

UNITED METHODIST HISTORY OF MISSION SERIES

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In 1999 the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) initiated a new seven-volume *United Methodist History of Mission*. They chose Charles E. Cole, a former staff member, to be its General Editor.

The first goal of the new project was to complete the history of mission of The Methodist Church and its predecessors begun fifty years earlier in 1949. That *History of Methodist Missions* was to have been a six-volume series “designed to present a comprehensive, detailed, and accurate history of American Methodism in its character as a Christian missionary movement.”¹ Only four were published, and they covered only the history in mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) to 1939.² Each volume, however, was based on careful research in the records and correspondence of the mission agencies.

The first goal of the new series was to complete the histories of mission never published in the earlier series—namely the histories of the Methodist Protestant Church (MPC) and of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). A second was to write the mission histories of The United Methodist Church and of its predecessor churches—The Methodist Church (MC) and the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB).

Third, the style of writing was to be “readable narratives or thematic treatments” that could appeal both to scholars and to the general church membership. Besides the five historical volumes, a sixth was to provide first-person accounts by insiders of several initiatives in mission taken by the GBGM between 1980 and 2002. A seventh and final volume was to be essays by an international panel of mission leaders, predominately United Methodist, on the future of mission in the 21st century.

¹ Wade Crawford Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1769-1844: I. Missionary Motivation and Expansion* (New York: The Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church, 1949), vii.

² Wade Crawford Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1769-1844: II. To Reform the Nation* (New York, BMCE-MC, 1950); Barclay, *The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1845-1939: III. Widening Horizons, 1845-95* (New York, Board of Missions of The Methodist Church, 1957); J. Tremayne Copplestone, *Twentieth-Century Perspectives: IV. The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896-1939* (New York: BOGM, 1973).

Fourth, the content of each volume was “to do justice to the contributions of women, ethnic minorities, and indigenous leaders to the history of mission.”³ A significant proportion of the writers are themselves from these constituencies.

In this review article I will analyze the scope, themes, and distinctive emphases of each volume, together with a brief assessment of the strengths and weaknesses (if any) of each.

I

The first volume by Ruth A. Dougherty covers the missionary work of the Methodist Protestant Church (MPC) from its founding in 1830 to its merger into The Methodist Church in 1939. Although the first general conference set up a Board of Foreign Missions, it took almost fifty years before the church successfully established missions overseas. “Why did it take so long?”, the author asks. Her conclusion is that “because of lack of resources and personnel” home mission work in the United States became the primary focus during the first fifty years.⁴

Racism was another factor introduced by Daugherty, but not fully discussed. As early as 1837 the MPC sent out its first missionary. Reverend David James, an African American pastor in Maryland, was sent by the MPC to Liberia. Although he was given a friendly reception by Liberians and other missions operating there, the MPC’s ruling that only a “white, lay, male member” could hold office in the church aborted his effort to establish a church and mission conference. Despite this denominational failure, individual members of the MPC supported Africa missions. Charles Avery, a Pittsburgh millionaire in the 1820s and MPC local preacher, gave generous support to the independent Mendi Mission that upon his death in 1858 was transferred to the United Brethren Church Mission. Racism also infected the church’s home missions after the Civil War. No whites felt called or committed to work among African Americans. Instead, the Home Mission Board assisted freed slaves to establish churches and lead in mission conferences of the MPC in the South.⁵

Mutual rights—understood as equal representation of laity and clergy—was one of the basic reasons for the formation of the MPC, and remained a distinctive feature of the denomination. Daugherty probes why this distinctive was not practiced in mission structures and policies.

For its first fifty years the MPC did not include women in the *mutual rights* of laypersons. Inspired by the formation of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1869, MPC women formed their own society in 1872. The author documents the opposition

³ Charles E. Cole, “Forward,” in Ruth A. Daugherty, *The Missionary Spirit: The History of Mission of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1830-1939* (New York: GBGM Books, 2004), xv.

⁴ Daugherty, 160.

⁵ Daugherty, 50-51, 46-47.

of men to this action, and their continuing efforts to place the WFMS under control of the church's foreign mission board, until the merger of the two boards in 1928.

