the authors retell the stories of missionaries who got it right, including St. Paul, St. Patrick, Mateo Ricci, Bartolome de las Casas, Mother Teresa, and Billy Graham. These mission heroes exhibit commitment, freedom, consistency, and other virtues that made their work successful. The next chapters provide a series of steps for knowledge acquisition that will enable effective cross-cultural missions. The final chapters show that gift-giving differs from culture to culture.

The book is clearly designed as a textbook for a course in missions. At times, it seems to be the course itself, with alliterative points written in italics and a style that feels like a lecture. Nonetheless, it is a valuable text that responds to many important issues in contemporary global missions.

—Kent Van Til


For some time, this reviewer lurked in the halls and library adjoining the venue in which the renowned 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference had convened eighty years previous. With others, he was vaguely aware that this august gathering had met there, decades earlier. However, Edinburgh 1910 was never a matter discussed, for, in fact, a whole range of other historic Christian gatherings had taken place on that very spot in subsequent decades. Thus, if one wanted to learn about Edinburgh 1910 while in that city, it seemed one would need to do archival research to read one of the few surviving printed eyewitness accounts, such as that left behind by Tempie Gairdner (1910), or a history of ecumenism compiled by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neil in 1947. Only in the last decade have such influential writers as Mark Noll (in his Turning Points, Baker 2001) begun to draw renewed attention to Edinburgh 1910.

Questions regarding this neglect of what was (to 1910) the greatest-ever consultation about the global Christian mission grow exponentially when one takes in hand Brian Stanley’s magnificent volume, a work completed just in time for a centenary event, Edinburgh 2010, marked not only in that city but also on this side of the Atlantic. Stanley’s volume, however, is the fruit of a decade’s labor in archives in Britain and America. By its very success, it demands the answers to such riddles as (1) How was this massive conference funded? (2) Who was invited and why? (3) Why was there no focus on the needs of Latin America? and supremely, (4) Why was no conference, so remarkable for its breadth, ever convened afterwards? and leaves the thoughtful reader waiting for more. It is not that Stanley has left stones unturned; it is that the stones he has turned over cannot be fully explained in the 300-plus pages allotted to him.

As depicted by Stanley, the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 was largely a British-American undertaking, with American donors providing an inordinate share of the needed funding. The moneyed industrialist friends of American Presbyterian mission executive, John R. Mott, saved this heralded conference from being stillborn for lack of cash. The large British role reflected the United Kingdom’s then scarcely challenged imperial dominance and extensive international missionary force. The large role reserved for American involvement reflected the longstanding special relationship between the two nations and the ascent of American influence in the world (especially since U.S. involvements in the Spanish-American War and the Panama Canal).

As to who attended this conference, there was—as one would expect, given the preceding—a preponderance of British and American mission leaders; these were not necessarily experienced missionaries or persons of extensive cross-cultural experience. Significantly, Protestant missionary societies (denominational and independent) from Britain, North America, and Europe chose and sent the delegates. Thus, representatives from the developing world were present in Edinburgh only if Western mission societies deemed it important that they be there. Priority was accordingly given to securing select delegates from India, China, and Japan (cultures that the Eurocentric planners deemed noble). Africa, by contrast, was given almost no representation because the reigning Eurocentric view in 1910 was that Africa—likely to be mined in backwardness for the foreseeable future—had little to contribute to the deliberations. These were not the only imbalances.

Working from the premise that Latin America was already at least nominally Christian through its residual Catholicism, the London-based S.P.G. (an Anglo-Catholic mission society, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) insisted that its involvement at Edinburgh would be contingent on that continent’s being eliminated from the conference’s deliberations. The S.P.G. did not care to cooperate in any scheme that questioned the validity of Catholicism. Thus, because the involvement of the S.P.G. was so sought after (and also, with it, the prominent presence in the conference of its supporter, the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson), Latin America—a field of aggressive activity by other mission societies represented at Edinburgh—went utterly unnoticed. So, almost, did the representation of the international female missionary force that then, as today, was rendering inestimable service to the missionary cause.

With all its design flaws, it is a wonder that the conference actually assembled in June 1910, but it did so, and with considerable aplomb—reflecting the careful spadework done in advance by its various commissions. It was assigned the task of soliciting global missionary intelligence and preparing position papers and the unscripted spontaneous contributions of non-Western delegates, who seized opportunities to press the concerns of their national churches on the attention of the gathered assembly. At the last possible moment before concluding, a resolution was put to the assembly calling for a committee to pursue follow-up consultations. It is from this that
there eventually arose (following the 1914–1918 Great War) the periodic meetings of the International Missionary Council that eventually merged in 1956 with the World Council of Churches.

