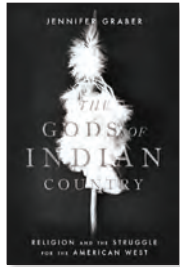


# Book Reviews

*The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West*, by Jennifer Graber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), xxii, 288 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



Readers of Bill Svelmoe's and Boone Aldridge's recent studies of William Cameron Townsend and the rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and Summer Institute of Linguistics could be forgiven for imbibing the idea that with Townsend's appearance a new day had dawned, and a fresh wind was blowing.<sup>1</sup> Townsend came on deck, took the wheel, and all tides ran fair. With the advent of the Wycliffe Bible Translators' (WBT) and the Summer Institute of Linguistics' (SIL) dual or blended identity, Christian missions may seem to have assumed a new form. But secondary and tertiary orders actually have an extended history in Western Christianity as ways to accommodate both nonclerical and noncelibate devotees in monastic witness and service. More important, for the moment, is the way that Townsend intentionally shaped himself and led SIL members to become "missionaries of the state," making them unquestioningly subservient to and of service to the state in ways apparently not conceived of before.<sup>2</sup>

In Mexico in the 1930s, one can see Townsend doing everything in his power to ingratiate himself and SIL with the Mexican government and to make SIL of service to its program of *indigenismo*. What was true in Mexico became even more the case when SIL entered Peru in 1945. Townsend's avowed aim upon entering the latter country was to make SIL indispensable to the Peruvian government; in consequence, SIL "pragmatically aligned itself with the nation-making and state-modernization goals of Peruvian educators and Peru's military leadership."<sup>3</sup> Integration became so complete that JAARS (SIL's airplane and radio communications arm) "effectively became an adjunct of the Peruvian military in the mid-1950s,"

including "carrying military personnel and transporting prisoners to the penal colony at Sepa."<sup>4</sup> It boggles the mind to think that mission as "service to all" meant quite that.

The airplanes and radios were new—as was the pervasive enlistment of missionaries with specialized training in linguistics—but was Townsend's two-pronged vision of the missionary task—doing good and doing gospel—so very new?<sup>5</sup> More narrowly, on the side of doing good, was the practice of casting mission and missionaries as adjuncts to various governments' colonial policies, programs, and objectives really new? Was it the best approach to doing good in Christ's name?

Anyone inclined to give a positive answer to those last two questions—was it really new and was it really good—might wish first to read Jennifer Graber's recently published volume, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West*. Graber focuses on the experiences of the Kiowa during the nineteenth century and the responses they made to the successive reductions they faced across that century in access to land, food, movement, and breadth of opportunity. On the one hand, she focuses on the spiritual responses the Kiowas made as the buffalo disappeared and the Plains Indians' circumstances became more straitened. On the other hand, she deals at length with the outlook and interventions of missionaries and "friends of the Indian," often also religiously motivated, who together composed part of the changing "culturescape" with which the Kiowa had to come to terms.

Graber's account, covering the years from 1803 to 1905, largely stays north of the United States' continually changing southern border. Except for fund-raising, Cameron Townsend worked primarily south of that border in Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. But Graber's account is yet one more record establishing that when it comes to acting as agents of government and to making mission subservient to governmental programs and objectives, Townsend had an ample supply of precursors and exemplars. Many before him had sought a solution to "the Indian problem" or, something quite different, had sought to alleviate the problems Indians faced. Some of his steps may have been novel, but the path itself was well trodden.

### *The Indian Problem*

As indicated, it is important to recognize that "the Indian problem" and "the problems Indians faced" in territories controlled by the United States were far from being synonymous. They were, however, related: in both cases Euramericans called the tune and the pace. The Indian

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problem was, in simplest terms, a problem that existed in the white intruders’ hearts and ambitions: at the beginning the colonists and later the settlers and homesteaders wanted land. But, inconveniently, it was occupied. The Native Americans were already there, and it was a puzzle how they were to be gotten rid of or dispossessed or converted into crypto white persons, adhering to the lifeways, not of the Cherokees or Senecas or Kiowas, but of European culture. Hunting and gathering did not mesh well with farming and manufacturing; communal landholding did not consort well with possession of land in fee simple or with private and individualistic exploitation of the wealth the land held in promise.

