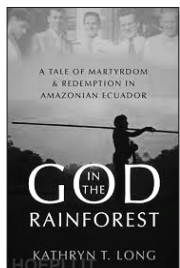


Books and Missiology

God in the Rainforest: A Tale of Martyrdom and Redemption in Amazonian Ecuador, by Kathryn T. Long (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), xix + 446 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



When the auca/Waorani burst onto the world stage on Sunday, January 8, 1956, they and the five men whose lives their spears cut short became *the* missionary story of the century.¹ Though the missionary Paul maintained that the testimony of his life and teaching was not hidden from public view—“was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26 NRSV)—this particular effort was deliberately shrouded in secrecy. In planning and carrying out their foray, the five missionaries shut out both colleagues and wider family members. The set on which the script played out was a seemingly out-of-the-way sandbank deep within the Ecuadoran rainforest, but all the ingredients of high drama were present. The five men paid with their lives, but much more would follow. The story sold well in its day, and its reverberations continue into the present.

Even at first glance, the binaries are abundant: cultured vs. primitive, high tech vs. “stone age,” outward looking vs. a fixed inward focus, contact vs. flight to the recesses of the rainforest, new life vs. old ways, light vs. darkness, hope vs. despair. On the one side stand youth, ambition, US-tinted religious idealism, glamour and prestige in certain circles, entrepreneurship, advanced technology, and extreme risk taking. That side of the story—abundantly documented in logs, journals, letters, photographs, and interviews—offers the tension, with nerves taut to the snapping point, of a cloak and dagger operation, but one carried out in the name of Jesus Christ.

On the other side lay the untamed presence of the forest primeval in the form of wide expanses of exceedingly thinly populated rainforest at the headwaters of the Amazon River. In it dwelt a people living—that is, judged from the perspective of, say, New York City—in extreme isolation. Their

isolation was both intentional and occasioned by fear: fear of outsiders and fear of one another. In the mid-twentieth century they constituted one of the world’s few remaining examples of a people living lives largely untouched by the instruments, ambitions, affectations, and maladies of the modern age. Or, at least, so it seemed. As noted, the people who lived in that forest were the Waorani. They had already made it abundantly clear that outsiders who encroached on their territory did so at their peril. The prospect of being speared to death restrained even bold men from intruding.

Spurring the story forward was ambition, some holy and some less so. The five missionaries—Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, and Roger Youderian—were filled with ambition to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Waorani, whom they unwittingly called by the disparaging Quechua word “auca,” meaning “savage.” The missionaries were also burning with a less holy ambition: a desire to be themselves *the ones* to make contact, to open the gospel to the auca, and to open the auca to the world. Hence the secrecy about their plans and the steps they were taking. They wanted neither to be forestalled by having others arrive first nor to be thwarted in their attempt. After all, if the Ecuadoran government were to learn of the endeavor, it might delay or even forbid the entire project. One further ambition, at least on the part of Jim Elliot, was to be able to establish a pure form of the church in wholly virgin territory, untrammled or unadulterated by prior contact with lesser or distorted manifestations of what the church should be, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic. Of Plymouth Brethren background, he knew best the form the church should take. Why have to cope with rectifying the mistakes of others? By being present at the inception of a wholly new branch of Christ’s church, the enterprise could be launched correctly from the start.

The five missionaries were young. All were men, all married, most with children looking for their return home. When on Sunday afternoon, January 8, 1956, they were killed on “Palm Beach” on Ecuador’s Curaray River, the news flashed around the world. Newspapers, radio news programs, TV, and magazines, all carried the story. Governments sent rescue parties which became burial parties. News organizations sent correspondents and photographers. All wanted to know who were these men? Why were they in eastern Ecuador, in the headwaters of the Amazonian Basin? Why were they trying to make contact with the reclusive Waorani in the first place, a people who quite plainly wished to avoid all contact? Why were they so secretive about their project? Certainly, they were evangelical missionaries, but what did that mean?

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When the sister of one of the men and the widow and young daughter of another went to live in a Waorani settlement alongside the very persons who had killed their brother and husband/father, the account became quite simply *the* missionary story of the century—and well beyond. Much has transpired since that epic confrontation in the mid-twentieth century, but both missionally and for the Waorani the events of that Sunday have colored everything that has happened since.

