

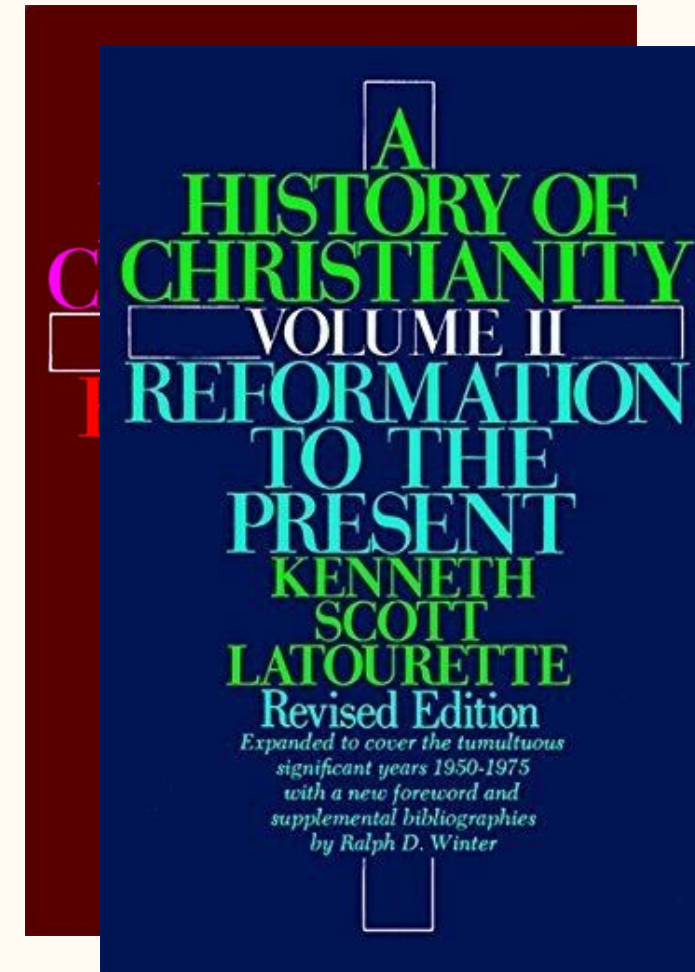
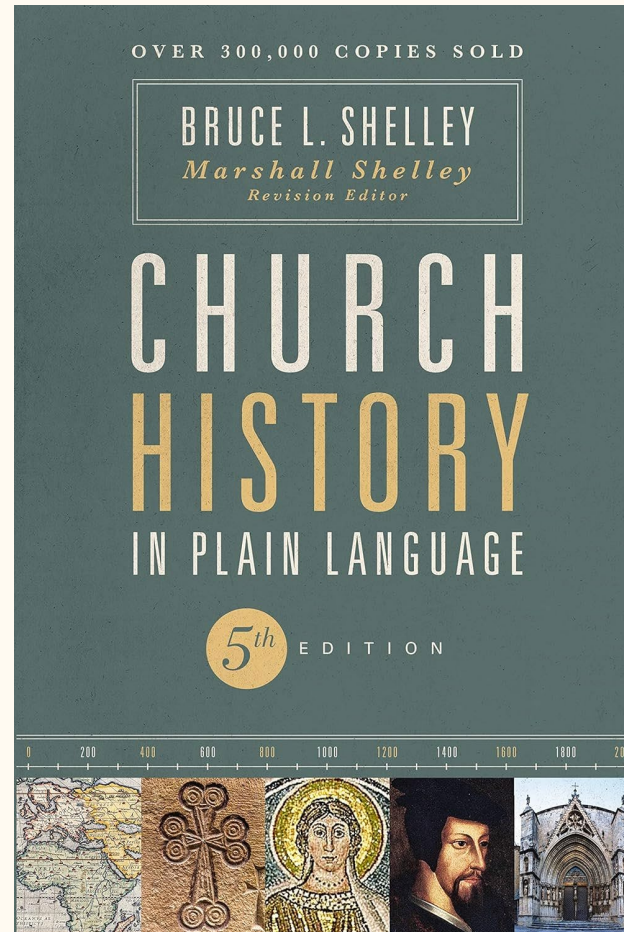
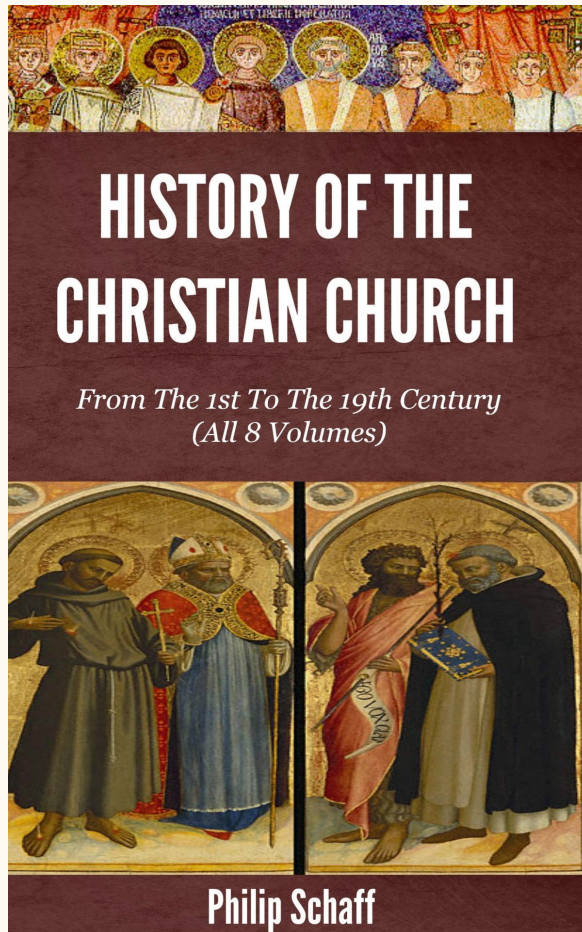
Polycentric Mission: from everyone to everywhere



