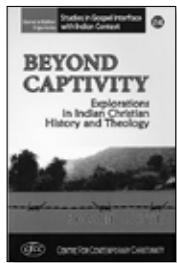


# Book Reviews

*Beyond Captivity: Explorations in Indian Christian History and Theology*, Studies in Gospel Interface with Indian Context, by Robin Boyd (Bangalore, India: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2014, pp. 342)

—Reviewed by Timothy Shultz



*Beyond Captivity* by Reverend Robin Boyd is an important book for several reasons. It is first and foremost a collection of Boyd's own essays written over a span of more than 50 years, at a time when the "missionary era" was ostensibly coming to a close in India. This vantage point allows the reader to see inside

Boyd's thoughts—someone who was an experienced and capable western missionary—about his own role within the Indian Church. Boyd's emphasis is clear: it is all about Jesus Christ. A large part of the book actually addresses how Indian people conceive of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In this way, Boyd makes the point that the gospel in India is about Jesus Christ and is not simply a Christendom-based religion complete with its own theology, history, ritual, and apologetic.

Secondly, Boyd goes to great lengths to describe the positive contributions made by the missionary community to the creation and growth of the Gujarat Church—a significant part of the Church in India. This point of view about missionary work in the Indian colonial context is strikingly different from the typical, widespread "western missionary as agent of oppression" interpretation. The revelation—almost always either forgotten, misunderstood, or taken for granted—is that missionaries did more than create churches, build hospitals, and found schools. Missionaries in India contributed to the very idea of modern education (and its functioning categories), including an emphasis on a science-based medicine within Indian civilization, not to mention biblical study, which is truly noteworthy.

Thirdly, Boyd reveals how Indians themselves participated brilliantly in the ministry of the gospel. This also runs counter to the academic "legend"—which has been accepted as fact—that manipulative missionaries planted and harvested rice Christians among the poorer classes of India. Boyd's work, taken together with the writings of Robert Frykenberg, Daniel Jeyaraj, and John C. B. Webster, show

that Indians were at the forefront of church growth in India and were not the British Raj equivalent of the despised New Testament tax collector.

Finally, it could be said that the real value of this book is Boyd's open-minded approach to significant and meaningful contextualization of the gospel of Jesus Christ into Indian and even Hindu forms. At the same time, Boyd shows how the controversies surrounding so-called "insider movements" versus "Christian conversion" are nothing new: contextualization was and actually still is at the heart of the gospel movement in India. The examples offered are taken from the literature that was created for the Church in Gujarat, where Boyd served. Clearly, there was a felt need for creating good literature that would support multiple points of view as ministry focus ebbed and flowed for more than a century.

There were three basic types of literature that supported three different philosophies of ministry. Contextualized literature that supported what we would today call "insider" approaches included: *Marks of a True Guru*—a description of how people can judge what a true guru was like; *Nakalanka Avatar (Spotless Incarnation)*—a collection of Hindu *bhajans* (or devotional songs) sung in local fairs that seemed to speak of an incarnation to come which sounded a lot like Jesus Christ; and *Hriday Gita (Song of the Heart)*—a gospel presentation done in a Hindu-cultural style.

There was also literature that supported a philosophy of ministry focused more on a Christian conversion-based approach in the form of various translated catechisms, dictionaries, theological works, and nearly every other type of Christian literature extant in Christendom. The majority of literature supported this ministry approach.

The area of music is one clear example of the simultaneous practice of these first two very different approaches to discipleship ministry. The *Dharmgita (Religious Songs)* and *Kavyarpan (Offering of Poems)* were both created in roughly the same decade. *Dharmgita* was a collection of translated hymns done in English metre while *Kavyarpan* was a version of the Psalms rendered in Indian metre. There were numerous other works for worship in each style done by both missionaries and Gujarati believers in Christ over many years. Boyd indicates that both approaches were effective within the emerging Church.