Early Contacts

I first encountered the story of the “auca martyrs” as framed in the books of Elisabeth (Betty) Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* and *Shadow of the Almighty*.² I was then in my teens. Elliot’s martyrology of the five men and her exaltation of Jim Elliot as the epitome of Christian spirituality fit right in. They meshed with and carried forward the image of the missionary role as the Christian’s highest calling that I had imbibed within my childhood home and church. It all fit as well with the quest for entrance into the innermost circle of fellowship advocated at summer Bible camps. Why be satisfied to be an Andrew or Bartholomew, still less a Thomas or Judas the Zealot? Aspire, young man, to join Peter, James, and John, the spiritual elite in closest and most intimate fellowship with Jesus. Seek to know, with full certainty, God’s will and to embrace and enact it.

My direct contacts with principal figures of the auca/Waorani story were few. In the fall of 1964 and recently married, I as a senior in college along with my wife, Lois, attended a writers’ conference that featured Elisabeth Elliot. She spent her allotted time interrogating several of our common tradition’s assemblage of assumed verities. Should prepackaged outlooks and “answers” be presumed serviceable by default, in advance of testing? Might not experience lead to deeper pondering and raise questions as to their adequacy? Emerging as I slowly was from the fundamentalism in which I had been raised, I was attracted to issues of epistemology. So, during the time allotted to discussion, I rose. “You have mentioned,” I said, “a number of things that we cannot know. What can we know for certain?” I hope that query was more a quest for enlightenment than an attempt at a “gotcha,” but unfortunately, my words must have sounded like a challenge. Elliot was non-plussed and ended up at a loss for words. After an awkward pause, Frank Gaebelein, also on the program, stepped in to patch things over, and the program went on.

I may have been young and gauche, but I was not pleased at the response my “confrontation with Elisabeth Elliot” received back at the much smaller fundamentalist college

where I was enrolled. Other attendees relayed the story, eliciting the dismissive remark from one faculty member that Elliot was “just a woman who has read a book.” I did not possess the language of sexism with which to label denigration of women, but I still recoiled instinctively from the fact of it. Further, I objected to the dismissal of ideas, not on their merits, but because of their pedigree: uttered by a woman, therefore, obviously not worth considering. Besides, I was all for reading books; I was reading a few myself, among them Elisabeth Elliot’s *The Savage My Kinsman* and, when it was published, *No Graven Image*.³

A decade later I had one other contact with Elisabeth Elliot. Our family had moved to northern Minnesota and there became neighbors to Betty Elliot’s younger brother Jim. Once when she was visiting his family, she came over to our house for tea and we visited. I have no reason to think that she recalled our earlier encounter at the Wheaton College’s writers’ conference. Only long after her compilation of *The Journals of Jim Elliot* was published in 1978 did I come across a copy of it in the library of a missionary guesthouse. I took the opportunity to read large swathes of it as well.

The Story Line Becomes More Complex

Rachel Saint I met once. At her invitation we became tablemates during a dinner at a Minneapolis conference organized by Sherwood Wirt, then editor of Billy Graham’s *Decision* magazine. That would, I believe, have been in the early 1970s. My recollection is of an evening of congenial conversation and her kindness to an aspiring writer with a strong interest in missions. I am confident that her nephew Steve Saint, the son of pilot Nate Saint, and I would have crossed paths on various occasions on the campus of the US Center for World Mission (now Frontier Ventures) in Pasadena, California, in the 1990s, but I do not recall that we ever spoke to each other.

With that my contacts with the principals are, I believe, now fully acknowledged. (In the 1960s I had encounters with Walter Liefeld, the husband of Olive Fleming, Peter Fleming’s widow, but I have no recollection of ever having met her.) Readers can be pardoned, however, if they think they anticipate a whiff of conflation, first, of the story of the auca/Waorani with the story of the five martyrs *and*, second, of the story of the five men with the story of Jim Elliot. Kathryn Long carries the regression further, remarking on the conflation of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Ecuador with that of the five men who died that Sunday on Palm Beach, a distinction to be made but one that possibly is of more importance to the families

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involved and the sponsoring missions of the five men than to others.⁴ One gains the impression that SIL was not eager to cut off the accrual of glory by association, however much Elisabeth Elliot might remonstrate.⁵ Reflections of the approbation that surrounded the five martyrs were known to ease open generous purse strings. Further, when SIL's work among the Waorani did begin, it quite simply grew out of the seed planted by those five men. As Rachel Saint (SIL), Betty Elliot (not a member of SIL), and Betty's daughter Valerie entered the Waorani settlement in October, 1958, they were walking in the all but discernible footsteps that those men had intended to plant on the trail. The residence of the three, along with Dayomæ (Dayuma), in the Waorani settlement, was a continuation of that story.

