

FROM EVERY TRIBE AND NATION

A HISTORIAN'S DISCOVERY OF THE
GLOBAL CHRISTIAN STORY



MARK A. NOLL

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In Memoriam
Francis and Evelyn Noll
Donald L. Andersen

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Introduction

To ask a historian for an autobiographical memoir risks replicating the absurdity of a famous Monty Python sketch entitled “Novel Writing: Thomas Hardy.” It features three minutes of breathless blather from a play-by-play announcer who, assisted by a ponderously earnest color commentator, describes Thomas Hardy penning the first sentence of *The Return of the Native*: “The crowd grows quiet now as Hardy settles himself down at the desk, body straight, shoulders relaxed, pen held lightly but firmly in the right hand, he dips the pen in the ink, and he’s off . . .”¹

For the most part, historians sit, read books, prepare lectures, grade student papers, occasionally travel to archives, sit some more, organize notes and books, relax by going to museums (and reading everything on all of the placards), attend conferences to hear papers read, write books and articles, retire, read some more, and fade away. The constant effort to figure out why people, institutions, ideas, cultural assumptions, conflicts, social relationships, and day-to-day living developed as they did in the past leaves little time or psychic energy for close attention to ourselves. While some of the books that historians write might be lively, humane, and compelling, our lives rarely are.

1. “Monty Python—Novel Writing,” YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogPZ5CY9KoM>, accessed July 2, 2013.

There are a few exceptions. Samuel Eliot Morison not only wrote the official history of the US Navy during World War II but was himself a fine amateur sailor and a naval officer on active duty during that conflict. Paul Fussell was just getting started on a career as a literary historian that would lead to very impressive books on the experience of participants in both world wars when he was drafted for battle in the Pacific. M. A. Polievktov, a distinguished historian working in St. Petersburg, witnessed firsthand crucial events of the Russian Revolution in early 1917 and then organized a series of revealing interviews with key participants right on the spot.² And sometimes academic historians have been called from the library and the classroom to become college provosts or presidents, where they are forced to act instead of just observing others in action. But these are exceptions that prove the rule.

Yet what are friends for if not to push you to do things you would otherwise not even consider? In this case, Joel Carpenter of Calvin College's Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity and Robert Hosack of Baker Academic were working on a scheme with a worthy purpose. Because they are deeply impressed with how dramatically the shape of world Christianity has changed over the last century, they are trying to find innovative ways to communicate the significance of those changes. They have concluded that minds click off and eyes glaze over when audiences are simply assaulted with the numbers measuring those changes. However impressive, such numbers can come off like recitations of the national debt or the trade imbalance with China. Yet they also feel that if more believers worship Sunday by Sunday in the Congo than in Canada, if churches in China are fuller than churches in Europe, if missionaries from Brazil, Korea, and Nigeria are becoming more numerous than missionaries from the "Christian West," then it is important to understand how, where, and why Christianity has become the first truly global religion.

2. Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II*, 15 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947–62); Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Semion Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism: Untold Stories of the February 1917 Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Joel and Bob also concluded that only fragments of the literate public could be enticed to read books about individuals, organizations, and developments in the Majority Christian World (Africa, Latin America, and Asia)—if the names, places, and events are unfamiliar—regardless of how objectively important these people and events might be. Thankfully, solidly researched books are now proliferating about such important people, significant events, and places where Christian faith now thrives.³ Much of what these books reveal is almost certainly more important for the future of Christianity than most of the people and events that we in the West recognize from our own recent history. Yet because these people and events remain outside the orbit of familiarity, it is hard for publishers to attract readers for books about them.

But maybe, Joel and Bob reasoned, a few more readers might pay attention to personal accounts of how some of us who are securely nestled in American settings nonetheless came to share their conviction about the tremendous significance of the new worlds of Christianity. As a result of such thinking, they conceived the series of which this book is a part.

To me, they posed this challenge: would I write a personal narrative to describe the process by which I came to share their belief that full attention to the non-Western world had become essential for any responsible grasp of the history of Christianity. They knew that I was trained as a conventional student of Western church history, which has traditionally concentrated on European and American developments or, when taking notice of the Majority World, has done so in terms of missionary efforts from the West. They also knew that for the last several decades my day job has been to teach, research, and write books on topics in American history. How, they wondered, did you become interested in reading about non-Western developments? Why did you plan and then begin to teach courses on world Christian history? What led you to write books aimed at general audiences about some aspects of that history?