The Nexus of Mission History and Church History

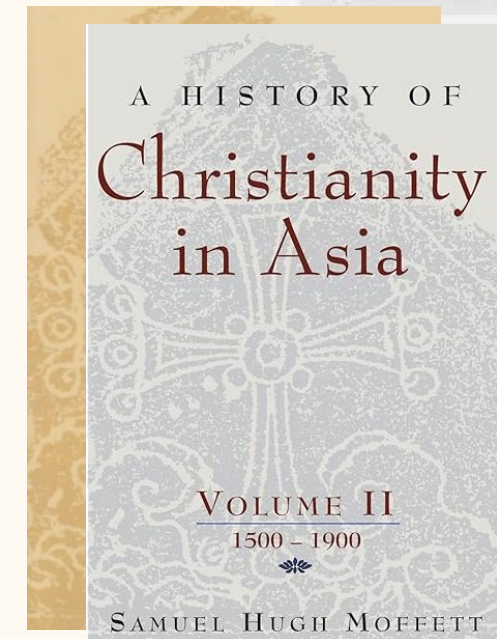
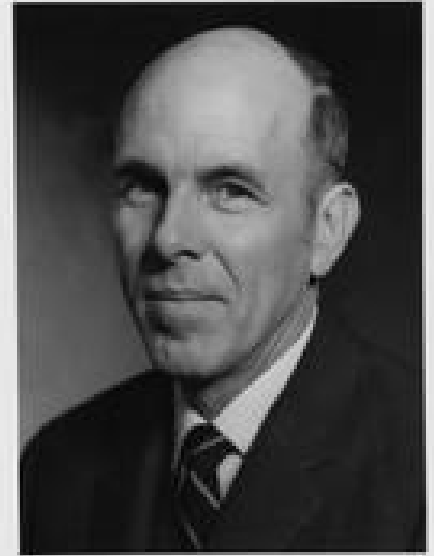
- The history of Christian missions was primarily recorded and propagated with Europe and North America as the centres of Christianity.
- Prior to the turn of the 21st century, most if not all of the textbooks on the history of Christianity was predominantly Eurocentric
“propagation of Christianity pulsated from both Rome and Constantinople, the centres of the Western and Eastern parts of the Roman Empire.”