The conflation of the story of the five men with that of Jim Elliot was both real and deliberate. With the help of Harper and Brothers, Elisabeth Elliot published the focal interpretation of the men and their story. The circle of widows was often asked to speak, and they responded to requests for brief articles, but by and large they deferred to Elliot, consciously avoiding putting forward counter perspectives or narratives that might detract from the picture she developed. Peter Fleming's widow, Olive, states as much in *Unfolding Destinies*, the account she finally published in 1990.⁶

Years later in "Missionaries in the Movies," a seminar that I led for a half dozen years at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut, I screened both the half-hour documentary *Through Gates of Splendor* (1967), narrated by Elisabeth Elliot, and the Saint family rendition, *End of the Spear* (2005), made for the big screen. Both were potent and effective.

If *Through Gates of Splendor* and *Shadow of the Almighty* seemed to have fixed Jim Elliot's halo firmly in place, it is to Elisabeth Elliot's credit that some adjustments crept into *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (1978). The sheen of idealization, if anything, shone brighter in this more expansive rendering, but room was found as well for glimpses of his humanity, not all of a sort that he might have chosen for public display. Jim Elliot's ability to confuse every vagary that passed through his mind with the very mind and will of God received less ready obeisance. For Olive Fleming Liefeld's part, three and a half decades was a long time to hold her breath; still she treads softly, even if firmly, making clear that Jim Elliot was allowed to suck up too much of the air in the room, both at the time and in later narratives. *End of the Spear*, released in 2005, both decentered the story of Jim Elliot and dared to portray him with a touch

of the buffoon, definitely not the characterization accorded him by Olive Fleming Liefeld. Old divergences of perspective insisted on being given recognition.

Carrying the Story Forward

Certainly, I read accounts such as *Jungle Pilot: The Life and Witness of Nate Saint*, an MAF pilot and one of the five men on Palm Beach, and Wycliffe/SIL publications such as *Two Thousand Tongues to Go* and doubtless *The Dayuma Story*, but not later books focused on SIL's work among the Waorani.⁷ For me the trail in the rainforest largely petered out when Elisabeth Elliot moved on to fields further west in Ecuador and then to the United States. The literary tracks I followed tended to skirt around or reach back across the ever-lengthening span of ministry to and among and by the Waorani themselves. I had much on which to catch up.

So it was with high anticipation that I came to read Wheaton College professor Kathryn Long's *God in the Rainforest: A Tale of Martyrdom and Redemption in Amazonian Ecuador*—and she does not disappoint. Her work is informed and judicious. She is willing to make assessments and to take sides on disputed points. When confronted with divergent accounts of significant events, she has amassed sufficient information to assess their credibility. To which report or reconstruction, if either, do the records and evidence lend support? *God in the Rainforest* brings the account down to the present decade of the twenty-first century. The stage for the drama stays roughly the same, the eastern Ecuadoran rainforest, but the roster of *dramatis personae* is crowded, with mission organizations, corporations, and government institutions jostling for position. Individuals and organizations gain and lose advantage. There is sufficient time and space for the mettle of individual actors on the stage to be tried, tested, and assayed. She issues even-handed judgment on the work carried out by the principals involved. For example, what can be said of the character of the Christianity and church life Rachel Saint sought to instill among the Waorani? Long is equally even-handed in assessing the claims of both promoters of SIL and critics of the organization's presence and activity among the Waorani.

The volume is not an attempt to give an overview of the whole of SIL or its operations. Long's conceptual bailiwick is to give—over the span of approximately seven decades—the happenings within the territory of the Waorani, the Waorani populace itself, and the doings of non-Waorani agents, frequently non-Ecuadoran, active in or impinging on both the rainforest and its inhabitants. To a degree the relevant non-Waorani consist of oil company personnel, loggers,

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and encroaching squatters close at hand, as well as mission administrators and government functionaries impinging upon the Waorani and their affairs from a distance. But mainly the persons in view are the Waorani themselves and the missionaries, including SIL personnel, active among them. As a group the missionaries were more numerous and more diverse than one knew if one's access was mainly through the gateway opened by the books of Elisabeth Elliot and her successors. For one like myself whose acquaintance tapered off sharply when Rachel Saint took over, *God in the Rainforest* admirably fills in the story.