Another consistent theme is cooperation in mission with other denominations. "Would the MPC have been involved in mission in Japan, China, and India without the assistance of other Christian groups?" Daugherty asks. "Probably not," she concludes, "because it did not have the resources or the persons to send as missionaries." It only began its work in those countries after other denominations had already been involved for some time in those fields. Significant in Japan was early MPC cooperation with other Methodist missions at work there and support of proposals for church union as early as 1889.⁶

Strong commitment to indigenous church leadership was another important theme. MPC mission leaders believed that "indigenous Christians were better evangelists, among their own people, than those sent from the U.S." Mission leaders were committed to train local leaders for the mission conferences both at home and abroad. They formed an annual conference in Japan, their first overseas mission, and ordained the first pastor just twelve years after arrival of the first MPC missionary. The Japanese church, therefore, was semi-autonomous almost from its beginning. This emphasis became essential in the 1930s when financial support was drastically reduced. The author concludes that "indigenous leadership was vital to the success of the mission work" including that of both churches and of schools.⁷

Important strengths are the book's thematic rather than chronological organization, the extensive use of archival sources, and the highlighting of contributions by indigenous leaders.

Weaknesses include inadequate coverage of cultural factors affecting MPC mission both within the United States and in Japan, China, and India. Daugherty concludes that the church's missionary spirit "waxed and waned" over the years, but fails to analyze the complex external factors (except for the Great Depression) that affected the church.⁸ One would have hoped for more treatment of Asian factors such as nationalism and the resurgence of Asian religions and their impact on the church's mission. Another weakness is a lack of comparisons or contrasts between MPC mission efforts and those of others within the Methodist family. Nevertheless, the author, chosen to participate in this project for her leadership in UMC missions from the local church to the GBGM, is to be commended for her thorough research and clear writing of this important history.

II

Volume two covers the mission history of the Methodist Episcopal Church,

⁶ Daugherty, 125, 197-199, 207.

⁷ Daugherty, 224, 85.

⁸ Daugherty, 231.

South (MECS), from its split from the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) over the issue of slavery in 1845, to its merger to form The Methodist Church (MC) in 1939.⁹ The author, Robert W. Sledge, is Distinguished Professor of History, emeritus, at McMurry University in Abilene, Texas.

Relations between the MECS and the MEC is a central theme of this history. Sledge shows that the two denominations “frequently fought with one another in the press, on the platform, and even in the courts while walking ‘the long road to Methodist union’.”¹⁰ In home missions and church extension they set up duplicate annual conferences on the West Coast, throughout the South, and in the border areas of the Midwest. The General Conference of 1844 separating the two churches had envisioned “mutually exclusive but cooperative fields.” Instead, after the Civil War, an *altar-against-altar* bitter rivalry took place in border areas as the churches competed for the loyalty of the Methodist population.¹¹

By contrast the two churches respected each other’s fields of work and cooperated in overseas ministries. In partnership they encouraged autonomous national Methodist churches in Mexico, Korea, and Japan.

Sledge contends that the MECS was “distinctively Methodist, and not particularly Southern.” New initiatives in mission took place as opportunities developed, rather than on any strategic plan. Many issues such as syncretism, enculturation, or nationalization “did not receive strategic attention.”¹²

Was this southern church as detached from sectional influences as the author contends? Unfortunately, seldom does Sledge give the reader insight into parallel political and social dynamics taking place. How did the vagaries of Reconstruction affect the MECS in mission? One key decision came in 1866 when the General Conference established a separate denomination for blacks, the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church. Sledge does include the judgment of CME historian Bishop Othel Lakey that the attitudes and actions of the MECS were “paternalistic, condescending, and racist,” but does not deepen the social analysis on this issue.¹³

Another theme is the emergence of women to “usefulness and authority” in the church’s mission work. While the denomination gave over its ministry to blacks to the CME, the Woman’s Home Missionary Society, from its formation in 1898 to its absorption into the Board of Missions in 1910, supported CME colleges. They also opened schools in Appalachia, in Florida for Cuban immigrants, city mission programs (including “rescue missions” for pregnant single women), and ethnic missions to Asian and Hispanic women in the West. The author calls these “pioneer programs of a

⁹ Robert W. Sledge, *“Five Dollars and Myself”*: The History of Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1845-1939 (New York: GBGM Books, 2005).