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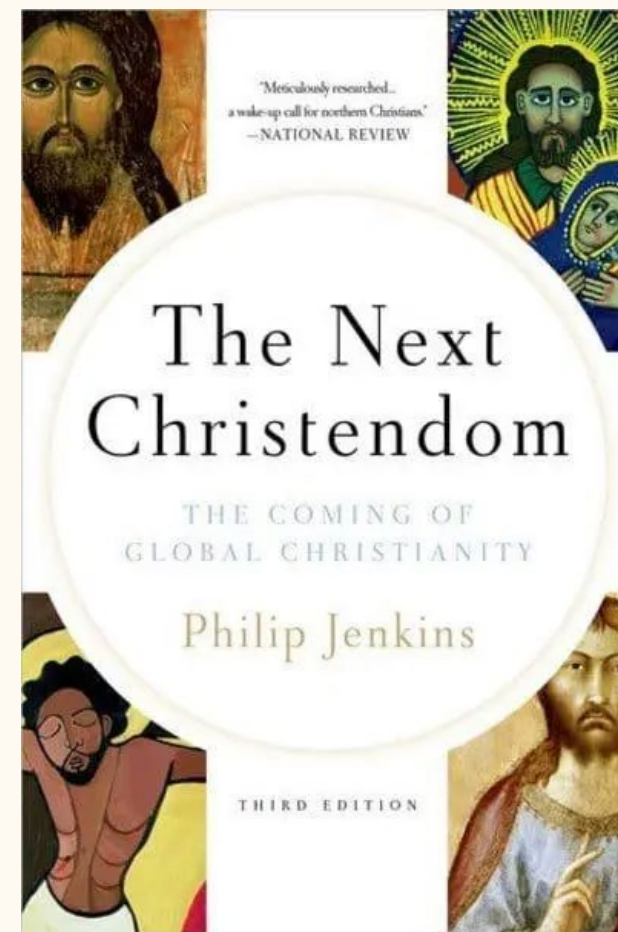
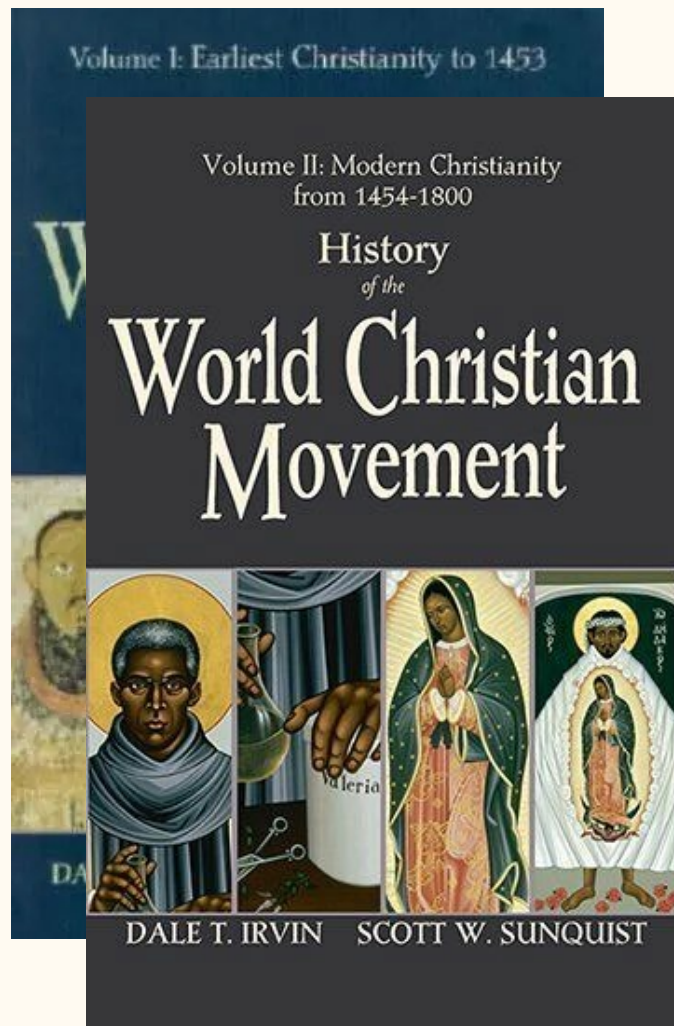
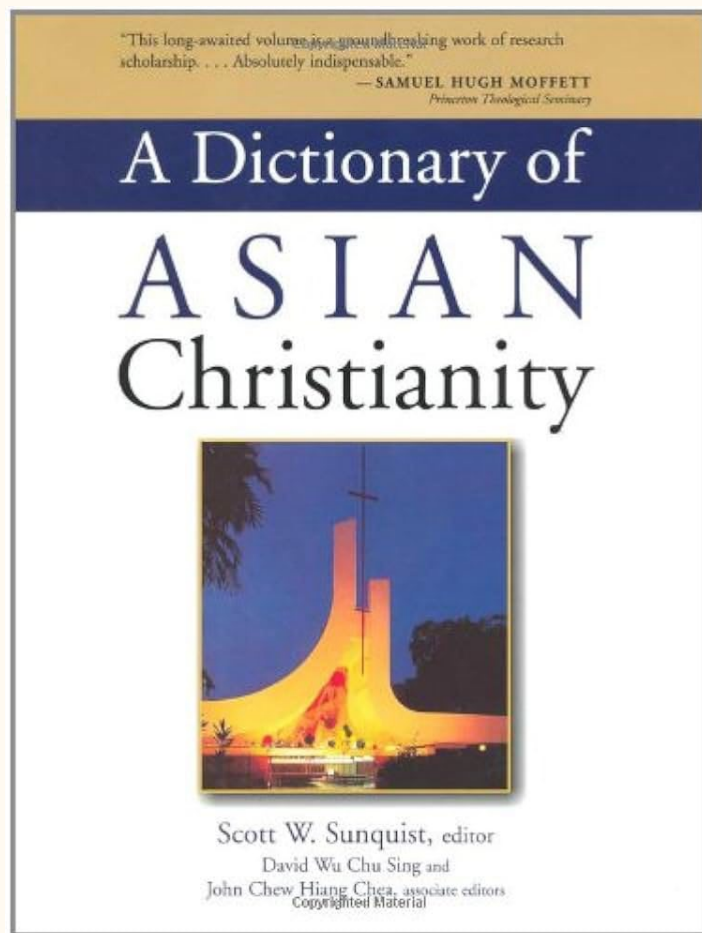