“Solutions” to clearing the land of its occupants and thus opening it for settlement by European colonists were various. Disease held great promise. Already between the visit of Columbus in 1492 and the landing of the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock in 1620, many fishing ships and others had visited American shores. With them came European diseases to which the occupants of the Americas had no immunity; vast numbers died in epidemics that swept across the two continents.<sup>6</sup> In some areas, when settlers arrived, they found that whole regions which previously had been heavily populated were denuded of inhabitants. As settlers moved west, they carried with them measles, smallpox, tuberculosis, and other diseases deadly to Native Americans. Contagion did its work, further reducing the number of Indians.

Another, “more humane,” solution was to “purchase” tracts of land from Native American peoples and open the land for white settlement. Alternatively, the government could negotiate concessions of land or establish Indian reserves by treaty and could then, after only a brief period of time, reopen negotiations, progressively restricting Native American lands and opening more and more land to white settlement. The ratchet worked only in one direction: from Native American land occupancy and toward white settlement. Choice districts and regions were reserved for white settlers; land in areas considered to be inferior or less productive were allocated to the Indians. Once the United States was established, lands acquired by treaty from Native Peoples accrued to the benefit of the federal government; selling “ceded” Native American land to settlers and land speculators became a lucrative financial support for the federal treasury.

More direct efforts to “solve” the Indian problem consisted of attempts at extermination through direct attacks, massacres, and Indian wars. At least one state, California,

established an outright bounty on Indian heads or scalps delivered. The US government reimbursed most of California’s bounty payments.<sup>7</sup> Actions such as the removal of the Indian population from the eastern United States under President Andrew Jackson to west of the Mississippi River into what was temporarily spoken of as “Indian country” fell short of direct killing. By means of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the United States had acquired an immense amount of territory. By putting the Indians there, two things would be accomplished simultaneously. First, the physical barrier of the mighty Mississippi River would separate the contending lifeways of the Native Americans and the white settlers from each other. Second, with the Indians removed, the fertile lands east of the river would be wholly open to white settlement. With no Indians present as a restraint on white occupancy, the settlers’ Indian problem would be solved.

But, of course, westering settlers quickly saw that the lands beyond the Mississippi were fertile. They were not the desert that maps labeled them as being. The settlers crossed the river, entered the land, and looked to the federal government to grant them title to the lands they farmed and claimed as their own. They also looked to the US government and its army to make their lives safe from reprisal by those whose land they had entered and expropriated. As the Civil War ended and later as the army was withdrawn from enforcing the program of Reconstruction in the South, soldiers became available in abundance to pursue wars of suppression against the “wild” Indians of the plains, such as the Kiowa. The Indian wars included massacres and rounding up of “wild” tribes to confine them to reduced lives on reservations. Coercive constraints were placed on Indian behavior, such as suppression of the Kiowas’ Sun Dance and other Native American approaches to spiritual power.

#### *Assimilation as Alternative to Extermination*

“Friends of the Indian,” especially, embraced the goal of assimilation as a more hopeful alternative to extermination. Each part of that sentence requires parsing. First, “friends of the Indian” did not refer to persons who were personally pacific and outgoing, amiable rather than bellicose, toward Native Americans in whose neighborhoods they had settled. They were, to one degree or another, professional or semiprofessional do-gooders. Friends of the Indian created interventions with governing authorities on behalf of Native Americans and planned courses of action and adaptation for “them” or “those people” to follow. They assumed the prerogative to think, plan, envision, and act in behalf of

*If Native Americans would consent not to live, think, behave, look, or engage in religious practices like Indians, but to behave, think, speak, reside, attire themselves, and worship like white people, they might be permitted to live.*

Native Peoples: “what they need or need to do is. . .” “This” is what “they” need to do, not just to live the good life, but to continue living at all. The friends of the Indian arrogated to themselves to know what was best for “them” and to set up programs for “them” for which “they” should be grateful.

Second is to stipulate what was meant by assimilation. Roughly framed, if Native Americans would consent *not* to live, think, behave, look, act, or engage in religious practices like Indians, but to behave, think, speak, reside, attire themselves, and worship like white people, they might be permitted to live.

That goal itself was, third, hopeful in several senses. It held out to Native Americans the possibility of life instead of extermination for their children. Assimilation might be a route to a possible future. It was also hopeful in the sense of acknowledging uncertainty. How long would assimilation take? A goal distant in time, its outcome was unassured, but the alternative, resistance, was certain to bring annihilation. At the least, assimilation might allow Native Americans’ children to remain alive. It might, looking further ahead, yield beneficial results for their children or grandchildren, even if not for themselves. All was tenuous. Another way in which the goal was hopeful was that it went against the evidence: when the Indians east of the Mississippi were compelled to relocate to Indian Territory west of the river, those such as the Cherokee who had assimilated the most, had settled down in houses, and had taken up farming were also forced to walk the Trail of Tears, right along with all the others. Many died along the way, maybe as many as a quarter of them. Hopeful, indeed.