In spite of the fact that this show of Protestant Christian unity in 1910 was about to be eclipsed by the Great War (with all that conflict's negative impact on mission), this missionary assembly is still worthy of the closest examination at the present time. Brian Stanley's decade of labor will be placing us in his debt for far longer than he took to research and write it. The following salient features stand out.

First, Edinburgh 1910 was the last Protestant missionary assembly in which the whole spectrum of Protestant missionary opinion was represented. If it is true that excessive deference was paid to the Anglo-Catholic S.P.G., it was also true that Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian mission-board personnel conferred at Edinburgh alongside representatives of the China Inland Mission, and other faith missions. The changed (and theologically polarized) Protestant scene, fracturing even as Edinburgh 1910 met with the trans-Atlantic onset of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, meant that never since has such a range of missionary consultation been facilitated. This makes the findings, the determinations, and the priorities set by Edinburgh 1910 especially noteworthy.

Second, Edinburgh 1910 (as described by Stanley) provides us with an interesting window into the early twentieth century discussion of questions regarding the theology of religions, which are still roiling our colleges, seminaries, and churches. While a strong consensus still existed in 1910 that Jesus Christ was to be proclaimed as the world's only savior, we see in Stanley's fascinating narrative the emergence and popularity of a kind of theological inclusivism, according to which the world's great religions were suggested to find their fulfillments only in Jesus Christ and the Christian revelation. This framework of interpretation, now termed fulfillment theology, was the outworking of Western idealism and held much more appeal for the Eurocentric majority of delegates than for the non-Western minority.

Third, the account gives a full description of the cry, most often voiced by the minority delegates from the less-developed world, for the urgency of the production of a Christian theology free of the stamp of the Western (and imperialist) world. To this cry, Western and Eurocentric delegates to Edinburgh were largely sympathetic. It needs to be noted that the then improperly recognized danger of the post-Great War theological collapse, in which surviving pre-War orthodoxies were widely abandoned not only in Europe but globally, would ensure that the quest for a non-Western indigenous theology would too often proceed without sufficient markers to ensure its fidelity to Scripture. The admirable aspiration after theological indigenization has not always gone well.

In the end, we are left with this impressive volume to ponder the question of whether Edinburgh 1910 illustrates the state of things that perished with the onset of the Great War, or whether it was instead the harbinger of a whole range of crises that would persist in the life of the global church for the next half-century and beyond. Let readers choose the answer to this question, which is best supported by Stanley's evidence.

—Kenneth J. Stewart


Christian Troll is a German Jesuit who has made Islam his focus. The Europeans are far ahead of North Americans in this field, largely due, no doubt, to the presence of Muslim immigrants who have been coming to Europe for at least four decades. My suspicion that this Orbis text would adjure readers to be nice to Muslims and pretend that "honest dialogue" will solve all the issues between the world's largest religions was quickly eliminated. A great strength of the book is its willingness to confront real differences between the two faiths. An additional strength of the book is the apparent piety and Christian commitment of its author. He approvingly quotes, for example, from Edmond Farahian and Christiana van Nispel: "From the perspective of the Christian faith, the Muslim who is seeking God with an open heart is, without knowing it, oriented toward Jesus Christ, who has conquered death and in his unlimited love enables all people, in what was known only to him, to participate in the paschal mystery" (150). Earlier he also writes: "Christians cannot recognize Muhammad as a prophet without thereby denying their own faith." (128)

Given his setting in Germany, Troll is also able to speak to the political challenges that Muslims both face and cause in modern democracies. He respectfully shows that there may be irreconcilable differences between post-Enlightenment democracies and the religio-political unity that is Islam. This should not be the first book you read on Islam, but after learning Islam's basic history and texts, it will well serve anyone who wishes both to understand and to minister to Muslims.

—Kent Van Til


The thirty-three narratives about hurting people and difficult circumstances in this book come from Margriet van der Kooi's experiences as spiritual caregiver at Zuwe Hofpoort Hospital in Woerden, the Netherlands. Often at the edges of life and death, certainly stained by the common sorrows of everyday life, van der Kooi's brief narratives represent the product of careful listening to the broken, interwoven with honest biblical, theological, and pastoral insight. Vignettes about long-simmering anger,