that will also make for interesting comparison with similar missions across the land.

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