¹⁰ Sledge, 1.

¹¹ Sledge, 146-147.

¹² Sledge, 2, 9.

¹³ Sledge, 137.

revolutionary nature.”¹⁴

I have chosen to focus this review on the programs for both home and foreign missions of the MECS described with clarity by the author. This volume, however, is also an institutional history replete with details of structure, leadership, and finance. Readers will appreciate both the photographs and descriptions of key leaders who, despite perennial financial limitations, led in creative mission endeavors.

III

Linda Gesling, in volume three, covers the mission work of The Methodist Church (MC) from the joining of three predecessor churches in 1939 to its merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) to form The United Methodist Church in 1968.¹⁵ This period the author calls the *watershed years*, in which the context for mission was “years of war, economic recovery, racial tensions, gender rights struggles, and advances in technology.”¹⁶

The author identifies three purposes in writing this history: 1) to chronicle important names, dates, institutions, and places as Barclay and Coplestone did in their *History of Methodist Missions*; 2) to follow the shift in the MC’s own focus from missionaries and missions to *mission*; and 3) to tell representative stories of how the church did its work, how theology informed decisions, how outside events shaped development, and how individuals contributed to its legacy.¹⁷

Gesling’s judgment is that The Methodist Church “fell far short of its potential” in mission. She documents how a growing number of Methodist mission personnel—both in the United States and in other countries—asked questions about culture and politics that moved them “out of the *middleness* that characterized most of U.S. Methodism.” Their creativity enhanced “the potential for radical leadership for justice and social change,” but was “tempered by the realities of the church’s identity and polity” as a mainstream, predominately middle-class, denomination.¹⁸

Gesling organized the history in four-year periods corresponding to the denomination’s general conferences. Each chapter contains some stories on the work of each of the Board’s divisions, with its world division given extended treatment. I found three themes (structure, indigenization, and the roles of missionaries), and two issues (race and gender).

In 1940 nine different bodies came together to work as one—the *home*, *foreign*, and women’s work of each of the three predecessor denominations.

¹⁴ Sledge, 9, 210-211, 282-291, 420.

¹⁵ Linda Gesling, *Mirror and Beacon: The History of Mission of The Methodist Church, 1939-1968* (New York: GBGM Books, 2005).

¹⁶ Gesling, 2.

¹⁷ Gesling, 10.

¹⁸ Gesling, 318-319.

The author provides thorough coverage of the restructuring efforts.¹⁹ She contends that the MC's structuring by region and race (its Central Jurisdiction) had unintended consequences in heightened sensitivity to issues of race and gender, and regional conservatism curbing more national efforts to change the status quo.²⁰

A second theme is *indigenization*. "How much of the policy of indigenization was actual reality?" Gesling asks. "Was it truly accepted by the missionaries and by the Church as a whole?" She documents how the board handed over power and authority to overseas church bodies, noting that often indigenous leaders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America wanting to deal more with issues of power and control than the tensions between generations over indigenization issues.²¹

A third theme is the changing *roles of missionaries* from the expectation that they would serve for life to hopes that each would "work themselves out of a job." Representative quotes from missionary letters highlight these changes, as well as the missionaries' work "in the midst of tension" over both political changes, and the sharing of power with local leaders.²²

Race, Gesling contends, "remained an issue for The Methodist Church during its entire existence" (although not always for its partner overseas churches). She documents key MC involvements in combating racism in the 1950s and 1960s, telling stories of creative and prophetic leadership both by African-Americans and by whites. Gesling agrees with Alice Knott's thesis that Methodist women led during these years in changing racial attitudes and practices, and documents how the Women's Division led in raising women's consciousness over issues of race.²³

The author focuses *gender* issues on the struggle of the Women's Division to retain a measure of autonomy and control over funds and personnel. She highlights convincingly the contrast of style, expectations, and support of personnel between the women's and world divisions with a Korea case study.²⁴

Storytelling is one of the author's strengths. Often she prefers it to writing a more traditional institutional history. Attractive and helpful are twenty-four vignettes, with photographs, of key staff, missionaries, and national leaders. Representative samples from missionary letters give a "first-person" flavor to the text.²⁵

A second strength is in-depth coverage provided on mission responses to several political crises, including the Gandhi-led resistance to British rule

¹⁹ Gesling, 11-14, 22-23, 153, 284-288.