A New Order in the Rainforest

And take over Rachel Saint not only sought to do, but did, though in league with Dayomæ. Over the years, the two drew upon each other in working toward their overlapping but progressively diverging purposes. In 1949 Rachel arrived in Peru. Soon after she first learned of the auca/Waorani during a visit to her brother Nate in Ecuador. Err long she became convinced that they were hers, that God had given it to her to be the one to open the gospel to this "savage" tribe. When she learned of a young Waorani woman who had fled to the outside some years before, but who still retained knowledge of her language, she moved to the hacienda where Dayomæ worked as a peon, sort of an indentured servant. Grabbing what snatches of time Dayomæ could spare from her work and her child, Rachel sought to learn the language. With her rudimentary skill in the language when she entered the Waorani settlement, she was dependent on Dayomæ linguistically and for insight into the culture. Rachel wanted to shield the Waorani from the inroads of outside influences. Dayomæ sought to get everyone clothed and to replicate the sort of patron/client peonage she had experienced at the hacienda, only this time with her at the top of the hierarchy.

Rachel Saint's ideal of protectionism was an illusion. She could no more prevent the incoming flood of outside influences than she could stop the flow of the rivers to the Amazon. She did retard the penetration of outsiders within her "Christian" settlement for an amazing period of time, thus buying the Waorani some time as they made adjustments in their life patterns and expectations. Still, as David Stoll points out, Rachel, her SIL colleagues, and Dayomæ had themselves introduced new patterns of thought and behavior along with igniting a burgeoning desire for market goods previously unknown to them. Steel knives they already knew about and appreciated. SIL personnel represented a cornucopia of food and things, which they used to ingratiate themselves with the Waorani and which the Waorani avidly sought to acquire.

Rachel knew what God's will was. God had granted the Waorani to her. She also knew what God's will was for others. She had sought for someone to teach her the language of the Waorani and "discovered" Dayomæ. Therefore, Dayomæ was hers and not to be made available to her more linguistically gifted colleague, Betty Elliot. Dayomæ was assigned by God to be the key that would help her unlock the gospel to the Waorani. Later, she recognized at once that Oncaye was to be the key to entry among the downriver Waorani. She certainly had the strength of her convictions, for herself and for others. Elisabeth Elliot's heart and mind probed spiritual issues differently, and Rachel expedited her withdrawal from the settlement. Elliot first shifted to work further west in Ecuador and later to a writing and speaking career back in the United States. For better or worse, the fate of the Waorani, it seemed, lay in Rachel's hands.

SIL in the Rainforest

Who stands athwart a tsunami to impede its advance is not likely to emerge looking dapper and unsoiled. That is exactly the position in which SIL, preeminently in the person of Rachel Saint, had placed itself. To the Ecuadoran government, it promised to facilitate the induction of the Waorani into national plans that included exploitation of their lands, trees, and underlying mineral resources, especially oil. To the Waorani it held out the prospect of an enclave free, in the name of God, from internal spearing and protection against being gunned down by operatives of the oil companies or the Ecuadoran military "clearing" the way for them. For the oil corporations as well as the government, SIL promised pacification, that is, removal of the Waorani from the land and their relocation within the restricted and protected zone set aside for them.⁸ SIL had made promises to three parties, not all of which and maybe none of which it could fulfill.

What SIL offered to do for the oil companies could hardly have been more baldly stated than it was in a prayer letter sent by Bill Eddy. A former JAARS airplane mechanic, Eddy had been "asked to serve as a public relations coordinator between the various oil company headquarters in Quito and [Catherine] Peeke, [Rachel] Saint, and others participating in Waorani relocation."⁹ He wrote:

Twenty-five years ago the Shell Oil Company lost many workers to Auca spears. For several reasons Shell decided to leave Ecuador. Suddenly with the discovery of a vast reserve of oil under the Eastern Jungle, twenty-one companies are working 1500 men there. As they advance, we fly ahead of them and explain to Aucas living in their path that they are coming. We persuade

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them that they should move out of the way. This is done by Auca Christians through a loudspeaker mounted on the plane. As the Indians move, we notify the oil companies. As a result of this close coordination by radio and telephone through our Quito office, there has not been one life lost to date. PRAISE GOD!!¹⁰