Another category of literature supported what seemed to be a third approach, namely a contextualized conversion approach, or a more Gujarat-based conversion. A set of commentaries was eventually written to support Gujarati pastors who led Gujarati churches "on the ground." These commentaries were not translated from European or North American books but were designed to support localized, and at least to some extent, contextualized local church ministry in Gujarat. There were also poems and songs created which

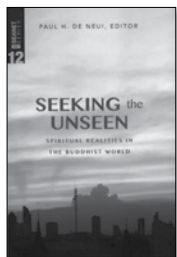
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were Christian versions of the Gujarati *garba* dance tradition. The impression this variety of literature gives is of differing philosophies of ministry being held in tension over time.

In conclusion, this valuable book provides a necessary corrective to a widely held point of view about contextualization and discipleship in the India mission context. Many Christian leaders, both Indian and non-Indian, express frustration and strident disagreement over what they believe to be the recent trend of western missiologists importing into India an inappropriate emphasis on contextualized discipleship designed for Hindus. *Beyond Captivity* examines evidence two centuries old, from the very outset of the missionary era in early 19th century western India. Here, in the literature designed by Indians and Western missionaries for the emerging Gujarati church, we discover that contextual worship, Hindu vocabulary and concepts to describe elements of gospel-centered Christian discipleship were struggled over and sometimes used. Hindu-friendly discipleship in India is nothing new. Boyd never says if there were any personal agenda or missiological conflict surrounding any of these points of view. If that is true, it speaks very well of both these (apparently) gracious non-Indians and Gujarati Christians.

*Seeking the Unseen: Spiritual Realities in the Buddhist World*, SEANET Series 12, edited by Paul de Neui (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016, pp. 319)

—Reviewed by Brad Gill



The recent missiological emphasis on grassroots theology in our witness to the religious worlds of Asia will gain further momentum with the publication of SEANET's most recent compendium, *Seeking the Unseen: Spiritual Realities in the Buddhist World*. This annual consortium, whose focus on the Buddhist world has served up a steady diet of themes and publications over the past couple of decades, has now added a very strategic and practical anthology to our developing theology of religions.

Missiology is benefiting from a shift towards more global theologies. Systematic theologians are turning from the conventional questions in our Western canon and allowing

new questions from a pluralistic world of religions to engage their theological attention. With the growing global diaspora of peoples spilling over into Western communities, the common churchgoer is demanding a theologically sound way to relate to those of other faiths. With particular sensitivity to the spiritual dynamics of this inter-religious encounter, mission theologians are increasingly pushing the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) into the foreground of missiological concern. Witness, for example, Velli Matti Karkkainen's treatment of the Buddhist-Christian encounter and his attempt to reorient our traditional theological categories towards "the spirit-filled cosmos" and "the search for correlates between the Holy Spirit and conception of spirit in Buddhist traditions."<sup>1</sup> Amos Yong, another theologian of Pentecostal tradition, has written prolifically on the potential fruitfulness of a pneumatological missiology that is sensitive to the Buddhist-Christian interface.<sup>2</sup> And one hears of mission historians like Scott Sunquist recognizing the vital role of the Holy Spirit as the person of the Trinity who should lead our initial encounter with other religious worlds.<sup>3</sup>

Amidst this rising tide of theological interest appears the need for a more practical orientation in approaching the spiritual dynamics of Buddhist faith. SEANET takes on these complex spiritual realities, bridging theological and practical concerns of ministry. Contributors to this new compendium maintain this blend as they seek to discern how ministry will advance in a historically resistant Buddhist world. The editor, Paul de Neui, has arranged the articles into three sections: biblical, cultural and strategic. That said, all of the authors seem to work from the ground up, with that sense for the difficult conundrums which perpetuate and frustrate the transmission of the gospel in street level ministry. While the spiritual worldview of the Buddhist receives consistent treatment, the reader finds himself oscillating between Buddhist religious concepts and practical spiritual needs throughout the book. The overall balance of these 20 contributors makes this required reading for the mission candidate just entering the Buddhist world.

