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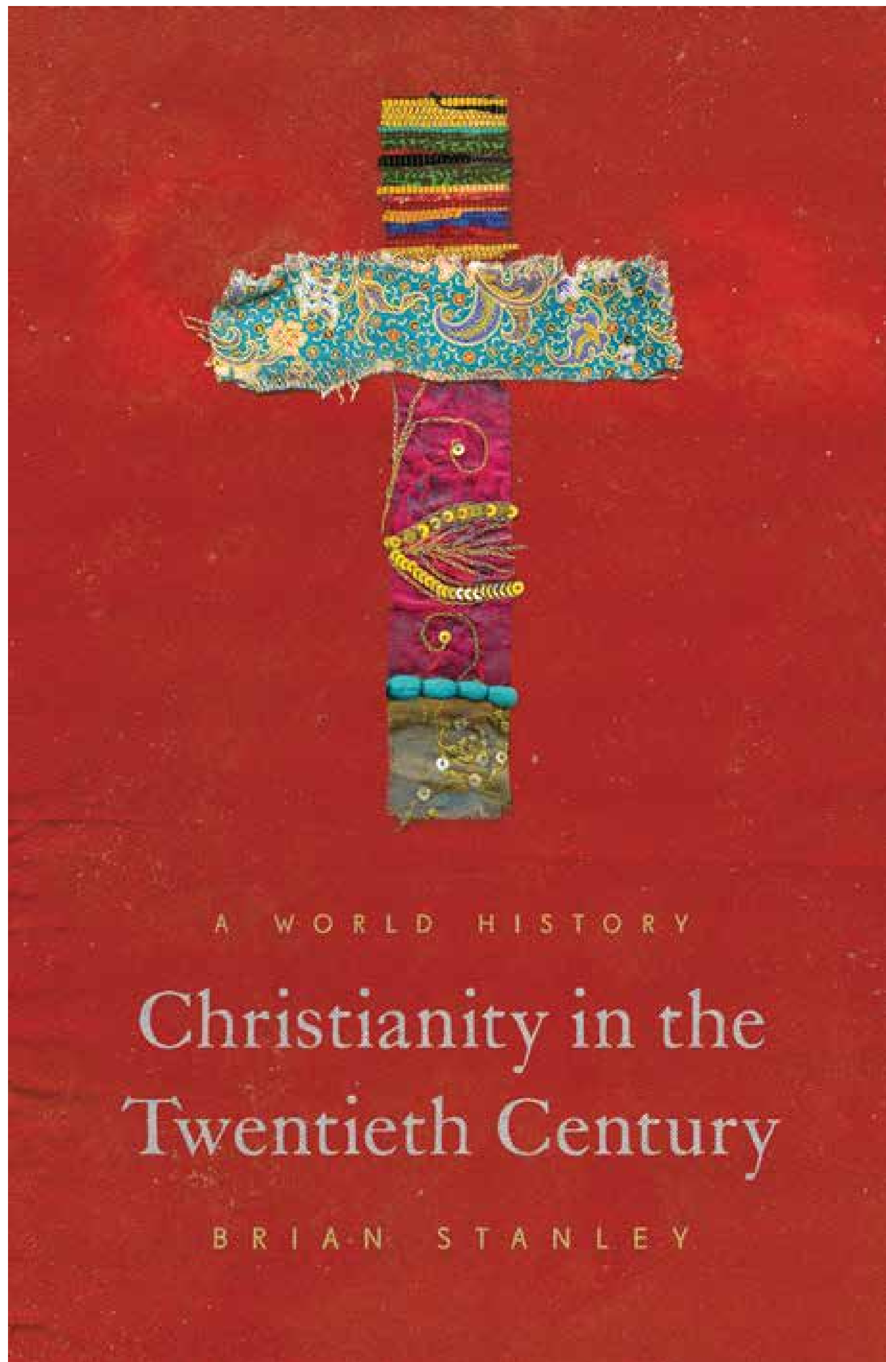

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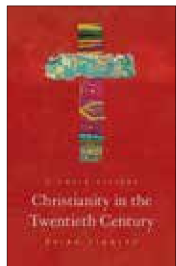
Book Reviews

Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History, by Brian Stanley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), xxi, 477 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



How did Christianity cope with, respond to, resist or draw from, and comport itself alongside the various ideologies, threats, and currents of uplift that swirled through and roiled life in the twentieth century? What trends are observable? What conclusions, even if tentative, can be drawn?