Eddy’s comment, described by Long as “at best a simplistic description of what SIL was trying to do,” elicited a blizzard of distressed commentary and forced Benjamin Elson, Wycliffe’s North American director, to seek to explain: “Our interest is not in oil but in Aucas” and that Wycliffe/SIL preferred Indian removal to the likely alternative of Indian slaughter.¹¹

For the prospect of an end to intra-tribe spearing and slaughter by external corporate and governmental forces, the Waorani voted with their feet, walking for days through the jungle, and with their seats, riding in JAARS and oil company planes and helicopters, to promised new homes at Tewæno. Around the resettlement area, Rachel Saint tried, as noted, to impose a perimeter of exclusion to preserve the Waorani from Quechuaization. The result was more a sieve than a dam. The Quechua wanted to take advantage of Waorani fish, game, forest, and land resources, and they found means to do so. Even more powerful was the appeal that “modern” Quechua ways and goods in Quechua markets had for the Waorani. They wanted what was “out there”; they wanted to be “modern” too. SIL had used trade goods to gain entrée among the Waorani and to entice Waorani compliance. The urge for more and more of the same could be neither suppressed nor controlled. Further, a prime mover in stoking these desires was Dayomæ, Rachel Saint’s Waorani informant, colleague, and increasingly co-leader.

Belatedly and over the objections of Rachel Saint, in 1974 SIL assigned one of its few members with a PhD in anthropology, James Yost, to do fieldwork among the Waorani and compile a comprehensive report. Eventually, his studies of Waorani hunting and horticultural practices undergirded appeals for enlargement of the land reserves allocated to the tribe. More immediately, he characterized the worship Rachel Saint had introduced among the Waorani as “an oppressive type of Christianity.”¹² SIL had already assigned additional SIL members to work among the Waorani so as to dilute Saint’s dominance, but Yost’s severe critique of her control over the community forced it to take further steps.¹³ Saint refused to accede, and the process of transition dragged out for eight years. Her last ties with SIL did not end until April 1982. “By then she was back in the Ecuadorian Amazon as a retiree living next door to Dayomæ in the small village of Toñæmpade. It had been established only a few years earlier, independent of any SIL support” by Dayomæ and her son.¹⁴

Observations

There are other chapters to the story: the Waorani and the oil companies; saving the rainforest; setting apart sufficient land for the Waorani to enable them to continue their traditional mix of hunting, fishing, and horticulture; the creation especially by Dayomæ’s son of rainforest tourism with the auca/Waorani and Palm Beach as the prime attractions; Rachel Saint’s interactions with other missions’ engagement with the Waorani, especially that of the Roman Catholic missionaries; and two more missionary martyrs, this time Roman Catholic.

A word on the last of these before some concluding observations. Alejandro Labaca, bishop of Aguarico, “was an outspoken defender of Wao rights.”¹⁵ For some years he had been spending shorter or longer periods of time in the rainforest, staying as a guest in settlements of the “wild” downriver Waorani. During these visits, Labaca wore the same apparel his hosts did; he went nude except for a string called a *come* tied around his waist. Over the years, he “found it difficult to recruit missionaries, particularly nuns, to share in the [Waorani] project. Inés Arango [Velásquez] was the only nun in the vicariate who expressed a specific calling to be a missionary to the Waorani.”¹⁶ Her practice was to wear her white habit but to remove her head covering and shoes when visiting the Waorani.

On Tuesday, July 21, 1987, the two were deposited by helicopter in an isolated “wild” Waorani settlement. Though they had been warned not to make a visit there at that time, both were veterans of numerous visits to Waorani settlements, and they persisted with their plans. The next morning the clearing was found deserted except for their two bodies, riddled with spears. Little known in the English-speaking world, “among Catholics in the Spanish-speaking world, especially in Ecuador, Colombia, and Spain, Labaca and Arango [Sister Inés Arango Velásquez] would be recognized as martyrs who gave their lives for the Waorani.”¹⁷

What, I thought, is going on? In reading *God in the Rainforest*, I was struck by the similarity in outlook and objectives of SIL among the Waorani and those that were current among missionaries to Native Americans in the United States a century and more ago.¹⁸ Was this some type of intellectual joke? Had nothing been learned? Words and phrases used to identify the role of SIL’s personnel in Ecuador could have been taken straight from descriptions of what nineteenth-century missions among Native Americans thought they were doing in behalf of the US government. The aims and the slogans were the same. See the quotation from Bill Eddy that appears above. As