Three prominent perspectives forge this book into a manual for the apprentice in Buddhist ministry. First, it provides a global lens on a range of Buddhist contexts. Local context matters, and the contribution from a variety of settings gives this book a global authenticity. Certain themes repeat as you move from context to context, but each will wrinkle according to a local or national culture. Besides the multiple voices from Japan and Thailand, the tour continues through Mongolia (Smith), Vietnam (Nguyen), Sri Lanka (Somaratna, Caldera), Burma (Nyunt), and the Chinese

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world (Lim, Burnett). The different streams of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, as well as the interface between the Great Tradition and the folk expressions, are intertwined in local spiritual permutations as the reader moves through the book. Yes, Buddhism is a daunting complexity, but this book gives the reader a feel for certain spiritual facets in the prism of this transcultural faith. It can appear simultaneously incomprehensible and comprehensible—which perhaps is par for the course when ministering in a Buddhist context.

Secondly, the reader is exposed to different theoretical and spiritual vantage points. Many of the writers take a distinct methodological approach with its own set of theoretical grids and models. A view of these religious realities is offered from a more classical functionalist lens (Smith), but also from an archetypal and symbolic lens (Burnett). Several contributors chose to study Buddhist perspectives through a particular ritual: the almsgiving ceremony in Sri Lanka (Somaratna); Nat (spirit) worship in Burma (Nyant); ancestor veneration in Vietnam (Nguyen); and the rituals of blessing and destruction surrounding a Buddhist monastery (Burnett).

To understand how Buddhist spirituality influences Asian cultural practices, Silzer used the social theory of Douglas and Lingenfelter to identify how strong community values form a Buddhist concept of self. Koning's research, on the other hand, focused more on cultural change. She probed the impact of globalization and what she called the "reframing of spiritual realities in scientific terms." In particular, by studying the diffusion of a scientific worldview, she was trying to assess what happens to the Thai Buddhist sense of reality (cosmology). She describes the resulting ambivalence and tendency to moralize a once taken-for-granted spiritual domain. The combination of these methods and theoretical vantage points gives the reader a broad outlook on how to strategically approach any one local Buddhist context.

Thirdly, a decidedly strategic orientation permeates the book. The final section is dedicated to strategy, and ranges from the role of the "alongsider" in Thailand (Lambert) to the personal supernatural experiences of a post-tsunami Japan (reprinted in this *IJFM* issue, see p. 17). Peter Nyant gives a brilliant apologetic for Jesus as the Great Ancestor when dealing with the Nat (spirit) worship surrounding ancestor veneration. But as different as these strategic perspectives are, the cumulative force is to recommend greater discernment amidst Buddhist spiritual realities. Beyond the analytical and practical methodologies one senses the vital place of prayer, spiritual power and discernment.

In an anthology like this one, the strategic insight of a certain author will impress an individual reader, and this was certainly the case with this reviewer. SEANET as a network faces the unique challenges of reaching a Buddhist world, but at one point I clearly sensed the strategic importance of their linking with a broader missiological community. Alan Johnson, who still continues his long tenure in Thailand even while commuting annually to the USA for his teaching post, makes a seminal contribution to attrition studies in his article. Johnson addresses the common experience of Buddhists who experience a profound power encounter (signs, wonders, healing, provision) but who eventually fall away from the church. But instead of focusing on a more intensive study of his Thai Buddhist setting, he applies research out of Africa to this problem, and this comparative study of Africa and Asia allows him to suggest a theory. He asserts that the transcultural Buddhist world of Asia will more easily reabsorb and reinterpret the discouraged convert; this is contextually distinct from the primal religious world of Africa, where power encounters seem to have led to more sustained people movements and less attrition. Maybe Johnson's insight benefits from his commute between two worlds, but his research indicates that all grassroots animistic worlds are not the same. It hints at why the ministry amidst Buddhist spiritual realities has a long history of frustration. In my judgment, that insight alone is worth the price of the book. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Velli-Matti Karkkainen, *Spirit and Salvation* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2016), see especially pp. 159–172

<sup>2</sup> Amos Yong, *Pneumatology and the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> Scott Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2013): 259–268. His entire chapter is accessible online at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org), [http://ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/31\\_1\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_31\\_1-Sunquist.pdf](http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/31_1_PDFs/IJFM_31_1-Sunquist.pdf).