The process of assimilation was clearly going to be a lengthy one with uncertain prospects. But unlike assimilation, the terms of which could be nebulous, shifting, and the goal ever receding, the fourth term, extermination, was quite literal. Extermination was assumed by various political spokespersons as inevitable, advocated in newspapers as something to be deliberately pursued, and, as indicated earlier, was in fact pursued by armies and militias in accord with governmental policies at various levels.

### *The Kiowa across the Nineteenth Century*

Jennifer Graber, associate professor of religious studies at the University of Texas at Austin, meticulously documents the progress of the Kiowa across a landscape transfixed throughout the nineteenth century by those two competing lodestars. *The Gods of Indian Country* recounts the progressive decrease in the set of life and religious options available

to the Kiowa as the years progressed. Kiowa modes of relationship to the land and its bounty gives her volume a tripartite structure: the periods of open lands, 1803–67; closed lands, 1868–1881; and divided lands, 1882–1903. During the first period, the whole of the American Plains was open to them. They could follow the buffalo wherever they went and could set up camp anywhere that they could establish themselves in the face of other Native American tribes and coalitions. After adopting horse culture in the northern plains and acquiring the Sun Dance from the Crow near whom they lived for a period, the Kiowa migrated south and became allied to the powerful Comanche occupants of the southern plains. They went on raids into Texas and Mexico for horses to trade and continued to move their camps freely, traversing a vast territory to maintain access to the shifting buffalo herds.

During the second period, closed lands, 1868–81, the territory of the Kiowa became circumscribed. From roving across a vast expanse of the western prairies, they were restricted by “treaty” and US military force to a circumscribed reservation in what is now southwestern Oklahoma. Land “freed up” in this way—that is, freed of Native American presence—was opened to white settlement. During the reservation period of unequally enforced separation between the Native Americans and the Euramerican intruders, the Kiowa were no longer free to follow the buffalo. They became dependent upon having the dwindling herds of migrating buffalo happen to come near them. If the Kiowa raided into Texas or Mexico or New Mexico, they were pursued by US soldiers and punished by imprisonment or execution. Efforts not just to supplant, but to suppress indigenous spiritual practices, such as the Sun Dance, came into play.

With passage of the Dawes Allotment Act in 1887 came the period of divided land. The reservations began to be broken up. By then, separation of the races by restricting Native Americans to reservations was being denounced as mistaken policy. The reservation system, with land held communally or tribally, was not inducing Native Americans to become farmers—at least, not quickly enough. Besides, it left too much land under Indian control. They were still able to dream of the return of the buffalo. Reservations had shown that they were not a conduit to private ownership of land and inculcation of individualism, as much as missionaries might stress the links between Christianity and work, private ownership, and individualism. The Indians were not clamoring to change from life in shifting camps and life sustained by the buffalo, their larder on the hoof. Maybe

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most important, land that was not individually owned (titled in severalty) could not be bought out by white settlers. It was shielded from white settlers' avarice.

The Dawes Act changed all that. The Indians were settled on 160-acre lots that they were expected to farm, whether they wanted to or not. Progressively, other sources of food were cutoff to make them dependent on farming. Settling Kiowa families on 160 acres each meant that an extensive amount of tribal land became "surplus" and could be opened to white settlement. I might add that, behold, lands now owned individually were susceptible to sale and also to purchase by whites. The terms of the treaties had never been lived up to; now the Native Americans could be sold out and have no resources at all once the sale money was spent. They would have nothing to live on. The dispossession of the Native Americans would be complete, but all would occur "legally" and by private transaction, rather than being carried out by officially acknowledged government policy. What could be wrong with "giving" 160 acres each—how generous—to families that before had never "owned" a plot of ground that they could call their own personal, private, property? All they had had before was the use of millions of acres and access to the sufficiency if not abundance those lands supplied.

### *Motivators and Mechanisms*

Kiowa spiritual practice in the Sun Dance and succeeding prophetic and spiritual movements, including the Ghost Dance and peyote cults, focused on several elemental concerns: health, abundant buffalo herds, the encroachments of white settlement, personal power, prowess in hunting and battle, and triumph in conflict with enemies. These concerns were practical and personal. As the Kiowa descended toward crisis, prophetic movements arose that promised the withdrawal of the white invaders or health or success in raids or the return of the buffalo (which whites as one front of government Indian policy were engaged in a purposeful program of slaughtering), and they gained a following. But when the prophecies of white withdrawal, for example, or success in battle failed, their followers abandoned them.