3. Reviews of many of them, along with much other useful material, appear regularly in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (IBMR).

Despite my grave suspicion about personal memoir as a genre and real reluctance to become introspective, I agreed. Why? Because for a person with historical instincts, the effort to grasp how Christianity came to exist as it does in the world today just seems very important as a puzzle begging to be explained. But that is not all. In the course of reading, teaching, and trying to write about the recent world history of Christianity, it also became obvious that this new knowledge spoke directly to the experiential and theological realities of Christian faith itself. When those realities are the most important things in your own life, it is natural to want to learn how others have experienced the presence of Christ and understood truths of the faith—even if those others have lived in situations very different from my own. And still more. As someone called to function as a scholar, it has long seemed to me imperative that at least some Christian believers should be thinking hard about why and how Christian believers should be thinking hard. As it turned out, trying to understand the new dimensions of world Christianity has proven to be a natural extension of efforts to encourage myself and others to pursue intellectual life as a calling from God.⁴

For these reasons and more, Joel and Bob won me over. If I could communicate something about the sheer pleasure of expanded historical understanding, the encouragement for deepened Christian life and thought from learning about Majority World Christianity, and the spur to thinking like a Christian that these new ventures opened up, it might be worth the effort.



My title for this book comes not only from Scripture but also from recent world history. Several times in the book of Revelation the same words appear to describe both the entire human race and the redeemed children of God. In various combinations—sometimes in plural form, sometimes singular—the words are “nation,” “tribe,” “language,” and “people.” Biblical scholars can parse the exact meaning of these

4. Explored in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) and *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

four terms, but it seems obvious that they are meant to describe the widest possible linguistic, ethnic, political, familial, racial, historical, and social diversity.

The most dramatic of these passages appears in chapter 5 where the key actor is called “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah,” “the Root of David,” and “the Lamb” who was slain. When this One opens a scroll that no one else can approach, “four living creatures” and “twenty-four elders” sing a new song:

You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for
God
saints from every tribe and language and people and
nation;
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our
God,
and they will reign on earth. (Rev. 5:9–10)

From this passage we learn that when the finished work of Christ is, in the other sense of the term, finished, his kingdom will be made up of people from everywhere, speaking all imaginable languages, shaped by greatly different historical experiences, representing every conceivable social location, and appearing as a rainbow of “red and yellow, black and white.”

The lesson for a historian from this passage would seem to be obvious. If the people of God come from every tribe and nation, so then should a history of the people of God try to take in every tribe and nation. Of course, since historians are far from divine, they can never describe the church from God’s universal perspective. Yet to realize that the Christian story, properly considered, must always be moving farther out to take in more of the “kingdom and priests serving our God” is now essential, even when historians work on only one aspect of one strand of the tribes, languages, peoples, or nations.

Alongside the mandate for history in this biblical passage, the recent past contains many events that anticipate the Revelator’s view of the

End. One of the most telling of these events took place on Whitsunday in 1862, when five thousand South Sea Islanders from Tonga, Fiji, and Samoa gathered to inaugurate a new specifically Christian government with a professedly Christian king. They marked this auspicious occasion by singing a hymn that had become the missionary beacon of the evangelical movement.⁵ Developments in the Pacific that led to that day had included some of the evil effects of Western imperialism—families disrupted, resources stolen, women ravished, fire arms introduced. Yet despite the Islanders' experience with those evils, they were able to sift through what they had learned from European contact and chose—for themselves—the hymn for the day.

That hymn was Isaac Watts's Christianized version of the Seventy-Second Psalm. To quote it here, with all of the verses that Watts wrote, might offend modern sensibilities (especially because of its reference to "barbarous nations").⁶ But a full quotation also conveys Watts's grasp of how wide the kingdom of God really is. It also suggests how poignant it must have been for these islanders "with their kings" to know that they too belonged among the "people and realms of every tongue."

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

Behold the islands with their kings,
And Europe her best tribute brings;
From North to South the princes meet
To pay their homage at his feet.

There Persia glorious to behold,
There India shines in eastern gold;
And barbarous nations at his word
Submit and bow and own their Lord.

5. Christopher Idle, *Stories of Our Favorite Hymns* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 24.

6. Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and Apply'd to the Christian State and Worship* (London, 1719), 186–87.