²⁰ Gesling, 12-14, 22-23, 301-302.

²¹ Gesling, 298, 309-315.

²² Gesling, 298, 200-205, 310.

²³ Gesling, 118-119, 148-151, 205-208, 288-294. See also Alice G. Knott's, *Fellowship of Love: Methodist Women Changing American Racial Attitudes, 1920-1968* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996).

²⁴ Gesling, 14, 288, 174-176.

²⁵ Gesling, 10, 247-249, 128-131.

in the 1940s, and the political crises in Africa in the 1960s in the Congo, Angola, and Rhodesia that led to the evacuation, imprisonment, or deportation of missionaries.²⁶

The book contains useful statistics on missionary deployment overseas for each historical period, plus their names and fields of service. It ends with extensive endnotes on sources used, and a comprehensive name and subject index.

I missed content concerning ecumenical trends in mission of the period that impacted MC policies and program. The International Missionary Council (IMC) and World Council of Churches (WCC) led in the change of thinking from *missions* to *mission*. The National Council (NCCUSA), through its Church World Service division, coordinated relief and development work.

It is hard in a comprehensive history to cover every significant program initiative. Three initiatives are worthy of note. The Church Center for the United Nations, a Women's Division project, deserves inclusion for it served not only Methodists but other denominations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to promote world peace and international cooperation. The short-term (three-year) options for mission service after World War II were an innovative addition. The extensive work of the Methodist Committee on Overseas Relief deserves more treatment, recognizing that it was the only MC presence in many nations.

Though often a mirror of society, the distinctive and creative contribution of the MC Board of Missions was "to put the church at the forefront in embracing new realities," and by doing so succeeding "as a beacon of the love of God."²⁷

IV

The fourth volume in the series covers the mission involvements of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) from its founding in 1946 to its merger with The Methodist Church in 1968 to form The United Methodist Church.²⁸ The author, J. Steven O'Malley, J. T. Seamands Professor of Wesleyan Holiness History at Asbury Theological Seminary, is himself from this heritage.

What could a small, mostly ethnic German, denomination of only 700,000 members do in the face of the overwhelming demands of global mission at mid-20th century? This is a well-researched and written history of a church that had an impact far beyond its size. To understand its distinctiveness O'Malley helpfully includes EUB antecedents for both policies and programs in each of its home and foreign mission fields.

²⁶ Gesling, 47-50, 208-223, 316-317.

²⁷ Gesling, 320, 322.

²⁸ J. Steven O'Malley, "*On the Journey Home*": *The History of Mission of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1946-1968* (New York: GBGM Books, 2003).

This is also a polemical work. Deftly the author provides a retrospective on those mission imperatives that the EUBs contributed to The United Methodist Church from its ethos—many of which were subsequently set aside or neglected.

The author contends that a “cogent theology of mission” characterized the EUBs from their founding.²⁹ True to its Pietist heritage it included, on the one hand, the calling of persons “to accept Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives and of the whole world.” It also had, on the other hand, a “Kingdom-expectant outlook” that the church is summoned to “cooperate with every movement and organization, secular or religious, private or political, in which God is discerned as working toward the fulfillment of human history.”³⁰

EUB commitment to the “primary pattern of indigenous united church bodies” is a central organizing principle of this history. The church gave its Board of Missions freedom to structure overseas church relationships. It consistently chose, wherever a united church organization had been formed, to voluntarily surrender its denominational sovereignty and prerogatives for the sake of united church programs. Upon formation of The UMC the divergence of the two denominations stood in “bold relief”. Methodists overseas were organized in central conferences related to the church in the U.S., whereas EUB fields were autonomous, united churches. EUB mission leaders expressed concern that the long-standing EUB commitment to unity of “all in each place” would not be adequately maintained in the new UMC³¹