Any book carrying the title *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History,* is, on the face of it, a "quite impossible book" (xx). The sweep, scale, and span of time, geography, institutions, personalities, theologies, and ecclesial contexts set any single author an insurmountable task. And to cover it all in a single volume? Utterly impossible, of course. And yet, if anyone is equipped to offer a bird's eye view of world Christianity in the twentieth century, Brian Stanley is surely that person. Professor of World Christianity and director of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, Stanley has published dozens of articles and book chapters on topics related to Christian missions and world Christianity. As author or editor, he has published eight books related to Christian world mission, beginning with *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Apollos, 1990) and *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (T&T Clark, 1992).

For five years (1996–2001) he was director of the Currents in World Christianity Project at the University of Cambridge. He is editor of the journal *Studies in World Christianity* (Edinburgh University Press) and joint series editor of Studies in World Christianity (Eerdmans). His credentials, as a person with his finger on the pulse of world Christianity, are impeccable.

How does he proceed? Before answering that question, let's look at some of the conclusions he reaches.

- The century [was] one in which the locus of Christianity shifted decisively southward and eastward, a judgment that rests mainly—though by no means entirely—on the remarkable Christian success story of Africa and the no less spectacular progress of Christianity in China since the Cultural Revolution. (357)
- Grotesquely scarred by two catastrophic global wars involving conflict between nations, most of which were professedly Christian, the twentieth century failed to live up to its billing as a century in which Christian ethics were supposed to triumph. (357–58)
- The twentieth century can properly be denominated as the great century of conversion to Christianity. It was necessarily, therefore, a period that also witnessed a radical pluralization of popular understandings of Christianity as the word of the gospel took flesh in innumerable cultural forms in non-Western societies.... [For Protestants, this pluralization was] obviously theologically problematic in view of their historic confidence in the perspicacity of the scriptures.... The rediscovery of the biblical figure of the prophet was an outcome that the Bible and missionary societies had not anticipated. (359)
- The book adds to the evidence that popular indifference is a more potent enemy of faith than state-sponsored militant atheism. (360)
- By the close of the twentieth century, perhaps the most pressing issue on the agenda of Christian theology was how to encourage Christians to pursue and develop a more irenic approach toward those of other faiths—and Islam above all—in the interests of intercommunal harmony and world peace. (362)
- Perhaps the most far-reaching theological reorientation evident in the course of the century has been in the realm of Christian mission. At the start of the century both Catholic and Protestant missionary thought was almost unanimous in identifying the pursuit of conversion to Christianity as the central missionary goal of the church.... By the end of the century, both Catholics and Protestants were no longer so united in their conviction that seeking the conversion of adherents of other religions to Christ constituted the essence of the missionary task.... The later decades of the century . . . witnessed impassioned contestation over the Christian understanding of salvation itself. (362–63)
- Human rights ideology proved its emancipatory value not simply to Christian defense of the oppressed in colonial or postcolonial situations, but perhaps even more to the women who in virtually every Christian denomination formed the majority of worshippers while being almost entirely excluded from the leadership of congregational worship and church life. (364)

Dwight P. Baker retired as associate director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut, in 2011. He was associate editor of the International Bulletin of Mission Research *(2002–15) and has coedited several books, including* Serving Jesus with Integrity: Ethics and Accountability in Mission *(2010) and* People Disrupted: Doing Mission Responsibly among Refugees and Migrants *(2018).*

Stanley stresses that "World Christianity means world Christianity, and not simply the Christianity of the southern hemisphere." So he blends his coverage in an attempt to truly offer "A World History."