The Nexus of Mission History and Church History

- But change was on the way - in the person of Samuel Hugh Moffett
- Mentored by Latourette, Moffett sought to tell the story of “the churches that grew and spread outside the Roman Empire in ancient and oriental kingdoms east of the Euphrates and stretching along the Old Silk Road from Osrhoene through Persia to China or along the water routes from the Red Sea around Arabia to India.”
- Primary purpose - “this volume will be another small step to restoring global balance in the study of church history.”

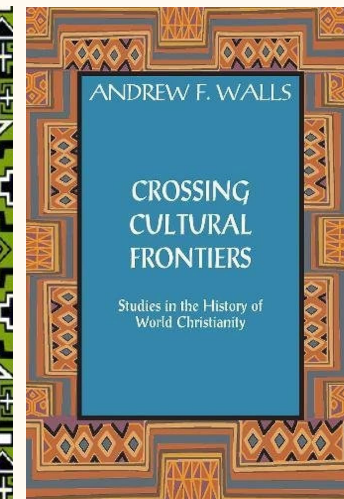
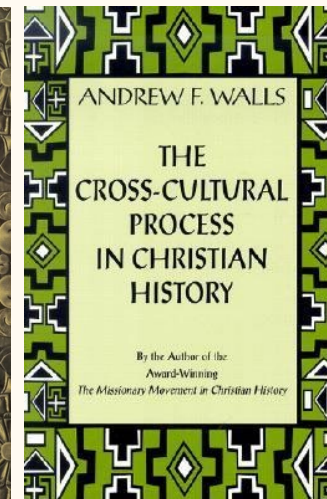
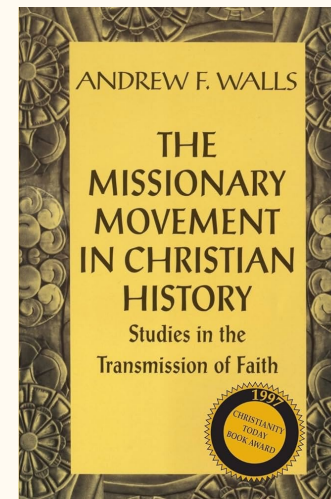


