

A Survey of Presbyterian Mission History in Africa: Historic Beginnings (c.1790s to c.1930s), Volume 1,
edited by J.C. Whytock

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A Survey of Presbyterian Mission History in Africa: Modern Beginnings (c.1940s to c.2020s), Volume 2,
edited by J.C. Whytock

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Here we have a massive contribution to the historiography of Presbyterian missiology and the history of Christianity in the African continent. This project has been overseen by Jack Whytock (ably assisted by his wife, Nancy). What is amazing is the enormous extent of the penetration of Presbyterianism into Africa since the close of the eighteenth century, apart from other mainstream denominations. We tend to focus on the Eurocentric movement to the exclusion of the United States and other sending bodies, particularly those of a more conservative profession. What is particularly refreshing here is the vast range of authors—local, practising missionaries, young and emergent as well as more academic contributors. These volumes have emerged from extensive consultations and conferences. Here is a veritable mine of information and interpretation—the very substance of the history of Christianity.

Volume 1 relates primarily to the period c1790s to c1930s. The work is divided into geographical areas: Western and southern Africa, Eastern and Central Africa, and the Nile Corridor with a final thematic section. Recurrent themes are indigenisation, the impact of theological shifts, sacrificial and servant mission, the contribution of women,



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Bible translation and linguistic developments, and regular secessionary trends within Presbyterian missions. It is interesting to note the more positive evaluation that is offered here regarding African Initiated Churches and mission than has often been the case in earlier assessments.

Volume two is organised somewhat differently; it covers new Presbyterian engagements, select Presbyterian initiatives within Africa post-World War II, new mission paradigms from the 1940s to the 2020s, and selected themes. Significant themes include the role of women and the contribution of missionary wives, massive outreach achievements, the rise of nationalist and independence movements, integration, variety of ministries, the rise of African ministers and academics (case studies included) and diaspora missions, the emergence of short-term missionary appointments, and parachurch activities. It is interesting to note that in the US context, mission arises in congregations rather than at a denominational level.

Then there is ecumenism as a paradox of “division and discord” within the Presbyterian body, as well as moves within the wider church community partnership in mission and sister church relationships, particularly at congregational and regional levels. One thing that emerges clearly, often in the context of separation, is the perdurance of the historic *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) though in varied iterations. This notwithstanding, there is always opportunity for ecumenical developments in the mission “that they may all be one” (John 17:11).

These volumes provide extensive glossaries (pp. 540, 592–594) and explanations of terms used which will aid student readers. Each chapter concludes with fact and reflection type questions and a select bibliography.

A great deal of energy, faith, and commitment has been devoted to the preparation of these volumes for which the Whytocks are to be congratulated. Their efforts have revealed an enormous body of hitherto unavailable material that will aid and stimulate further research.

The final word is of “pointers of change coming” (p. 768), which indicates that a third volume will be forthcoming and is in preparation. It will be awaited with great anticipation.