- In . . . the last four decades of the century it became steadily more apparent that the clash between invocation of human rights and the appeal to unchanging Christian conceptions of divinely revealed truth touched not simply on the ecclesiological issues of church leadership, but, still more fundamentally, on theological anthropology—the Christian understanding of the identity of human beings. . . . The issue of whether practicing gay and lesbian people should be ordained to the Christian ministry came increasingly to the fore. . . . The argument did not fall neatly along [North/South] geographical lines. (365)
- The most striking single contrast between the face of the world church in 1900 and that of the world church in 2000 is the salience and near ubiquity of Pentecostal styles of Christianity by the end of the century—forms of Christian expression that in 1900 were still uncommon and deemed to be at best eccentric and at worst heretical. (365)
- If the gravest challenge faced by Christianity in the twentieth century was the repeated subversion of Christian ethics by a series of tragic compromises between Christianity and ideologies of racial supremacy, the most serious challenge confronting the religion in the twenty-first century looks likely to be the preparedness of some sections of the church in both northern and southern hemispheres to accommodate the faith to ideologies of individual enrichment. (366)

Organization and Process

The issues identified in the snippets just given, and others like them, provide the thematic nuclei around which the book's fifteen chapters are organized. An introduction and conclusion act as bookends to the volume. Each chapter contains four sections. The opening section offers an exposition that lays out the topic of the chapter and its parameters, provides background, gives orientation, and identifies two regions of the world church for which the chapter's topic was particularly salient during the twentieth century. The second section examines the topic of the chapter—for example, racism, Pentecostalism, or migration—in relation to a religio-geographic or ecclesiological domain or region for which it is particularly germane. The third section presents a supporting or contrasting or augmenting case. Sometimes the third section includes comments on a further religio-geographic region as well. The fourth section opens the topic to wider vistas as well as offering integrative reflections and evaluative observations.

Stanley stresses that "World Christianity means world Christianity, and not simply the Christianity of the southern hemisphere" (8). So, the book blends coverage of the churches of the North and West with those of the South and East. In this way the book attempts truly to offer "A World History." The following chapter titles and section headings give a flavor of the approach.

Chapter 7: The Voice of Your Brother's Blood: Christianity, Ethnic Hatred, and Genocide in Nazi Germany and Rwanda

I. Theories of Race and Vocabularies of Ethnic Hostility

II. Race and Religion in Nazi Germany

III. The Church and Ethnic Conflict in Rwanda

IV. Christian Prophecy and Its Failures

Chapter 8: Aliens in a Strange Land? Living in an Islamic Context in Egypt and Indonesia

I. Christianity and Religious Plurality

II. Coptic Christianity in Egypt

III. The Church in Indonesia

IV. The Politics of Christian Survival

Chapter 11: Doing Justice in South Africa and Canada: The Human Rights Agenda, Race, and Indigenous Peoples

I. The Churches and Human Rights Ideology

II. Apartheid and the Churches

III. The Canadian Churches and the Residential Schools

IV. From Civilization to Human Rights

Method

So what sort of book is *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History?* Here one could go into a lot of "It is not" disclaimers. It is neither an institutional history of branches of the worldwide Christian movement nor a collection of the life stories of outstanding Christian leaders from around the world and throughout the twentieth century. It is not an attempt to construct a synopsis of the Church as a whole within the bounds of the twentieth century. Neither is it a social history of Christianity in the twentieth century. Facts and historical records play a big role, but figures and statistics are used sparingly and judiciously. Just three illustrations appear in the volume, all maps. No all-encompassing narrative rehearsing the overall story of the church is attempted.

The book is pitched at the level of sociological analysis. It's easy to imagine the volume as the distillation of the author's postgraduate seminars of a very high order over several years.

What the book does provide is a set of critical reflections built around fifteen issues, most of which are broadly sociological in nature—fundamentalism, secularization theory, migration, religious identity, ethnic cleansing, liberation, and others. Its reflections are informed by and constrained by the thirty or so case studies. Stanley attends to the sweep and flow of macrolevel social movements, trends, and forces. He asks what challenges they presented for the existence, flourishing, and character of the twentieth-century church. The result of expounding those issues and seeking to answer those questions is an illuminating and informative book. Stated in his own words, Stanley writes that "history is all about change, and the writing of history seeks to explain processes of change" (313). That conception of history is crucial to understanding the type of historical account *Christianity in the Twentieth Century* contains. It is pitched at the level of sociological analysis and explanation, not of personal vignettes or narrative set pieces. It would be easy to imagine this volume to be the distillation of the author's preparations for offering a series of postgraduate seminars of very high order over the course of several years.