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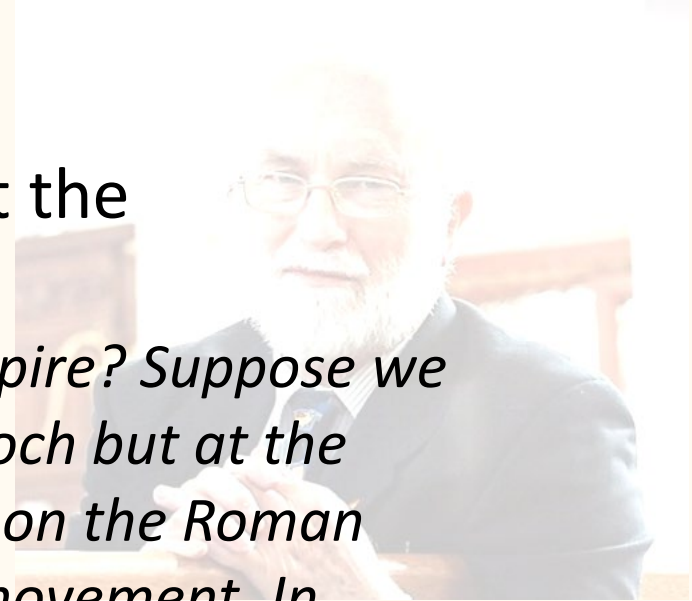
- At the same time, a Methodist mission historian was noting the patterns in African and world Christianity - Andrew Finlay Walls
- Walls critiqued church history as a “glorified form of European clan history.”
- He was among the first to highlight the growth of Christianity in the global south.