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mentioned, a number of times James and Marti Hefley identify Wycliffe/SIL's goal, in behalf of oil companies and the government, as one of "pacification."¹⁹

Rachel Saint was quite simply an in-country administrator's nightmare in spades. She took her orders only from God. OK, but what did God want to have done? She alone was the judge of that. (Leave aside that she also knew what God wanted various other persons to do and that she alone was the judge of that, as well.) Financially, she received her support from a constituency that lay outside of SIL's control. She was, in effect, an independent ministry unto herself, facilitated by the Wycliffe/SIL twin organizations.

More mundanely, Rachel had a direct conduit, over the country administrator's head, to Wycliffe/SIL's founder/director, Cameron Townsend. Therefore, her grievances and requests had to be handled delicately. At the same time, Townsend had the same direct line of communication to her. Organizationally, the lines of communication were a mess.

Rachel Saint had star power because she was embedded in Wycliffe/SIL's star setting: among the Waorani. Townsend wanted to use that star power and prevailed upon her for the tours and books, written by others, that touted the story for public relations, fundraising, and recruitment purposes.

Rachel Saint had both conviction and courage. At least twice she stepped in directly to avert outbreaks of bloodshed and reprisal among the Waorani. When one man announced that he was sharpening spears to avenge a perceived affront, Saint marched into his dwelling, confiscated his spears, and hid them under her own bed. In another instance, she maintained the sanctity of her Christian community's cardinal rule, "No killing," by seizing the intended killer's spears and breaking them in pieces. To surmise now that by the time Saint intervened both men may have been secretly ready to welcome a face-saving way out of a step that, noisily announced, would have almost certainly led to their own deaths as well, does nothing to detract from her courage and the strength of her convictions. Quite probably she was the only person who could have done what she did and not have been killed.

From SIL's perspective, an immediate effect of Rachel Saint's retirement might be thought of as quasi-logistical. The path was finally clear for progress to be made on the long promised and as long deferred translation of the New Testament into *Wao tededo* (Wao language). Catherine Peeke and Rosi Jung, assigned to pursue the task together, carried it through to completion. "Five hundred copies were printed in May 1992 for a population of about twelve hundred, of whom

some 30 percent were marginally literate."²⁰ If the long delay is to be laid at Rachel Saint's feet, then the fact that the Waorani had grown so significantly in number during the same period should be credited, in part, to her account also. Breaking the cycle of killing had borne wholesome fruit.

Of the two women who followed Dayomæ to the Waorani, Elisabeth Elliot was the one with gifts as a linguist. But Saint could not let go of either the task of language analysis or that of translation. Developing an orthography was hers to do; translating the New Testament had to be done by her. Why? Was it because she was caught in the bind of the SIL vs. Wycliffe self-representational sleight of hand? If she surrendered the linguistic role, would she have lost her standing in the Ecuadoran government's eyes for remaining in the country? If she were not there translating the New Testament, would she have had no standing among her supporters in the United States? That was what they were contributing money for her to do. So, she drove Elliot from the rainforest and, by her insistence that she and she alone (though with the aid of Dayomæ) must be the one to do the translation, effectively obstructed progress on the translation until after her retirement.

What is to be made of the exploitation of the auca/Waorani, the strutting of them on the US and world stage in person and in print as fundraising props? The killing story—these were the men—and the conversions made outstanding press. Elisabeth Elliot objected, asking whether that was best for the Waorani, but Rachel Saint acquiesced and served as interpreter. Though Dayomæ and other Waorani were pressed into service, little of the money came back to Ecuador and less to the Waorani work.²¹ They were made to serve Cameron Townsend's larger cause.

Was it that larger cause—and the pressure to write glowing accounts of progress in prayer letters—that generated the "grade inflation" that caught up to SIL when Jim Yost reported on his fieldwork findings in the mid-1970s? SIL/Wycliffe was caught in a bind, but why did it equivocate instead of then and there rectifying the misinformation it had been giving out?²² In the 1970s, results of SIL's work among the Waorani were somewhat less than they had been reported to be. By the 1990s, an estimated 15 to 20 percent of the Waorani were practicing Christians.²³

The Will of God

When the five young men were killed on Palm Beach, much was spoken and written about the will of God, searching earnestly for a quid pro quo. Some thought they found it when reports came back that various Waorani had

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become Christians or when the last of the five men identified as their killers had been baptized. Five for five, ergo, God willed that those five should die so that these men could receive salvation.