Two Complementary Books

Two volumes from a decade ago, one by Mark Noll and the other by Dana Robert, could well be read as complements to *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History.* If Christianity has a worldwide presence today such that a history can be written of it, the reason is in some measure to be credited to the missionary movement from the West that took place, by fits and starts, over the past five centuries. But as all historians of mission today are avid to acknowledge, missions and missionaries are far from the whole story. They were essential but far from sufficient to account, for example, for the explosive growth of Christianity in Africa during the twentieth century. Indigenous initiative and agency arguably played the far larger part—and certainly did so for the character that Christianity in Africa has taken. Robert's volume, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion,* provides a concise and highly readable overview of exactly what her title promises.[1]

It is to discussion of indigenous agency versus outside religious hegemony that Noll makes an interesting contribution in his *New Shape of World Christianity.*[2] First noting

> David Bebbington's identification of the four key marks of evangelicalism as Biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), conversionism (a stress on the New Birth), activism (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement) and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity),

Noll goes on to examine the question of distinctively US evangelical influence on the shape of Christian thought and practice in other places around the world.[3] What we observe bears a resemblance to US evangelicalism, so are US evangelicals exercising an outsized and undue influence on emerging Christian communities? Are they exercising spiritual overlordship to the detriment of young branches of the household of faith? Noll rules out US religious "dominance" and dismisses the possibility that US evangelicals have "dictated" the character of religious outlook and practice among, for example, South Koreans. South Korean Christians made those choices.

But if "American missionary influence [abroad] increasingly reflects forms of Christian faith that are conversionist, voluntarist, entrepreneurial and nondenominational" as is found in the United States, what conclusions are to be drawn when similar characteristics appear within national churches in various parts of the world?[4] American dominance? American influence? Or might the answer be, as Noll suggests, that similarities found elsewhere have been evoked by social, economic, and political influences and pressures abroad that bear resemblance to the social forces that imparted to US evangelicalism its particular shape? If so, the US might provide an example, but parallel responses elsewhere would be truly indigenous. They would be independent responses in their settings to social conditions structurally similar to those that nurtured the birth of US evangelicalism. Similarities between Christian communities then could be accounted for, not as transplantation or heavy-handed dominance, but as responses to the presence of similar social conditions within the broader community. The proposal is suggestive and, whether one accepts it or seeks to refute it, it moves discussion—and historical analysis—onto the level of broader social currents and forces.

Appreciation

One of the merits of *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* is that it expands our view of the church. The church is not only bigger than you think (to borrow the wording of Patrick Johnstone's book title); it is also more diverse than you dreamed.[5] And the ways it has sought to respond to the challenges that have confronted it in the twentieth century have been more varied than you, or I at

One of the takeaways is that there is no one "true" or standard Christianity against which all other versions are to be judged. There are only "Christianities." Each "edition" falls short.

least, imagined as well. The church may well be the household of God—which implies the presence of diversity and distinctions of character and roles among its members. It is definitely not an aggregation of cookie cutter replicas or carbon copy images of each other. We all have a commitment to follow Jesus Christ; we do not all have an obligation to look or think or act in all ways alike. Without trying to belabor that point, Stanley's work underscores its truth.

Though not the point of the book or one of its contentions, one among many takeaways for me is that there is no one "true" or standard Christianity against which all other versions of Christianity are to be judged and to which they are to be constrained to conform. There are only "Christianities." Each version or "edition" falls short. Each needs to be more fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and to be guided by his Spirit. Each has something to offer. Each must be humble enough to learn from while also, in humility, teaching the other.

Summing Up

As indicated, this masterly volume is the product of a lifetime of study and immersion on Brian Stanley's part in the field of Christian world mission and world Christianity. He brings historical depth to his consideration of the topic. An astute and exceedingly broadly informed commentator, he offers penetrating observations and characterizations. As he proceeds, his comments constantly cast light on the topic at hand. The volume is a valuable assessment by a perceptive and sympathetic scholar of the diversity to be found in the field of world Christianity. I recommend it strongly.

Endnotes

[1] Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[2] Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

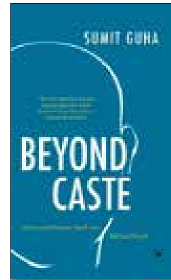
[3] Noll, *New Shape of World Christianity,* 46–47.

[4] Noll, *New Shape of World Christianity,* 91.

[5] Patrick Johnstone, *The Church Is Bigger Than You Think* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005).

Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present, by Sumit Guha (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016), xxiii, 291 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



In over thirty years of study related to Hindu traditions the subject of caste has repeatedly arisen and I finally came to a settled conclusion that there is neither a clear understanding of how caste developed historically nor agreement on how it should be understood in its complex practical expressions at the current time. Sumit Guha in his study *Beyond Caste* has changed my position. It seems to me that Guha has presented a case for understanding caste that compels consent. It does not solve the ancient history problems (it does not even address this) and it is neither simplistic nor simple. This review will outline Guha's case, hopefully convincing some and moving others to study the book.

Guha is a historian at the University of Texas at Austin, but his study shows a deep grasp of the sociological literature related to caste and also adequate familiarity with the influence of treatments from Hindu texts. But it needs to be recognized that Guha has goals beyond just describing caste, as he states clearly in his Introduction:

> The book has two goals. Its central aim is to present a new, historically informed understanding of the working of South Asian state and society through the past millennium; the secondary one is to provide the basis for a comparative understanding of the long-run processes of ethnic politics in this area as it came to modernity and experienced modern forms of state power. By attaining these goals I hope to enable us to drastically rethink the "caste system"—that central trope in the popular and scholarly understandings of the Indian subcontinent through the centuries. (1–2)

Guha goes on in his Introduction to make clear that there is no one caste system that explains Indian society, rather there are complex change mechanisms that produced and transform caste:

> I will explain caste as an *institution,* as a very stable feature of human interaction, which is nonetheless maintained and

H. L. Richard is an independent researcher focused on the Hindu-Christian encounter. He has published numerous books and articles including studies of key figures like Narayan Vaman Tilak (Following Jesus in the Hindu Context, *Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998), Kalagara Subba Rao* (Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ, *Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005), and R. C. Das* (R. C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity, *Delhi: ISPCK, 1995).*

Guha provides a data-rich history of the development of discussions about caste, and he's cynical towards Western sociology—"the world of Western anthropology was enamoured of grand models and armchair theorists."

> reproduced by belief and behaviour. These can and do change over time. I therefore argue that the effort to find a single, unified rationale for the internal workings and external relations of each of thousands of caste corporations is ultimately futile. We should begin by thinking of this society as being, like any complex civilization, multi-stranded or polyadic. (2, italics original)

Not only is there no simple explanation for caste, the modern development of caste is not really unique compared to other societies:

> I will show that the bounded, status-ranked ethnic community or "caste" is a social form that frequently appears in multiethnic societies. But in South Asia it became a highly involuted, politicized form of ethnic ranking shaped by the constant exercise of socio-economic power. (2–3)

This gets to the heart of caste; "bounded, status-ranked ethnic communities" where occupation, kinship, and purity and pollution (the latter pair being the "religious" element) are all in play. Guha suggests that purity has taken too large a role in most attempts to understand caste (Dumont's landmark study being a case in point) and wants a focus not just on the markers of caste but also the powers that enforce caste (4), because the political element played and continues to play a major role in the development of ethnic boundaries and the ranking of ethnic communities.

Guha objects to making too large a distinction between "traditional" (precolonial) Indian society and modern India, particularly objecting to suggestions that caste as we know it today is a product of the colonial period. He outlines a compelling case for continuity in the last thousand years of Indian history while recognizing unique elements related to the colonial era.

In arguing his case Guha first (Chapter One) looks at how caste came to be central to the current understanding of India. The term caste is an oddity as there were many English and Sanskrit terms that could have been used, yet the Portuguese *casta* came to prominence (23). Europeans put a focus on "purity of blood" which was not central to Indian thought, in the process creating the odd idea (impossible to Indic understanding) of a "half-caste." Initially caste was seen as "a functional ordering of civil society" (38), but the development of Orientalist textual studies supported by missionary cynicism towards "Hinduism" led to the perception of Brahmanical dominance as the key to caste:

> The valorization of textual knowledge foregrounded the Brahmans who had composed the oldest parts of it, and this fitted well with the missionary current in Oriental studies, which had a natural propensity to see caste as a product of malign Brahman dominance, if not fraud and conspiracy. This went back to St. Francis Xavier, who wrote in 1544 that there was a perverse "breed" *(engeance)* among the Hindus (Gentils) known as Brahmans who controlled all the other Gentils. (39)

Guha provides a data-rich history of the development of discussions about caste up to the present time. He is cynical towards Western sociology ("the world of Western anthropology was enamoured of grand models and armchair theorists" [52]) while appreciating the work of Hocart and Susan Bayly among others who recognized the dynamics of caste and its manipulation politically (49). Bayly documented how "Christian" rulers manipulated converts (the Tamil Paravas) similarly to other political powers (37, etc.). Sri Lankan case studies further show that the dynamics of caste transcend religious identities and India itself.