In home missions the EUB Board of Missions had the same freedom to determine locations for mission and church extension projects, and to maintain lists of board-certified home missionaries. In 1947 the church extension department shared in twenty-five different ecumenical projects.³²

O’Malley also commends the EUB “drive towards indigenous church leadership.” This required its missionaries to rethink patterns of paternalism—ones particularly evident in the West Africa mission. This priority, he notes, may have helped its Asian missionaries to operate less with a sense of Western cultural superiority. He contends that EUB commitment to ecumenical and indigenous mission “invariably incorporated a wide diversity of cultural factors and denominational perspectives overseas.”³³

Readers will find in this work a balanced coverage of the history of each geographic field of EUB mission from Europe to Africa, and from Appalachia to New Mexico. Abundant photographs help the reader to visualize the persons in mission included in this history. Although some historical background of predecessor missionary activity is provided, the series is

²⁹ O’Malley, 24. This is in contrast with the pragmatism and opportunism, rather than a developed theology of mission, that characterized the MECS. Sledge, 9.

³⁰ O’Malley, 21, 187, 189.

³¹ O’Malley, 80-81, 181, 183.

³² O’Malley, 151, 171.

³³ O’Malley, 188.

deficient in not including the histories of predecessor missions of the EUB going back to The Evangelical Association (1816) and The Church of the United Brethren in Christ (1815).

V

Volume five of the series covers the history of The United Methodist Church (UMC) in mission from its founding in 1968 to 2000.³⁴ The author describes The UMC as “a church on a mission of self-correction and reform” amidst “growth in a global context.”³⁵ He intersperses chapters on policy issues with chapters covering mission work in geographical regions—a felicitous organization of the book for the readers.

This is an insider’s history. The author, Robert J. Harmon, served during this period first as the planning officer of the UMC’s General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), and then as the chief executive officer of its world mission program. The result is a richness of detail for those parts of the history the author (and editor) knew best, but often a paucity of detail on those programs of which they had no personal investment or knowledge.

The author chose *reconciliation and unity* as the theme for the 1968-1972 period. This chapter, like others, is strong in analysis of the GBGM’s responses to social, economic, and political issues. This includes the creative responses of its United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to world hunger crises and natural disasters.³⁶ Closer at home Harmon summarizes well the National Division’s program to strengthen and develop racial/ethnic churches, to respond to devastating urban riots by creating *communities of shalom*, and to the drug crisis with a special program on substance abuse and related violence.³⁷ Coverage of the programs of the Women’s Division focuses on its ecumenical initiatives and stands on social issues. Missing is treatment of its creative Church Center at the United Nations.³⁸

Harmon gives accurate and in-depth coverage to initiatives in mission of the GBGM, especially of its world division. Chapter nine, on “Initiatives for a New Mission Age”, includes twenty-four pages on the Russia initiative—the Board’s flagship cooperative program with others in a renewed but largely new mission field. Quality coverage is given also to the work in Kazakhstan of the Health and Welfare Ministries Program (focused on nuclear radiation and health issues), to the renewal of the UMC in the Baltic States, to new board relationships in Latin America, and to cooperative new mission outreach in Cambodia, Vietnam, Nepal, Senegal, and East Africa.³⁹

The author brings an inside planner’s sensitivity to the complex GBGM

³⁴ Robert J. Harmon, *From Missions to Mission: The History of Mission of The United Methodist Church, 1968-2000* (New York: GBGM Books, 2005).

³⁵ Harmon, 2.

³⁶ Harmon, 247-252.

³⁷ Harmon, 252-260, 264-268.

³⁸ Harmon, 276-278, 406-407, 395-398.

