

ANTHROPOLOGY AND MISSIONARIES

Editor's note: The following comment on the recent Special Issue of *JASO* on 'Anthropology and Missionaries' (Vol. XXIII, no. 2) was solicited by the editors. Dr Bowie's D.Phil. thesis (Bowie 1985) is one of the few in Oxford in recent years to deal centrally with missions. She is also one of the editors of a forthcoming collection of essays on women and missions (Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener (eds.) 1993).

Studies dealing with the interaction between anthropologists and missions, as well as anthropological studies of mission, are still so scarce that any addition to the field is to be warmly welcomed. The guest editor of the recent *JASO* Special Issue, W. S. F. Pickering, is therefore to be thanked for putting together these articles on 'Anthropology and Missionaries', with his introduction. It is clear from the papers selected for publication (and it is possible that the addition of those that had unfortunately to be excluded would have strengthened this impression) that anthropological perspectives and cultures vary as much as do those of missionaries and their host societies. While, for example, Joan Burke is able to present an insider's view of the Roman Catholic Church and the Sisters of Notre Dame in Zaïre, R. H. Barnes looks at inculturation in Indonesia from the outside.

The recent discussion in mission circles of 'inculturation' or the cultural accommodation of Christianity to a non-Christian, usually 'tribal' setting has obviously spurred anthropologists to look at missions anew, and to engage with some of the theoretical and practical questions asked by missionaries themselves. One might be forgiven, however, given the papers presented here, for thinking that the debate is confined to the Roman Catholic Church. The terminology varies, but similar questions are being addressed by Protestant missiologists, as Pickering indicates in his introduction (see also, for example, Scherer and Bevans 1992; Winter and Hawthorne 1992).

The question of the extent to which the missionary can, or wants to, use anthropological information about a host society, and conversely, the value to anthropologists of ethnographic data collected by the missionary are central concerns. Stefan Dietrich's article on Pater Schmidt is a useful exercise in clarifying some of the differences between an anthropological and a missiological perspective, particularly as the writings of such anthropological missionaries as Aylward Shorter tend to merge the two. Dietrich's reminder that the description, study and analysis of religions began in theology, and that the social scientist is therefore using a terminology that begs a different set of assumptions (such as the distinction between 'religion' and 'magic') is worth reiterating. I also would concur with Dietrich's conclusion that 'anthropology cannot answer theological questions, but perhaps it can be used by theologians to help in framing well the questions—and, in consequence, the answers'. Dietrich's article underlined for me the continuity between pre- and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic emphasis on the 'essentials' and 'inessentials' of faith. Missionaries continue to manipulate or 'exploit' cultural knowledge in the service of Christianity, with indigenous

Christians as frequent participants in this process. Indeed, this raises various ethical questions for the anthropologist whose cultural expertise might be tapped, questions that are dealt with in the present collection only by Joan Burke, who was invited by her subjects to undertake her study in order to enable them to become increasingly conscious agents of their own history.

The value of localized studies is demonstrated in the essays by Macdonald and Howe. Archival material, official mission documents, the memories of those involved, as well as more conventional fieldwork, are all needed in order to evaluate the relationship between missionaries and locals in specific geographical and historical situations. These tantalizingly brief glimpses might, it is hoped, inspire other anthropologists to re-evaluate their own fieldwork data, or to undertake new studies of the interaction between missions and local cultures. While, therefore, the *JASO* collection is to be warmly welcomed it also reminds us of how much more could be done.

Kanogo (1993) and Basu (1993) have provided two of the very few contributions to the literature from the perspective of recipients of missionary activity (although they write primarily as historians rather than as anthropologists). Moreover, societies supposedly Christianized for many centuries are under-represented in current literature, despite the fact that they often pose a continuing challenge to the missionary policy of the church (see, for instance, Skar 1993). For the Roman Catholic Church in Wales the Principality is still mission territory, with many parish priests, most of whom are Irish, being members of the missionary order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). These priests are more resistant to the use of the vernacular (i.e. Welsh in Welsh-speaking areas) than are OMI missionaries in Cameroon, or in many other more 'exotic' mission contexts. And Gaelic-speaking priests do not seem to be markedly more sympathetic to Welsh-speakers and their aspiration to worship in their native tongue than priests from English-speaking backgrounds. There is also a vast amount of potentially very valuable comparative work that could be done on Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Bahai missionary activity. Given that the anthropological study of missions is in its infancy, however, the *JASO* collection constitutes an important contribution. I sincerely hope, though, that the papers that could not be included in the *JASO* Special Issue will be published elsewhere and become similarly accessible.

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REFERENCES

- BASU, A. 1993. 'Mary Ann Cooke to Mother Teresa: Christian Missionary Women and Indian Response', in Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener (eds.), pp. 187-208.
- BOWIE, FIONA 1985. *A Social and Historical Study of Christian Missions among the Bangwa of South West Cameroon*, University of Oxford: D.Phil thesis.