Throughout the nineteenth century and particularly its second half, Protestant Christianity assumed the singularity of its own truth and held itself up as *the* route and mechanism for creating citizens out of indigenous peoples—and immigrants, if such were to be granted entry into the country at all (the Chinese Exclusion Act, for example, was signed into law in 1882). When openings to administer Indian affairs became available, such as with President

Grant's earlier Peace Policy, Protestant friends of the Indian scurried to fill those slots and strove strenuously to exclude Roman Catholics from the role. When the Kiowas seemed recalcitrant because they were not converting quickly enough, friends of the Indian joined the government's agents in seeking military force to suppress the Sun Dance. When the Kiowa showed reluctance to take up farming, slaughter of the remainder of the now decimated buffalo herds was presented as a kindness to the Indians who for lack of an alternative would be forced to settle down and to put their hands to the plough. This outlook was spread across the spectrum from Indian agents in government employ to friends of the Indian in formal positions of responsibility to Congress and newspapers. Missionaries were in the mix, also.

### *Boarding Schools*

Extermination of the buffalo, the Plains Indian's means of support, so that hunger would force compliance in programs of assimilation was one side of the equation. On the other side were day schools and efforts to replace the blanket Indian with shorn hair and European style clothes. But the *pièce de résistance* in the effort at inducing assimilation was the boarding school. Day schools had several drawbacks: being close by, Indian parents could come by to observe; seeing what transpired, they might remove their children. By definition, students in day schools did not live on the school grounds. They were still exposed to the community and its influences. They might study English, but they also continued to speak their language, learn the traditions and rhythms of Kiowa life, and aspire to traditional roles in community life.

Boarding schools sought to break all such links, and to that end, they were located at remote distances from tribal lands. The best known, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, opened by Captain Richard Pratt in 1879, was located in central Pennsylvania. Some Kiowa from Oklahoma became students there. Pratt's motto, "Kill the Indian in him and save the man," epitomized the approach he had developed while in charge of Fort Marion, a military prison in Florida.<sup>8</sup> A number of Indians from the southern plains, Kiowa among them, had been sentenced there, arriving in May 1875. The program Pratt devised was one of forced assimilation in hair style, dress, worship, work, language, and contacts. He maximized white contact with the Indians in the prison and farmed the Native Americans out among the white population as laborers. For example, he brought members of the community in to teach English to the inmates. He not

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only required attendance at Christian religious instruction (conducting some of it himself as warden of the prison), but also took the prisoners to Euramerican church services. Anything he could do to multiply cross-cultural contacts and provide Euramerican role models, he did.

In boarding schools all communication was to be in English. Every effort was made to suppress speaking of Indian languages. Euramerican clothing was to be worn. Appearances, including hair length, were to follow Euramerican styles. The list of attempts to erase Indianness and to instill Euramerican styles and values goes on and on. As stated above, the objective was for the products of the boarding schools to behave, think, speak, reside, attire themselves, worship, and work like white people. For optimal results of de-Indianization, advocates of boarding schools recognized that the earlier a child could be removed from his or her home and from parental influence, the better the prospect of success. Such children might then aspire to become citizens, something that was denied to them as long as they resided on the reservation.

But after satisfying all requirements, assimilated Native Americans faced the final insult: they would have to wait twenty-five years to become citizens. One could easily read that as: "By then most of you can be expected to be dead." After all, the experience of the Cherokee had already shown that though part of the issue was indeed cultural, it was more than cultural. It was racist if not a matter of out and out racism. The Cherokee, the most assimilated of the Indians, were also deported; they too were forced to walk and die along the Trail of Tears. Land and modes of land tenure that might impede white acquisition of the land were the kicker.

### *The Gods of Indian Country*

I have not really provided much of a feel for what Jennifer Graber has written and the story she relates. It is better and less bitter—though bitter enough—than what I have written. Much more straightforward, Graber's account is almost that of an impartial observer or dispassionate recorder, simply presenting the facts. This was done, then that took place, and then this also occurred. A dance was planned; the army was summoned to intervene. But the whole gives a coherent account of a century of striving and reversal and ultimate defeat of a people.