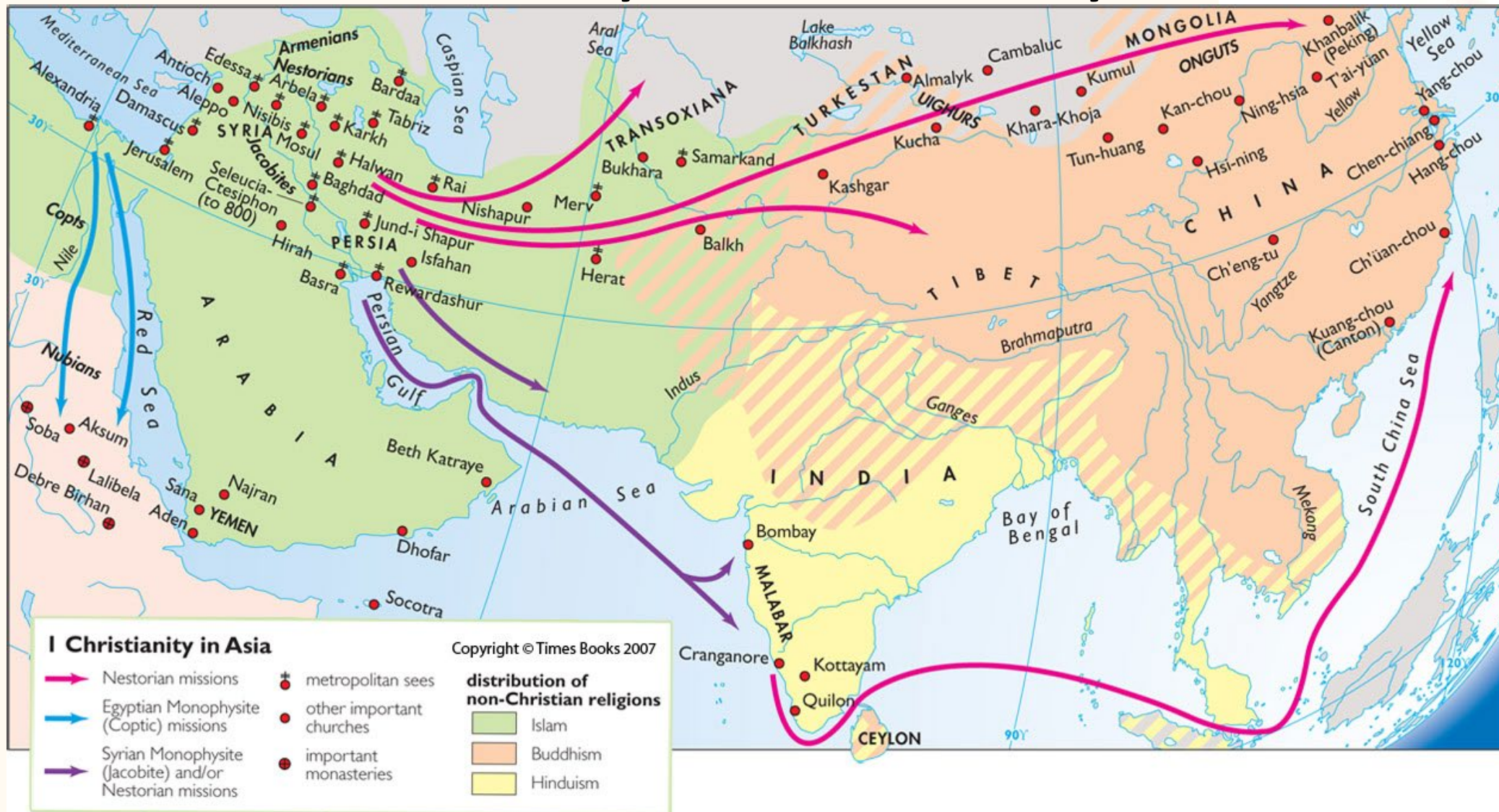
The Nexus of Mission History and Church History

- Walls challenged the student of history to look without the European context:

But suppose we look at early Christianity outside the Roman Empire? Suppose we look not only at the well-known movement westward from Antioch but at the eastward movement as well? The little buffer state of Osroene, on the Roman imperial frontier, was the early base of a remarkable Christian movement. In Edessa, its capital, are the remains of the oldest church building yet discovered, built at a time when no such thing was possible in the Roman Empire. Edessa, indeed, often does appear on maps of the early church. Unfortunately, it is usually at the eastern extremity of the map, yielding the idea that it represents the eastern extremity of a Christianity centered on the Mediterranean. If, however, we place Edessa at the western end of the map, and pigeonhole the Roman Empire for a while, we can observe a remarkable alternative Christian story.