For him shall endless prayer be made,
And princes throng to crown his head,
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
With every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on his love with sweetest song;
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on his name.

Blessings abound where'er He reigns,
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest.

Where He displays His healing power
Death and the curse are known no more;
In Him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.

Let every creature rise and bring
Peculiar honors to our King;
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud Amen.

To quote this great hymn here does one thing more. It anticipates a theme that will appear later in the book when we consider the unusual importance that singing the praises of God has enjoyed in almost all Christian communities. Significantly, however, if singing has been universal among believers, the varieties of music sung have been highly particular, culturally specific, and often unintelligible to outsiders.



My bosses, Carpenter and Hosack, have insisted that this book be personal and anecdotal, and that it not be festooned with too many footnotes that are otherwise second nature for a self-respecting historian. They suggested that short, impressionistic chapters would be better than the ponderous, complex sort. They also indicated that it would be fine to excerpt or repeat fragments of material I had

originally written for other purposes. To assuage my scholarly conscience, I do note when I am revising here what has been published elsewhere. Otherwise, I have tried to obey orders.

Left to myself, I would probably have begun this account in the late 1960s when I was coming to learn about a form of Christianity quite different from the one in which I had been raised and which played an important part in fixing my course as an adult believer. Or perhaps in the late 1980s when in fairly rapid succession I first heard Andrew Walls lecture and then was induced by good friends at Wheaton College to take part in a summer teaching expedition to Oradea, Romania. But my wife, Maggie, thinks the story has to begin much earlier. For reasons that should become apparent, I'm sure she is right.

❖ 1 ❖

Cedar Rapids

At Calvary Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where I grew up, missionaries were conspicuous—both in the flesh and as idealized exemplars of what the Christian life should be. Not only did we stage an annual weeklong missionary conference, with nightly meetings addressed by Christian workers from around the globe who spoke about and illustrated (with slide projectors and curios) their tasks in the Philippines, Brazil, Argentina, India, Pakistan, the Ivory Coast, what was then called the Belgian Congo, Alaska, and more. But other missionaries also regularly passed through, to be introduced on Sunday morning, or more commonly to address the congregation on Sunday evening or at the church’s midweek prayer meeting. My parents, Francis and Evelyn Noll, were active in all phases of life at Calvary Baptist and so did their full share of hosting, entertaining, and squiring the visiting missionaries. In later life, long after I had left the family nest, my parents took several tours to missionary sites where on the ground in Africa, Pakistan, the Philippines, and perhaps elsewhere, they reconnected with missionaries who had come through Cedar Rapids.

During the 1950s and early 1960s I was not in a great position to appreciate the mission-mindedness of our local church. But much

later, a little bit of family history played its part in clearing up my vision. My father, a navy pilot in the Second World War, had flown eighty-nine missions off his carrier to support the movement of US troops westward across the Pacific. More than three decades after that service—and because contact with missionaries had helped redirect his life—one of these tours took my father to sites in the Philippines that he had once flown over in his Grumman TBF Avenger. I was greatly struck with what the passage of time had brought about and keen to learn more about his wartime experiences, but he seemed more impressed by the chance to meet Filipino believers and view missionary life up close.

In the late 1980s, when I began to realize how important the world as a whole actually was for the history of Christianity, I felt that these new insights had to overcome what I had experienced of missionaries when growing up. At that later time I was, for example, much impressed with books that explained the irreversibility of translation—once missionaries and their native coworkers had translated the Bible, Scripture no longer belonged to the missionaries but was put to use for purposes determined by those who spoke the target language. Thus, the missionary translators might want new converts to concentrate on the apostle Paul’s account of the substitutionary atonement, but the converts themselves might view the struggle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, or the genealogy of Matthew 1, as the key to the whole biblical story. The process of translation, my new reading revealed, was far from the uncomplicated task of “bringing the good news” that I remembered the missionaries describe.

What I was learning in the late 1980s also showed clearly that the great surge in world Christian adherence was taking place primarily through the efforts of native teachers, local “Bible women,” colporteurs, and newly converted catechists and evangelists. Missionaries often provided a spark for this process of indigenization, but it was almost always local believers who fanned the spark into flame. In addition, I was learning more about the costs of conversion: stories of missionary deprivation, even martyrdom, stuck in my memory from what I had heard as a youth; but broader reading revealed that

what local believers sacrificed for their faith in many new Christian regions—property, health, family relationships, even life itself—was almost always much more extensive than what missionaries had been asked to endure.