Graber is bitter about steps of repression taken along the way, for example, when Indian agents and Indian advocates, so-called friends of the Indian, called in the military to

suppress Native American practices and to impose agendas of assimilation. She is bitter about steps that were taken *for* Native Peoples and supposedly in *behalf of* Native Peoples and for which it was thought they ought to be grateful, that were devised and carried out without consultation *with* Native Peoples. But she is most bitter in writing of the denouement. By the end of the nineteenth century, "emancipation" via destruction of the reservations had largely been thrust upon Native American peoples. Many had acquiesced to a degree in adopting Euramerican standards of farming and employment. Even more, probably, consented to wear Euramerican style clothing. Attendance at schools and use of English was growing. Few Native Americans still existed who did not display at least partial signs of living within the Euramerican orbit. In sum, the end of the Indian problem could be heralded as having been achieved.

What, she asks, were missionaries to do? Had they, despite their cautious framing of their task in missionary letters and periodicals—much progress has been made; so much work is yet to be done—actually left themselves with nothing yet to do? Was the task over? It was at this point, she writes, that, fortuitously, the United States turned its primary attention from internal colonization to external colonization. The Spanish-American War brought far flung territories within the purview of American churches and missionary vision in a way not heretofore experienced. The gospel of American civilization had achieved its full purpose in the lives of Native Americans. But the burgeoning American empire opened new opportunities for mission and missionaries to carry the gospel of American civilization around the world.

### *Several Observations*

Missions and missionaries are not the theme or main concern of Graber's book. They appear by necessity because they were present and because they did play a role in the lives of the Kiowa. But native agency and the steps one Native American people, the Kiowa, took in trying to cope as their world crumbled around them are the book's primary focus. Missions and missionaries were only one component in a larger scene. Forces were in motion that were far beyond any of the individual actors' control, whether Native American or Euramerican, missionary or Indian agent, soldier or friend of the Indian, however well meaning. About the best that those who were well meaning could hope to accomplish was to soften the blows. To stave off the passing of a way of life was more than could have been hoped, though some did hope and are to be honored for trying.

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Graber's comments on the fine calibration necessary in missionary publications as appeals for support were sent out touch a sensitive nerve. She notes the need felt by missions among the Indians to balance reports of progress against spelling out challenges faced. Too much emphasis on progress already made might induce complacency; too much attention to obstacles and reversals might discourage potential supporters. Enough progress must be recounted to encourage supporters that their money is helping to underwrite an effort that is accomplishing something. Giving is not fruitless or a mere waste of money. But the picture must not be too rosy; there must still be work ahead that will justify additional gifts in support of the mission's ministry. The dilemma is not new: in 1 Corinthians 16:9, the apostle Paul wrote that a wide door for effective work had opened to him, and there were many adversaries. There are points of encouragement, but there are also opponents and challenges. Mission publicity and support raising ever since has been a quest for a fine balance and certainly is still today. When is an account and appeal the literal truth? When does it cross the line into manipulation? Is there a line? Or is it both at once? Is a report or an appeal inherently manipulative, at least to some degree? Can one seek clean hands and a pure heart through honesty, candor, absence of pressure techniques, openness, and frankness alone?

Tyrants from Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar to Stalin—as well as many in between—have recognized the demoralizing power of displacement. Uprooting people from their land and resettling them elsewhere cripples them. Dislocation entails all sorts of loss. There is the loss of local knowledge, of knowing when the rains can be expected, which plots of soil are best suited to which crops, where game can be found, how topography can be used to advantage for defense in case of attack. Displacement severs networks of family and acquaintances. The eyes and hearts of those who have been displaced ache for familiar terrain. The Trail of Tears is the best-known instance, but Native Americans underwent continual displacement, at a rapidly growing pace, at the hands of the Euramericans who were moving in. People, we are told, are more open in times of personal and social upheaval to considering new religious claims, specifically, to proclamation of the good news of God's love expressed in Jesus Christ. We certainly should extend a helping hand in times of upheaval and calamity, and God may at times use individual and social crisis to awaken hearts, but should we strive to turn dire straits into a technique of evangelism?

Paul, in speaking of us as being ambassadors of Christ, assigns us an exceedingly high role and responsibility. Ambassadors are empowered and trusted to act in the name of the potentate who appointed them. They are to act in that ruler's stead but also in line with that ruler's character and intentions. They are to act with initiative and have agency, but it is not independent agency. They have freedom of movement and scope, but it is tethered. It has bounds and specific terrain over which it ranges. Cameron Townsend, mentioned earlier, is to be credited with recognizing the reality of the obligation Christ's servants have, not simply to preach the gospel, but also to do good. Still, his seemingly unquestioning confidence that doing good could be parsed as doing the will of and furthering the purposes of the state and its incumbent officials seems naïve and even quaint—when it does not, in fact, cross over into being devious and diabolical.