The Nexus of Mission History and Church History

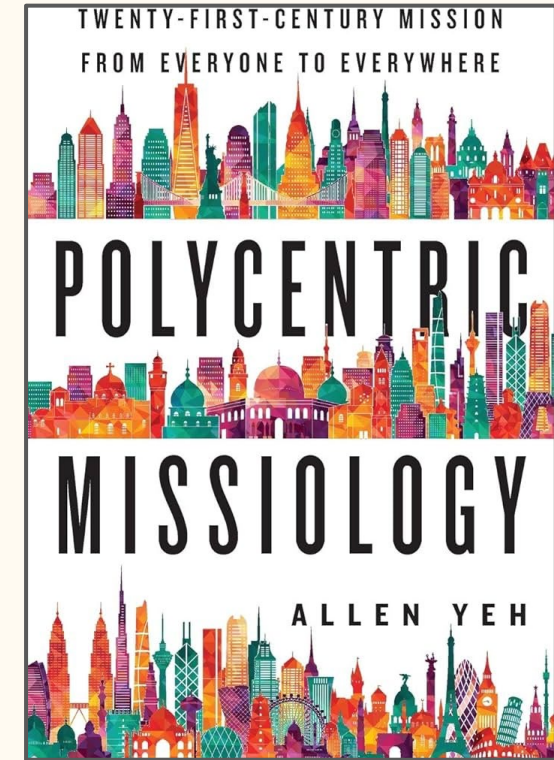


The Nexus of Mission History and Church History

- The highpoint of Latourette’s “great century” of missions from 1800-1914, was the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh.
- It was also hardly a “world missionary conference” due to the predominantly “white Protestant” representation.
- There was no representation from Central or South America and one sole unnamed African.
- Brian Stanley noted that “of the 1215 official delegates, 509 were British, 491 were North American, 169 originated from continental Europe, 27 came from the white colonies of South Africa and Australasia, and only 19 were from the non-western or “majority” world (18 of them from Asia)”

The Rise of the Global South

- In the centennial commemoration of the 1910 WMC, Allen Yeh noted that the voices of the “younger churches” could no longer be sidelined nor silenced.
- The explosive growth of Christianity in the non-western world and the corresponding shift of gravity of Christianity to the global south, from 1910 to 2010, has reshaped the demographics of Christianity
- Notably “there were more than twenty-five centenary conferences held in 2010.”



The Rise of the Global South - Polycentric Missiology

Of all the meetings in 2010, five are of particular significance:

- Tokyo 2010
- Edinburgh 2010
- Cape Town 2010
- 2010 Boston (theological schools/students)
- CLADE V (*Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización*)

It would great to see how the next gathering of Lausanne (in September 2024) will reflect the polycentricity of mission (missions from everyone to everywhere).

The Rise of the Global South - Polycentric Missiology

- In response to a question as to which of the conference in 2010 might be regarded as a true successor to the ideal of the 1910 Conference, Yeh's wrote:
“...all of them are needed and together they are the successor of Edinburgh 1910. A century ago, mission was unilateral and unidirectional (“from the west to the rest”). Today, in light of the phenomenon known as World Christianity, mission is polycentric and polydirectional: “from everyone to everywhere”. **No one conference or continent does mission best. But, together, each provides a valuable piece.**”

The Rise of the Global South - Polycentric Missiology

- But is polycentricism another *nouveau* concept or just another emerging trend?
- The rise of the early centres of Christianity itself is demonstrative of the polycentricism and polydirectional spread of the Christianity.



The Rise of the Global South - Polycentric Missiology

- The increasingly multiple loci for propagation of the Christian faith ensures that we will not again repeat the excesses of colonial missions or perceive mission as simply a project for sending out missionaries in the hope of changing the world and making disciples in our own image.
- Instead of a mission that is unidirectional, mission is polycentric and polydirectional; instead of a mission that is paternalistic, mission increasingly is a partnership that engages everyone at the peripheries.
- Yeh is emphatic “that the future of mission is polycentric, and that the entire global church needs to work together to bring the Gospel to the nations.”

The Rise of the Global South - Polycentric Missiology

- This building up of this multi-ethnic missional community is the context that necessitated his epistle to the Ephesians.
- Andrew Walls, sees this breaking down of the walls of division and the building of the temple of God, as “the Ephesian moment.”
- He noted that:
“the very height of Christ’s full stature is reached only by the coming together of the different cultural entities into the body of Christ. Only “together,” not on our own, can we reach His full stature...
None of us can reach Christ’s completeness on our own. We need each other’s vision to correct, enlarge and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ.”

The Rise of the Global South - Polycentric Missiology

- We live in a context that is increasingly divisive and polemical.



The Rise of the Global South - Polycentric Missiology

- In politics, in economics, in sociology and in various aspects of life, we are witnessing an increasingly fractured world where the West seeks to exert its unipolar dominance.
- This rise of the church in the global south brings to the forefront the Ephesian question:
- “Will the church in all its diversity will demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all its culture-specific segments?”
- “Will the body of Christ be realized or fractured in this new Ephesian moment?”

Thank You