³⁹ Harmon, 299-350.

relationships with churches around the world. The tenfold typology includes UMC central conferences and affiliated autonomous churches, as well as ecumenical, concordat, cooperative mission, and covenant relationships.¹

Harmon does acknowledge that there has been “strong controversy over the purpose and objectives of the church’s mission(ary) program.” He covers criticism by evangelicals that reduced missionary deployment is a step back from obedience to the Great Commission. The search for common ground with the new independent Mission Society for United Methodists (MUSM) was, in his judgment, “a major but disappointing enterprise.” Without comment Harmon reports that numbers of GBGM international missionaries declined from more than 1,400 in 1968 to slightly more than 400 in the year 2000—the same number as those serving under the MSUM in that year.²

I would suggest that the author misses the larger picture while describing in accurate detail everything that he has seen up close. Let me be specific. In thirty-four pages Harmon gives us “A Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean.” From the perspective of a GBGM executive it is a balanced presentation giving almost equal weight to the mission work in each country. Look closer, however. All citations are from GBGM documents—mainly articles in *New World Outlook*, the board’s promotional magazine. No Latin American sources were used. While CIEMAL, the Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches in Latin America through which the World Division related to the autonomous Methodist churches of the region, receives major attention, the vivid stories of those churches in mission are missing.

Consider also the treatment given to *volunteers in mission*—the predominant category of North American personnel in Latin America and the Caribbean (and other regions) during the 1968-2000 period. For 1998 we are told that 54,000 United Methodists contributed 16 million hours of volunteer labor.³ Not one story is included to illustrate this form of service. Instead, the reader in seven pages learns how the GBGM responded as a mission institution to this outpouring by local churches and conferences of mission interest and involvement.

The author devotes three of five pages on Zimbabwe to the important story of Bishop Abel Muzorewa’s political leadership, including serving as the first African prime minister of that country. The judgment that his political leadership “was a difficult concept for the church to embrace” is, in my judgment, inaccurate.⁴ The “big story” of the church in mission in Zimbabwe is missing. Despite the bishop’s leadership of a political party, in opposition after 1980 to the government of Robert Mugabe, the church grew rapidly. With mission personnel reduced 90% from that in 1968, the Zimbabwe Annual Conference from 1968 to 2000 probably grew more than 1,000% in membership, numbers of pastors, and giving. The story of creative leader-

¹ Harmon, 48, 59, 107, 131, 139, 141, 215, 219, 227, 286, 300, 337, 459-465.

² Harmon, 94-96, 168-169, 178-183, 201.

³ Harmon, 122.

⁴ Harmon, 130.

ship by women deserves to be told, including both economic empowerment and ministry to those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Harmon concludes his history with the planner's vision of a "global church" as "an adventure into what the church is becoming." Such a community, in his judgment, assumes an inescapable commitment to issues of economic and political justice, and to interdependence among peoples and their churches.⁵

VI

In volume six the Series editor, Charles Cole, provides vignettes and testimonies by key leaders in mission of The United Methodist Church.⁶ Eleven recount the new initiatives undertaken by the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) beginning in 1980. All but one was a director of the board between 1980 and 2002. The period coincides with the leadership of Randolph W. Nugent as General Secretary from 1981 to 2002. Several of the authors pay tribute to his leadership.

In 1980 the UMC was in transition in its self-conception. During the 1960s and 1970s it had conceived of itself as a U.S. denomination with overseas affiliate churches that it encouraged to become autonomous churches. Its work, except for relief projects, was confined to those countries in which the predecessor denominations had been in mission. Increasingly from 1980 the UMC began to think of itself as a global church with member churches in more than thirty countries, and with cooperative mission work in an additional ninety countries.

Narrative first-person accounts of how new mission initiatives were begun and developed are the strength of this book. Some of these were new initiatives in the United States. More were in overseas ministries. These included accounts of the rebirth of Methodism in Russia, the Baltic States, and countries of Eastern Europe, and of new ministries began in nations formed out of the breakup of the Soviet Union. Refugee communities in the U.S. and Europe took initiatives to plant churches in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Africa during this period became the continent of fastest Methodist growth. Old comity agreements, reserving countries or districts for mission by a particular denomination, fell away. Largely through African initiative new congregations were planted in Namibia, Botswana, Malawi, Guinea, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, the Sudan, and Kenya. Historically, with the exception of Kenya, these countries did not have a Methodist church presence.

Do not look to this volume for analysis of major issues faced by the GBGM, or for evaluation of its work and its general secretary. New churches in Russia, Cambodia, and other countries required partnerships with

⁵ Harmon, 455-457.

⁶ Charles E. Cole, ed., *Initiatives for Mission, 1980-2002* (New York: GBGM Books, 2003).