Which raises the question of confession. When is it appropriate to acknowledge the sins of the past, of our mothers and fathers in the faith and the ministry and in missions? Our natural tendency is to gloss over them in silence, is it not? But when does silence pass from being incomplete truth—for our account of anything can become tedious, but it can never become complete—into becoming deliberate distortion and misrepresentation? When does the time for confession and asking for forgiveness come? Is that part of missionary practice? Should it be? What about restitution? Apart from being grossly inconvenient, is that even possible? Can wrongs done ever be set right? Or are such questions simply a symptom of the West's crushing guilt complex?

The plight of the Kiowa across the nineteenth century was not a happy one. Knowing that the duplicity and killing of Native Americans then is part of my heritage now—just as is complicity in the US-aided bombing and starving of Yemeni children today—presses upon me. My country, the system in which and through which I live, and do so rather well, is and was responsible for all this. How can such guilt be expiated? It is painful to need to acknowledge that in nineteenth-century Indian territory, missionaries, while properly part of the mix, were far from unblemished in their record. Certainly, one can be confident that some of them were working to at least ameliorate the worst blows and soothe some of the effects of what was being wrought upon the Kiowa. The crushing of the Kiowa may have been inevitable and implacable as fate, rendering them up as “civilized and Christianized” potential citizens, but I cannot for the life of me conceive why it should have been thought that they ought to have been grateful for the extirpation of the buffalo and deprivation of their land and liberty.

**W**hen is it appropriate to acknowledge the sins of the past? When does the time for confession and asking for forgiveness come? Is that part of missionary practice? Should it be? What about restitution?

### Conclusion

Jennifer Graber provides a lucid account of the fate of one Native American tribe over the course of a century. As mentioned, her focus is not on missionaries. It is on native agency and on steps the Kiowa took to access spiritual power so as to rectify their world which had clearly become out of balance and was progressively becoming more so. If the motif is native agency, it is to that extent an unremitting record of failure. One approach after another to spiritual power—Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, Peyote Cult, prophets—ends in failure. Each cycle has a shorter half-life than the one before. If the goal was to restore the world to its state prior to the arrival of the Euramericans, Christianity also was a miserable failure. No such thing happened. The best the missionaries seem to have been able to offer was the goal of turning the Kiowa into crypto-white Protestants—something that the state might eventually recognize as potential citizens.

The Kiowa were renowned and feared raiders and warriors, but they were not equipped to hold off the ever more tightly encircling battle-hardened soldiers of the US Army with their superior provisions, munitions, and logistics. In the end the Kiowa were starved into submission by the use of food—or rather the destruction and withholding of food—as a weapon of war. With avenue after avenue shut off against them, eventually the Kiowa had no option but capitulation.

Despite their best efforts, the Kiowa were caught up in the throes of a massive—and eventually overwhelming—social, political, economic, and military upheaval. Missionaries were part of the mix, but so far as can be judged from Graber's account, they were neither dominant nor the most potent factor in determining what happened to the Kiowas. The story is well written and well worth reading. For one unversed in Plains Indian history and missions among them, the conclusions to be drawn about efforts to bring the benefits of the gospel to the Plains dwellers are dismaying as well as sobering.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> William Lawrence Svelmoe, *A New Vision for Missions: William Cameron Townsend, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, and the Culture of Early Evangelical Faith Missions, 1896–1945* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2008); Boone Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935–1985* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake*, 125.

<sup>4</sup> Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake*, 136.

<sup>5</sup> Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake*, 125: "It was clear too that [Townsend] had little patience with any narrow focus on salvation at the expense of social concern. The 'Bible,' he insisted in 1945, 'tells us of a better age to come, [but] it also tells us how to better this age.'"

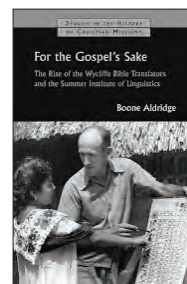
<sup>6</sup> On pre-contact Native American population size and the devastating effects of European diseases, see Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 92–96, 132–33. The literature on this issue is voluminous. For treatment at length of the topic of Native American population size, the catastrophic effect of diseases introduced by Europeans, and Euramerican assaults on Native Americans with the purpose of exterminating them, see David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> See Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2017). For the difference between the Americans' predatory approach to Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest territories and the treatment accorded to First Nations peoples on the Canadian side of the border, see Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 140.

