

***In The Way: A Study of Christian Missionary Endeavours.* By Kenelm Burridge. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991. ISBN 0-7748-0376-2. Pp. xvi+307.**

Kenelm Burridge, Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia, ostensibly intends "to reveal . . . an interior logic to missionary activities" (x); in essence he attempts to vindicate Christian missionaries. He maintains that "anthropologists are . . . in some sense apologists for the peoples or situations they deal with" (x). As an anthropologist who studies "missionary situations" (ix), and considers missionaries "a general but distinctive class" (ix), Burridge accordingly defends them.

He dialectically interprets mission. Its substantive polarity is "metaculture" (Christianity) and culture. Its modal polarity is "Devotional" (spiritual) and "Affirmative" (temporal). The interaction of these dynamics informs "the missionary process" (160), whose end is "inculturation" whereby "the metaculture or faith is given different cultural but recognizably Christian expression" (182). Although there are "Devotional" as well as "Affirmative" means of "inculturation" one mode inevitably predominates, thereby atrophying mission and causing "millenarisms" (sectarianism), or conversely, "secularization." The author gives the examples of New Metlakatla, the settlement of converts William Duncan (1832-1918) founded on Annette Island in Alaska, to illustrate "millenarisms," and "liberation theology in its more radical expressions" (224) to typify "secularization." Both instances represent "stasis" (198), wherein the modality of mission supplants its substance so that "the missionary process" loses its dialectic corrective and resultant flux. To avoid this missionaries have to play the "spiritual" off against the "temporal." Burridge therefore reasons that "the missionary task is, properly, to hold and maintain the tension between God and Mammon" (109).

According to him, this accounts for the "vulgar stereotype of missionaries" (31) as equivocal, evasive and manipulative, to which he retorts that missionaries are necessarily Janus-faced because mission is dialectical. By the same token, they must adopt socio-cultural "interstitiality" (neutrality) in order to "negotiate between the contraries" (237) of mission. Yet their mediation inevitably draws them into dilemmas, which are consequently normative "situations" for their "class." The author argues that "every missionary is caught in movement between God or the Divine and the human or culture, the faith and/or social work, stability and change" (xiv). Due to this inexorable polarization "missionaries are . . . continually forced into becoming . . . individual" (75).

Burridge thus undermines the missionary “stereotype” through a virtual crisis missiology which contends that the “individual” is the missionary norm.

However, he overextends this rationale and thereby vitiates it. He infers that “although there can be few cultures that do not produce individuals of a kind . . . Christianity seems to be the only systemic (world view) that from first beginnings has produced and insisted upon generalized individuality” (165). This inference ignores the history of Christian intolerance and persecution on the basis of heresy, schism and nonconformity.

Moreover, the author asserts that Christianity is socio-culturally “interstitial” (neutral), which he considers the sine qua non of “inculturation.” He alleges that Christianity is not culturally particular, but transcends social specificities by virtue of its supposed anthropological universality. He declares, “Christianity speaks to what are believed to be human universals, demands cross- or trans-cultural qualities of address, and is antithetical to any given and specific culture” (198). This assertion neglects the rudiments of comparative religion, and disregards the fact that Christianity developed primarily in the West.

Indeed the stated purpose of *In The Way* contradicts the postulate that Christianity has no socio-cultural referent. Burridge proposes that “all those who enjoy the parts of the Euro-Christian heritage may come to acknowledge how much the world owes to those men and women who are or have been Christian missionaries” (xi). In effect this book is an apologia for Christianity and Western civilization, rather than an anthropological study of missionaries as purported. This explains, but does not excuse, the author’s tendentious socio-cultural conclusions and exclusive religious claims, which are inconsistent with the principles of anthropology.

Furthermore, this apologetic animus alternately compels Burridge to oversimplify and exaggerate in favour of missionaries. On the one hand, his reconciliation of the missionary paradox reveals the ultimate reductionism of his thought. He concludes, “all the contraries and oppositions are, however, those of an observer on the outside. From the centre, the heart of the metaculture, whence missionaries take departure . . . they melt into unity, an absolute in which all contradiction is overcome” (236). Such a simplistic answer belittles the author’s argument for the four-dimensional complexity of mission. On the other hand, he disparagingly overstates the missionary “stereotype” when he analogically warns that “one occasionally needs to be reminded of the Nazis . . . and the use they made of stereotyping Jews and others” (269). Nevertheless, in *In The Way* Kenelm Burridge formulates a missiological dialectic which helps to understand the intricacies of mission.

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