Methodists from other countries. What were the dynamics of these relationships? In other countries, notably Kenya, United Methodists established new congregations where other Methodist churches historically had worked. Were such initiatives viewed as a partnership or as a threat?

Shifting patterns of mission service deserve more analysis. One author claims that the UMC increased its number of missionaries from 950 in 1996 to 2,180 in 2000. Was this primarily a redefinition of who are to be called *missionaries*?

This volume will best be remembered as a kaleidoscope of first-person accounts of the GBGM in mission in the last two decades. Like a stained glass window, its beauty is found in the juxtaposition of different facets giving a pleasing view from afar, more than in the precision of details.

VII

The seventh and final volume of the Series is in a different genre.⁷ It is a collection of essays addressing the question: “What does the future hold for the people called Methodist in mission? If, as some scholars insist, Methodism is essentially missional, how can the movement regain its early energy and vision?”

One underlying premise is that history provides not only understandings of what has past, but also helpful insights on both present and future realities. The back cover contains the only statement of purpose of this volume—“to explore the future of mission for those in the Methodist family in a new, sometimes, threatening, often promising world.”

In contrast to the vignettes in volume six by GBGM insiders, only two writers of these essays have served as board members or executives. All but one, however, are Methodists who bring a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. Three write about continent-wide challenges for mission in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Two contributions (Ghana and the Philippines) are national case studies; one is regional (Southeast Asia). Four write from ethnic perspectives in the United States (Native American, African-American, Korean-American, and Latino-American). Three essays are thematic in content (religious pluralism, women, and youth). Space constraints do not permit me to summarize each of these quality essays. Instead, I shall lift up key themes related to the central question raised.

Authenticity is the first. It includes issues of inculturation of the faith within cultures or sub-cultures. “Will Methodism, indeed Christianity, be found in the efforts to reconstruct a positive and empowering self-understanding for the African?”: Mercy Oduyoye asks this question out of the struggle for selfhood of churches in West Africa that were founded by Methodist missionaries from Great Britain. Creatively she analyzes the temptations to import youth culture from the West. She warns that “attachment to things

⁷ Charles E. Cole, ed., *Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (New York: GBGM Books, 2004).

American can mount to nauseating proportions” and lead to a pseudo-inculturation not based on a living faith.⁸ Scott Sunquist, in his probing article on “Asian Mission to Asians,” fears that mission work from wealthy Asian nations (e.g. Taiwan, Singapore, and Korea) may be less relevant to the Asian context “because of the subtle Westernization that has taken place in these churches.” In contrast he tells of a Singapore Chinese woman serving humbly among Muslim village women in Senegal.⁹

Stephen S. Kim, in his chapter on the future of Korean mission in the United States, provides a masterful reflection on the ongoing effort by United Methodists to advance Korean-American mission and ministry. He develops three “guiding lights” for the missional vision. The first is *global* identity—being members of the global family without abandoning Korean identity and heritage. The second is a global ethic that will help Korean-American women to move from traditional fatalism “to affirm the interdependence of all creation in God’s care.” The third is a “journey forward inwardly” with a theology of sincerity (*Chung-Yung*) as “the foundation of reconciliation in family, society, and even in the ecosystem.”¹⁰

Women in mission is a second theme and the focus of two essays. Peggy Halsey, a former GBGM executive for work with women, asked forty persons to make “one prediction about women and mission in the year 2020.” Their composite response was that “women will still be the primary deliverers of mission and will also continue, with children, to be the neediest recipients of mission.” Elizabeth Tapia contributes a “women in mission” perspective from the Philippines. A theological educator and ordained UMC pastor, she focuses on the “flexible, innovative, and participatory” roles of women in struggles for a more just and human society for all. In her judgment the Filipina Christian women “hold up half the mission sky” bringing “vision and dynamism into mission work.”¹¹

Mission spirituality is a third overarching theme. Robert Hunt, in his probing essay on “The Challenge of Christian Mission in Islamic Southeast Asia,” calls for “a spirituality of *kenosis*,” of self-emptying in imitation of Christ. Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, of the UMC’s New Jersey area, writes on “Christian Mission in a Religiously Pluralistic Society.” He asks: “Can Christians claim and curtail the work of the Holy Spirit only to and in the Christian domain?” and “Are we fulfilling the mission of God as modeled by Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit?” If so, he believes, our mission will be theocentric in the new millennium, depending on the Holy Spirit “to blow the new winds of Spirit into mission endeavors.”¹²

Methodist distinctives is a fourth theme. James A. Dwyer, in “The Future of Methodist Mission in Europe,” develops five features of Methodism in

⁸ Cole, ed., *Christian Mission*, 18, 9-10.