*For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics*, by Boone Aldridge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), xvi, 272 pp.

—Reviewed by Brad Gill



The myth of the frontier. We imagine it as the freedom for grand exploration, conditions that can generate an openness to change and an easy release of long-held traditions. Modern historians will more likely demythologize such romantic notions. Their craft demands a suspicion of all that collects around heroic frontiersmen. Steeped in the ethical scruples of our post-modern age, their task is to expose the more brutal and tarnished realities of Western expanse. They reveal the truly tragic victims on those frontiers—the minorities, the powerless, the losers. We benefit greatly from these conscientious studies, for they can open up a whole new hemisphere in our historical imaginations. But what author would dare write a sympathetic historical

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study of a missionary pioneer into such a climate of post-modern historiography?

In his study of Cameron Townsend and Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics (WBT/SIL), Boone Aldridge has dared to do just that. He has offered a new retrospective on the entrepreneurial life and mission of this extraordinary pioneer, but he has placed it carefully within the international currents of an evolving 20<sup>th</sup> century. From Townsend's early college days in a progressive institution like Occidental College to his controversial steps into Russia during the Cold War, Aldridge has handled the arc of Townsend's organizational leadership of WBT/SIL with keen historiography. Townsend's unique skill-set as linguist, missionary, diplomat, organizational leader, and entrepreneurial promoter is tempered by this author's reference to contemporary political and evangelical developments. The myths that enshroud Townsend the man are dispelled by Aldridge, who attempts an irenic and honorable critique. He proves that demythologizing is a beneficial exercise for mission strategy.

He offers more than a biography. It's in effect an organizational history. For any mission leader on the frontiers today, who struggles to discharge his duties in fast-changing conditions, this book is a case study of innovative organizational design amidst the revolutionary dynamics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a historical case-study, it will compliment the insightful books on cross-cultural organizational leadership being published today (I recommend Douglas McConnell's recent contribution<sup>1</sup>). It's an inspiring blend of biblical mission, leadership values, and historical drama, creating a very readable study of intrepid organizational design.

Townsend's objective of translating the Bible into the indigenous languages of neglected tribes consistently challenged conventional wisdom. Aldridge develops the crucial aspects of Townsend's thinking that led him to a "dual" organizational design, that ingenious (often paradoxical) partnership of a Bible translation mission (Wycliffe) and a scientific enterprise focused on applied linguistics (SIL). Aldridge's intent is to "explain the strategies and policies of this complex and often confusing missionary organization" (p. 10). His careful historiography provides rich contextual insight into how conditions can impact organizational innovation, offering a more complete understanding of the many controversies that surrounded this particular mission agency.

Townsend's instinctive and very inductive orientation to organization would result in criticism from both an evangelical public (Chapter 5) and secular anthropology (Chapter 6). Chapter by chapter, Aldridge uses a chronology of the WBT/SIL story to isolate these criticisms. The reader senses how the issues Townsend encountered in the *zeitgeist* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provide a missiological template for mission leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The author begins with Townsend's disposition during those early years in Guatemala and Mexico and how this pioneer was shaped by the progressive-fundamentalist debate among North American Protestants (Chapter 1, "Pioneering and the Progressive Ideal"). It was this progressive orientation that would contest what Townsend called "the time-honored shackles of churchianity" (p. 8). He would disturb both Keswick sensibilities and the institutional priorities of faith-mission structures. Townsend's early intuition mixed with his dogged entrepreneurial skill to envision a "progressive missiology" that would re-engineer the salient mission template of his day. The ripple effect from the dual nature of WBT/SIL would continue to complicate the organization's evangelical status and affiliation for decades. (Chapter 5, "On the Home Front," picks up on WBT's controversial publicity tactics—like the World's Fair Pavilion in 1964 and the struggle to be accepted into the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association).