The young people of our church, along with adults and youth everywhere in evangelical America, were deeply moved in January 1956 as news spread about the five young missionaries killed by the native Waorani in an Ecuadorian jungle. When a memorable book written by one of the widows appeared shortly thereafter, their sacrifice made an even deeper impression. That book, Elisabeth Elliot's *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testimony of Jim Elliot* (Harper, 1958), deserves its status as a classic of evangelical spiritual biography. Yet I do not remember any comparable books, or serious attention of any sort, paid to the thousands of Majority World Christians who in those very years were experiencing hardship, deprivation, and often death for their Christian adherence: Kenyan believers targeted by Mau Maus, Mexican Pentecostals attacked for violating village traditions, Chinese Christians of all sorts rounded up in the early years of the Mao regime. On rare occasions, there might be mention of believers suffering for Christ in China or the Soviet Union—but usually to illustrate a larger problem: the threat of godless communism. From time to time there might also be reports of Protestants persecuted in Colombia—but again to underscore a more general danger: the ongoing threat posed to “real Christianity” by the domineering actions of the Catholic Church.

With most of my generation of evangelical young people, I also thrilled to stories about the self-sacrificing martyrdom of John and Betty Stam, even though the only concrete circumstance respecting their lives that I remember is that they were slain by Chinese Reds. In fact, they were killed in 1934 as a by-product of a long and complicated civil war, whose origins could be traced to the failed Chinese republic of Sun Yat-sen, or back further to the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, or perhaps even to the Opium Wars of the 1830s when Britain muscled its way into the China trade by allowing the East India Company to market narcotics to the Chinese people. The Stams' story had the

potential for illuminating the history of that part of the world where they met their end, but I recall only an emphasis on the kind of piety we were supposed to emulate.

In other words, a serious disconnect separated what I remembered about missionary service from my youth and what decades later I was learning about the dynamics of world Christianity.

In retrospect, it is clear that the problem was not primarily with the missionaries I met, for most of them were dedicated people, and almost all of them bore lightly the weight of commitment that took them from North America to “the regions beyond.” Instead, part of my problem was missionary hagiography. At least as I perceived the matter, our species of hagiography had little room for critical, particular, or concrete thought. In the apparent hierarchy of godliness, missionary service was not like other vocations. The names of missionaries who began service but then moved on to other careers were expunged from the congregation’s memory as thoroughly as anti-Stalinists once vanished from Marxist photographs documenting the history of the Soviet Union. The missionary aura seemed to convey a level of sanctity on those who continued in the harness that removed them from the realm of merely terrestrial concern.

Yet precisely in those early years, I was growing increasingly interested in terrestrial concerns. To be sure, I was also reading heaps of stories about Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Dizzy Dean, Lou Gehrig, Ted Williams, and other heroes of the baseball diamond who somehow escaped my aversion to hagiography. But there were even more books about the nation’s founding, the Civil War, the notable presidents and statesmen, Indians and settlers on the frontier, the Depression, and the world wars. This reading was introducing me to political conflicts, material interests, imperial aspirations, colonial resistance, and this-worldly complexity. And with these dimensions of human experience I was fascinated. Another disconnect followed: between the new worlds opened by such reading and the worlds I remember from early attention to missionaries.

Our missionaries were treated like gods, and gods, it seemed, could not be bothered with merely human questions of politics, culture,

economics, literature, foreign policy, or the comparative study of religion. In point of fact, I now know that some of the very missionaries who passed through our church did have definite, and sometimes learned, opinions on these questions. If I had asked them about broader cultural or theological matters, some of them would have provided thoughtfully informative answers. But for whatever reason, their interest in such matters and my eagerness to learn about the shape of the world never quite connected.

The reading urged upon us was another part of the problem. To be sure, juvenile missionary literature had some points in its favor. At about age ten or eleven, I devoured the *Jungle Doctor* books by the Australian Paul White. (When many years later I discovered some of these old books and read one or two to our own children, I found them not quite as good as I thought they were when I was ten but a lot better than I would have considered them if I had rediscovered them at age twenty-five instead of nearly twice twenty-five.)