The second chapter looks at "Territorial Power: The Spatial Dimension of Social Organization." There is again far too much data to attempt a proper summary. Guha demolishes the idea of autonomous unchanging villages, in this chapter particularly attacking Karl Marx's presentation of this idea. Village clusters *(janapada,* but *nādu* in south India) are rather the key locations where political power developed. Guha's opposition to neat theorizing is clear in this comment:

> Hence, rather than thinking of social and economic institutions in terms of authentic regions and ancient traditions, it is more useful to view them as continually reproduced and inherently unstable. (62)

This unstable continuous reproduction means that what is called caste today would have had many different manifestations in different parts of India in different historical eras. Ethnic boundaries are the key reality:

> So territorial bounding and internal stratification had to proceed alongside each other. In other words, the caste hierarchy and the village cluster or *janapada* grew up together: the one created a social boundary, the other a spatial one. (63)

This chapter contains stimulating analysis of the ancient Arthashastra, the concept and place of the tribe, fighting units for warfare in the village clusters and developed kingdoms, and introduces some of the changes that developed in the colonial era. Strong states and kingdoms developed by weakening and limiting other power networks *(janapada,* fighting units, etc.)

Chapter Three is on "The Political Economy of Village Life" and opens with a romantic statement of Jawaharlal Nehru ("The old Indian social structure was based on . . . the

The harsh realities of poverty and oppression are highlighted in a chapter which shows the centrality of political power in all developments related to caste and village life.

autonomous village community; caste and the joint family system") which Guha then systematically destroys. Once again Guha marshals data to show the varieties of villages that developed across India, with western India having the most developed structures. The *balutā* system of western India involved hereditary functions with fixed entitlements; the *jajmāni* system of parts of the north involved a patron household overseeing servants and other vassals. Guha comments:

> For whatever reason, *balutā*—an institution well known to colonial administrators and Indian historians—was never recognized by the few Western anthropologists who, if they considered the rural division of labour at all, focused on the cultural rationale of *jajmāni.* It is a classic example of the Orientalist producing the Orient. (115)

Readers with interest in this topic need to read Guha's fascinating documentation supporting his position that "The evidence suggests that both patron-client pairs and village servant systems have existed or been altogether absent at various times in different regions" (135). The harsh realities of poverty and oppression are also highlighted in this chapter which shows the centrality of political power in all developments related to caste and village life.

Chapter Four focuses on the household as the central political unit. The household was more than biological kin, and established state power used the terms and practices of kinship in its developed power relations. Case studies of state power related to kinship, strategies of division, and income generation show how rulers could initiate change into social and economic structures. British colonial power is shown to demonstrate all the same issues that are documented in pre-colonial periods. But British efforts to prevent the rise of alternate power structures are also documented.

Chapter Five comes to the colonial era, the chapter title aptly indicating the contents: "Ruling, Identifying, and Counting: Knowledge and Power in Eighteenth Century India." The role of the census is a large part of this story; Guha's dismissive swipe at census errors is worth quoting:

> It is not difficult to enlarge upon the fallacies and inconsistencies, tropes and clichés of the censuses province by province through the decades, but I will not lengthen this book with such exercises in post-colonial preening. (204)

While "The pursuit of information was an integral part of the maintenance of power and control well before the colonial state" (178), it is also true that "there can be little doubt that the colonial regime pursued its aim of collecting such information with unmatched persistence, tenacity and success" (173–4).

Central to the story of the development of state power both in precolonial and colonial times is taxation and income generation. Data about peoples and populations was to this end despite different approaches of different rulers. Guha documents this reality and shows continuity rather than discontinuity as the colonial era emerges. A good summary of his case:

> We see, then, that in managing both high politics and military manpower resources, knowledge and use of community identities were essential components of political management and military administration; stable governance required both. (188)

Ethnic communities or castes were part of the core data, easily manipulated by the new colonial powers, as illustrated by British classification of Marathas as Shudra while Rajputs, due to their political significance offsetting Marathas and Muslims, were elevated beyond the place assigned by Brahmanical orthodoxy and were defined as Kshatriya (201).