⁹ Cole, ed., *Christian Mission*, 39, 43.

¹⁰ Cole, ed., *Christian Mission*, 207, 212, 215, 217.

¹¹ Cole, ed., *Christian Mission*, 270, 73, 75.

¹² Cole, ed., *Christian Mission*, 63, 159-160, 166.

Europe that distinguish it from other religious bodies. They are Methodist theology, Methodist sociology (i.e. social conscience), Methodist politics (transnational), modernity (self-reflective and self-critical), and personal commitment. The latter attribute encompasses “personal responses to God’s grace, personal involvement in God’s mission for God’s people, and personal commitment to the vision of Christ to reach all with the good news.”¹³ Readers may wonder if these distinctives characterize Methodism in other continents. Dwyer also provides a comprehensive survey of the varied churches of the Methodist family in twenty countries, and of their mission opportunities.

“*New wine in old wineskins*” is a fifth overarching theme. Dwyer tells stories of resistance by established congregations to welcoming immigrants and giving them authority over building and finances. Anthony J. Shipley, out of his life experience as an African-American UMC pastor and GBGM executive, finds positive models of effective mission and ministry both in vital middle-class African-American communities (long pastorates and holistic ministries), and in poor communities (adequately funded and endowed with well-trained, committed and compensated leaders). In contrast José M. Fernández, in “A Latino Perspective,” calls for “a radical restructuring of the system which we now call the church.” He would train a core of new pastors who are Latino in culture, theology, and lifestyle. They would be persons in mission for life, mostly employed in secular jobs, but committed to pastoral leadership for renewal of the Latino churches.¹⁴

The editor is to be commended for providing in this volume a well-balanced and well-focused collection of essays on the future of mission for the people called Methodists. The writing style is engaging, with first-person accounts drawing the reader into reflection on substantive issues.

VIII

Some concluding thoughts: what will be the contribution of these volumes to an understanding of the mission history of the people called Methodist? Hopefully a study guide will be prepared to enhance the use of these volumes by interested groups.

Each manuscript for the series underwent a rigorous evaluation process both by specialists recruited by authors, and by anonymous readers chosen by the editor. Their comments enhanced the quality and accuracy of each volume.

Attractive style elements include photographs, maps, and sidebars telling the story of key individuals. Documentation placed at the end of each volume includes appendices, endnotes, bibliography, and indexes. Charles E. Cole is to be commended for thorough editing that shrank the differential between output by seasoned scholars, and that of persons writing out of their

¹³ Cole, ed., *Christian Mission*, 78-86.

¹⁴ Cole, ed., *Christian Mission*, 118, 193, 202, 242-243.

experience in mission.

It should be recognized that the outline of the historical volumes is institution-based. Largely neglected are historical events and cultural movements that shaped the mission themes and emphases of Methodists. For example, the women's missionary movement of the late nineteenth century was an interdenominational phenomenon.¹⁵

One would have welcomed comparisons and contrasts between the mission perspectives of the forerunner churches (MPC, MECS, and MEC) of The Methodist Church, or of the uniting bodies (MC and EUB) of The United Methodist Church. This may be suggestive for future analysis and writing.

The intention of the General Board of Global Ministries, in launching this Series, was that future generations might find in these volumes not only information and interpretation of Christian mission, but also inspiration to continue that mission in the future. These books deserve careful reading and reflection by all United Methodists desiring to innovate for creative mission in the 21st century. I commend them also to mission leaders of other denominations—both as models for the writing of mission histories, and as sourcebooks for reflection and action in mission.

¹⁵ See Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 255-316.