Graduating to what was heralded as more serious missionary literature created the really serious problems, though I should be charitable in recognizing the purposes for which such books were written. Besides the unbelievable heights of spiritual dedication portrayed in these volumes, what particularly put me off was what I perceived as insensitivity to local contexts, a lack of interest in historical background, the absence of attention to cultural connections, and a distressing absence of maps.

One particular example sticks in my mind, although my memory of this book may be a product of late-adolescent prejudice. Whatever the cause, I can still remember the distaste with which I finished a biography of James Outram Fraser entitled *Behind the Ranges*. At least as I recall it, the book furnished very little on the texture of the South China world in which Fraser worked, almost nothing that would allow a reader to situate the Lisu people in broader ethnic, linguistic, or political contexts, no analysis of family or economic life, little attention to the history of China or Britain, and only sparse details about Chinese culture or the culture from which Fraser had come. Recently I discovered that the original 1944 edition of this work did

in fact contain maps, but I am pretty sure that the copy I read was as mapless as it could be. Later I also discovered that Fraser had been a pioneer in recording and analyzing the Lisu language, but these aspects of his work had also escaped my attention.

The sad result of experiences with books like *Behind the Ranges* was that, just as I was beginning to get serious about other kinds of history generally, and soon other kinds of church history specifically, I abandoned mission history as in any way relevant to those developing historical interests. *Mea culpa. Mea maxima culpa.*



It took quite a while to recognize the mistakes I made—about the importance of missionaries and about my own experiences at Calvary Baptist. The perception of an outsider was crucial to that recognition.

The outsider was my wife—though when she first visited Cedar Rapids, she was still only a girlfriend. Maggie Packer had been raised in a conservative Presbyterian church where missionaries were not unknown but where they occupied a smaller place in the spiritual universe than at Calvary Baptist. Her experience was especially different from mine in one crucial respect. Missionaries in her denomination received their financial backing from the denomination. Missionaries visiting Cedar Rapids were, among other activities, raising their own support. At the time I did not realize that our Baptist pattern was becoming increasingly common throughout the world, while the older Presbyterian model represented a legacy of traditional Christendom that was becoming less and less important as the twentieth-century Christian world emerged.

When Maggie first sat down for a meal in our home, what leapt out at her—literally in front of her face—were pins affixed to a big map on the wall. The map covered one entire side of the family dining area; the pins, obviously, represented the missionaries whom our church supported or who were otherwise known to the family. For several missionary conferences, my father had helped construct even larger maps above the church's baptistery, which at Calvary Baptist occupied the prominent ecclesiastical space where crucifixes hang in more liturgical churches. These maps at church were decorated

with tiny light bulbs identifying the location of the church's missionaries. The maps always presented the Mercator Projection, with North America and Europe "up" and Western Europe in the center, although at the time I was completely inert to the way in which maps convey a story about what is central and what is peripheral in world history.

In retrospect, I also am remembering that our missionary conferences functioned as an alternative liturgy. They often took place on the week between Palm Sunday and Easter, which meant that when traditional liturgical churches were observing foundational elements of the Christian past, our missionary-minded congregation was looking forward to the Christian future.

Sometime in the late 1950s, my dad built a slightly smaller map, though without electrification, for home. "And you think your interest in world Christianity," Maggie has said to me, "came from reading books by Lamin Sanneh or hearing Andrew Walls lecture or having to make up a new course? I think it started way, way before then."



Prompted by such biographical assistance, it has become increasingly clear that experiences at Calvary Baptist planted seeds that later sprouted as my interest in world Christianity. At least three matters were important.

First was simple awareness. Cedar Rapids was not, I believe, unusually insular by comparison with other Midwestern communities of the 1950s and early 1960s. We knew that employment at our large Quaker Oats plant depended on exports, as well as local climate and national farm policy, and that business at Collins Radio picked up considerably when technological competition with the Soviets heated up after the launch of Sputnik in 1957. Excellent teachers in the Cedar Rapids public school system taught us well in the classics of American and English literature, and also provided a solid basis in world and American history. Yet few in that setting were being exposed to as much of the world at large as those of us who, without realizing what was happening, attended even casually to the parade of missionaries passing through.