The final chapter is "Empires, Nations, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity, c. 1800–2010." Guha's opening statement gives an excellent summary:

> We have seen how local political organizations were adapted and modified through recent centuries as intensive political competition, enhanced information flows, and the strengthening of markets (including those for military force) changed their internal structures and external relations. The once-solid frame of the village cluster was sapped by military-fiscal regimes through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and largely dissolved in the nineteenth. (210)

The foibles of British power and the maneuverings of locals to adjust to new realities is presented with compelling case studies. The British managed to "achieve a degree of penetration and control over South Asia that no previous government had ever achieved" (227).

The British were completely dependent on local knowledge and leadership, so various subaltern classes/castes rose with the increasing power of the colonial state. As Guha summarizes,

> In a vast and diverse subcontinent there were, not surprisingly, major divergences in the composition of this subaltern class across regions. This reflected both long regional histories and the accidents of conquest. (228)

Guha defines five different regions and the distinctives of which locals emerged as powerful. He proceeds to outline some north and south India differences as the dynamic of Dravidianism also came into play (228–231). This is rich material for understanding modern India, and it is not suited for simple summation.

Caste "has been delegitimized as ideology without its presence as a political identity being undermined. . . . its religious strand has frayed away but the one binding it to the exercise of power is thicker than ever." —Guha

The Punjab becomes a central case study. The British, acting consistently with Indian history, used their power to manipulate people and events for the sake of their own longevity. They carefully segregated the army (Punjab being the center of the British military), creating Sikh, Brahman, Rajput, Muslim, etc. battalions to prevent any wider unity that might lead to revolt. The blatant politicization of their economic policies is acknowledged in a statement from 1901 when "agricultural tribes," which included Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh peoples, were being defined:

> Our decision as to any particular tribe must turn largely on political considerations.... it seems proper to consider whether its [any particular tribe/caste/group's] numbers, position, etc., *render it of sufficient political or social importance to be considered an agricultural tribe.* (239–240, quoting British officer P. J. Fagan from *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* by Norman G. Barrier, Raleigh: Duke University, 115; emphasis added by Guha)

In the end, "the new caste politics everywhere modified patterns of community boundaries and political action" (235). The rise, and more recently the decline, of the Congress political party is succinctly narrated:

> The Congress system always rested on a tacit compromise with the locally dominant. The deepening of competitive politics in India gradually made this arrangement less and less viable. (249)

A brief Afterword (four pages) summarizes the core arguments of the book. At the end of the twentieth century, caste

> has been delegitimized as ideology without its powerful presence as a political identity being undermined thereby.... In other words, its religious strand has frayed away but the one binding it to the exercise of power is thicker than ever. (252)

> Caste as ethnicity has also maintained itself across political and religious boundaries, encompassing all the major faiths and all the five countries of South Asia. More than ever, it can only be understood in terms of the ethnic boundary processes that I invoked in the Introduction. (253)

> This book has argued that we need to abandon the futile search for a social essence, for the Indic avatar of Hegel's absolute spirit. It has shown that social structures, old and new, have been politically ordered in ways that we cannot grasp unless we deploy the concept of caste as a bounded corporate body shaped by socio-political power throughout its long history. (255)

In the end, Guha does not have a neat theory or definition, but he has presented a picture of complexity and how various influences have led to the development of what is often simplistically referred to as "the caste system." It is rather multiple systems. The ancient Brahmanical efforts to define and control the complexities of social, economic, and political life succeeded no further than British colonial efforts to understand and control Indian society.

Embracing this paradigm of complexity enables one to wrestle with local dynamics, contextual specificities, rather than resting in "grand models and armchair theories" which inhibit an empathetic grasp of locally-experienced realities. This study leaves one resolved to listen and observe more carefully and discern more wisely just what has been and is significant about "caste" in India today. It thus does a great service to all who want to understand any aspect of life in the archipelago of Indian peoples, where, despite the analogy, no people (or person, or village) is an island. **IJFM**