The chapters are laid out in a rough chronology that raises successive missiological issues—themes that would forge the values and principles of WBT/SIL over the next decades. In Chapters 2 and 3 ("The Linguistic Approach" and "Translating the Word"), Aldridge maps out just how the academic rigor required for Bible translation led SIL deeper and deeper into the halls of the university world. As SIL personnel began to apply linguistic theory to the unwritten languages of indigenous tribes, they became more confident in their interaction with scholars. Aldridge's extensive use of direct quotes and historic anecdotes recreates the drama that surrounded Townsend's diplomacy in Mexico, but one suspects the pace of his narrative elides much of the backstory. (One can turn to Hartch's focused treatment of SIL in Mexico for much more of that detail.<sup>2</sup>)

Aldridge identifies this professional flank of translators committed to the science of linguistics as one more

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evangelical stream trying to overcome the unfortunate legacy of anti-intellectualism. He wraps a lot of this initial challenge around the emergence of Kenneth Pike, who joined the faculty at the University of Michigan, generated his own theory of linguistics from translation work in Mexico, and in 1942, became the president of SIL. Pike exemplifies how by applying sophisticated linguistic theory to some of the most remote primitive languages in the world, SIL’s translators generated theoretical discoveries. In a narrative that includes the innovations of Eugene Nida and John Beekman, Aldridge recreates the reciprocity of theory, critique and debate that would continually characterize the intramural life of SIL. It was a fertile hothouse climate that allowed a young Wayne Dye to test the organizational assumption that Bible translation automatically leads to “scripture use” and a movement to Christ. It was also the context which generated the linguistic theories that would support idiomatic translations of the Bible which have led to more recent movements to Christ.

Aldridge’s history recounts how this dual organization displayed the tension between our intellectual and devotional disciplines in mission (“Heart and Mind? The Struggle for Balance” p. 59ff).<sup>3</sup> Can we expect better educated missionaries to maintain their spiritual intensity? (I was reminded of one SIL chapel service I attended in 1976 where Pike ended that morning devotional by repeating over and over again the call, “God needs scholars!”) The attempt to blend Bible translation with a secular, academic, and highly theoretical discipline could cause a spiritual drift. As SIL built an alliance with the University of Oklahoma (1940s), was it an egregious lapse for SIL classes to then drop their tradition of beginning their classes in prayer? This common personal tension of spirit and mind becomes quite poignant in SIL’s institutional history.

Christian mission throughout history has had to confront the geopolitical realities of empire and nation-state, and in Chapter 4, Aldridge rolls out the philosophy of SIL in Townsend’s venture into Peru. It was here that Townsend took his earlier tactical decisions to cooperate with the government of Mexico, and extended them into a more full-service approach, one of “service to all.” It required the dual organizational model of WBT/SIL (what some considered the “two-headed monster”), but it also required “the Townsend factor,” that blend of diplomat, promoter and entrepreneur. In so doing, Townsend ignored church/state boundaries and stirred up a swarm of suspicion and reaction on the home front (Chapter 5). Despite the high cost back home, maintaining

this dual organization would pay high dividends on the field. In Peru, “international good will” became a strategy. Aldridge focuses the controversy surrounding Townsend in his desire to launch SIL’s own jungle aviation planes, complete with mechanics, which were used to ferry Bible translators in and out of tribes. He would make these planes available to service others, such as flying Catholic nuns and priests to and from the jungle, or the even more questionable decision to transport military weapons for the government. It was all an effort to “couple faith and diplomacy” and “to make SIL indispensable to the government” (pp. 136–137). By carefully parsing the Peruvian context (the religious hierarchy, government departmental policy, educational system), Aldridge helps the reader comprehend the ethical realities of a strategy of “service to all.” The author highlights Townsend’s bald use of State power in advancing his mission to indigenous peoples.<sup>4</sup>

WBT/SIL’s organizational structure may have been effective in overcoming the geopolitical resistance of nation-states, and they may have sufficiently addressed the conservative qualms of a North American sending base, but they were still to face an ideological barrage from those strange bedfellows in the academy—the anthropologists. Through the 60s and 70s, WBT/SIL had grown to more than 2500 members, and in Chapter 6 (“Staying the Course”), Aldridge describes a stream of publications that accused SIL of exploiting and oppressing indigenous peoples. Aldridge’s treatment of new intellectual currents—the New Left and an idealistic anthropology—and his blow-by-blow critique of SIL in these publications could make any modern missionary under similar conditions squirm. He covers WBT/SIL’s reaction and their attempts to de-westernize and refashion their organization along more international lines.

In just 288 pages, Aldridge has not only told the dramatic story of this pioneering organization, but his rich historiography creates an important case study for mission leaders today. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Douglas McConnell, *Cultural Insights for Christian Leaders* (Baker Academic, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935–1985* (University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Kenneth Pike’s *With Heart and Mind: A Personal Synthesis of Scholarship and Devotion* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> This approach of cooperation with the national governments of Peru and Mexico has been highly criticized. See Baker’s book review on *The Gods of Indian Country*, by Jennifer Graber in this same issue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).