Even if missionary presentations were overwhelmingly pious in tone and almost entirely apolitical, still, who in Cedar Rapids knew anything about conditions in the Argentine pampas, or could locate the Ivory Coast on an African map, or heard firsthand about the paralyzing heat of summer in the plains of India, or learned what it was like to experience the sudden end of colonial rule in the Congo—unless they were exposed to visiting missionaries. Progressive academics for several decades have been attacking with great intensity the role of missionaries in promoting the evils of Western imperialism; recently a range of observers, including anthropologists and historians with no personal stake in Christian faith, have countered with what should have been obvious all along. However missionaries measured up against what has now become the accepted moral norm for respect of non-Western cultures, in the context of former times—and compared to all other agents out of the West—missionaries were always among the most humane, most altruistic, and most self-critical representatives of Western nations in non-Western regions. Similarly, viewed in strictly comparative terms, very few middle-class young people from small-city Iowa of my generation were introduced to as many places far, far away from the United States as were the youth of churches like Calvary Baptist that were committed to the missionary proclamation of the gospel.

This exposure to missionaries also worked at some level to influence the course that family members took. Why was my brother Craig so fascinated by foreign languages, and myself only slightly less so? Why did it seem so natural for him to spend a summer with missionaries in Alaska or later to enlist for service in Turkey with the Peace Corps? My sister, Ann, would probably be the best person to answer such questions, if they can be answered. I'm pretty sure she would say that somewhere in our family's history there has to be a large place for early experience with missionaries.

The second thing that prompted my interest in world Christianity was an introduction to the dynamics of cross-cultural communication. Visiting missionaries, so far as I can recall, never uttered the words "indigenization" or "enculturation"; they did not dwell on foreign

political systems, except to point out how strange some of them were by American standards; they rarely spoke, in our Baptist setting, about the difficulty of planting denominational churches where Western denominations were unknown. But they did let on how difficult it could be to learn Asian or African languages far removed from English; they did relate struggles and breakthroughs in communicating with native helpers; they did show slides that depicted, sometimes dramatically, how far from home their labors took them; they occasionally presented samples of native music that did not sound anything like the gospel tunes or traditional Protestant hymnody we sang; and they certainly communicated something about their “cultural distance” from a small city in the Midwest, though not by using that phrase.

Once again, seeds were going into the ground. It would take much nurture for a harvest to appear, but a hint had been provided, awaiting later development, that the Christian faith itself began, and has constantly existed, as a cross-cultural faith.

The third vital contribution from those early years was the Christianity that spurred missionary motivation—for the missionaries themselves, but much more for the Calvary faithful who placed such a high value on the missionary enterprise. I suppose outside observers would have been correct to view our church as “fundamentalist.” We had the long sermon series on the prophetic future detailed in the book of Revelation; we either sponsored or took part in well-organized revival campaigns; at the end of almost every service, we imitated Billy Graham by featuring altar calls to the accompaniment of “Just as I am, without one plea”; we disapproved of smoking, drinking, movies, and other signs of worldliness; and, although many of us had close Catholic friends, we knew there was something very wrong with Catholicism itself.

Yet if “fundamentalism” means angry zealots on the warpath, there was virtually none of that. Instead, we had a patient, loving pastor, Don Andersen, who went out of his way to stand with the needy, the grieving, the injured, and the weak. We enjoyed youth pastors who, despite occasional flashes of immaturity, really liked kids. And most important, the church was full of laymen and laywomen

who exemplified mature, balanced Christian faith. There were the dedicated teachers who made Sunday school a time of friendship as well as (occasional) learning. There were the stalwarts on the church softball team who taught hot-headed youth that losing was not the worst thing in the world. There was the young church secretary with whom all the teenaged boys were at least half in love and who tolerated the most boorish behavior from her admirers with infectious good humor. There were those who went “calling” on Thursday nights to ask visitors where they would spend eternity if they died that night and sometimes also provided a little material help for folks in need. There were the elderly who bore infirmities, poverty, loneliness, and sometimes alienation from children with remarkably few complaints.

Calvary Baptist was by no means heaven on earth. Yet even if—as I might now conclude—the Christianity on offer was too little interested in culture, too unconcerned about history, too much guided by formulaic piety, and too thin in its theology, it was genuine all the way down. Depth of conviction fueled the fixation on missionary service. Of course, we heard regularly that every Christian should be “one sent,” but we knew who really took that admonition to heart. Missionaries were the exemplars, and for me they helped crack open the world.