Elisabeth Elliot was not so sure that the mind and will of God could be read so easily. Both she and Rachel Saint thought long and hard about God's will, but Elliot seemed to be more restrained in her conclusions. She continued to ask probing questions, but was more reserved in her certainties. What we take to be a window into the mind of God might prove to be only a mirror. To be faithful to our conviction of God's calling on our lives and to be obedient to it, yes; to presume to know God's mind or purpose, no. Even though I am paraphrasing some of Elliot's later reflections, I am glad that she continued asking questions, and I appreciate the point that she, even in my lesser wording, was making.

In Sum

Perhaps the last word should be given to Kathryn Long. She correctly observes in concluding *God in the Rainforest* that

perhaps it is time for critics to concede that SIL workers did help the Waorani end some patterns of internal violence and survive contact with outsiders. By the same token, it may be time for North American evangelicals and also missionaries to recognize that the Waorani do not live in a historical, cultural, or geographic vacuum, nor are they frozen in time.

She goes on to add:

The Waorani are much more than the "supporting cast" for missionary heroism. They are people with a unique language, culture, and geographic location that—in common with all other cultures—reflects both the goodness and the brokenness of the created world.

To which, amen. A fitting conclusion to an exemplary study over the *longue durée* of a highly complex and at times hotly contested portion of mission history.

Endnotes

¹ I am following the convention used by Kathryn Long, *God in the Rainforest*. She does not capitalize "auca" since it is a Quechua term of disparagement, meaning "savage," not a proper noun. Those called "auca" referred to themselves as Waorani (sing. Wao, pl. Waorani; also spelled Huao, Huaorani, etc.), that is, "people." The names of persons and places show similar variations.

² Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor: The Martyrdom of Five American Missionaries in the Ecuador Jungle* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958) and *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

³ Elisabeth Elliot, *The Savage My Kinsman* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) and *No Graven Image: A Novel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

⁴ I have the impression that many persons refer offhandedly to the five men as though they had been members of SIL; see, for example, David Stoll, *Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire? The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, 1982), 298. For more on the vexed relationship between the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators, see the work by David Stoll just mentioned and Boone Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

⁵ James Hefley and Marti Hefley, *Unstilled Voices* (Chappaqua, NY: Christian Herald Books, 1981), 185.

⁶ Olive Fleming Liefeld, *Unfolding Destinies: The Ongoing Story of the Auca Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1998; orig. 1990). See Hefley and Hefley, *Unstilled Voices*, 68.

⁷ Russell T. Hitt, *Jungle Pilot: The Life and Witness of Nate Saint* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), Ethel Emily Wallis, *The Dayuma Story: Life under Auca Spears* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), as well as such books as Ethel Emily Wallis and Mary Angela Bennett, *Two Thousand Tongues to Go: The Story of the Wycliffe Bible Translators* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959).

⁸ Hefley and Hefley use the term "pacification" a number of times in referring to SIL's program undertaken for the Ecuadoran government.

⁹ Long, *Rainforest*, 175.

¹⁰ Louis Wolf, "Pious Infiltrators: The Summer Institute of Linguistics," *Covert Action*, no. 18 (Winter 1983): 45, <https://archive.org/details/CovertActionInformationBulletinIssue18Winter1983CIAAndReligion/page/n43>. Wolf is citing from Laurie Hart, "Pacifying the Last Frontiers: Story of the Wycliffe Translators," *NACLA's Latin America & Empire Report* (December 1973): 22. See discussion by Long, *Rainforest*, 175 and 387n19.

¹¹ Long, *Rainforest*, 175.

¹² Long, *Rainforest*, 205; see elaboration on 206.

¹³ Long, *Rainforest*, 167.

¹⁴ Long, *Rainforest*, 211.

¹⁵ Long, *Rainforest*, 275.

¹⁶ Long, *Rainforest*, 281.

¹⁷ Long, *Rainforest*, 275.

¹⁸ Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018) and R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians: Two and a Half Centuries of Partnership in Missions between Protestant Churches and Government* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1966).

¹⁹ Hefley and Hefley, *Unstilled Voices*.

²⁰ Long, *Rainforest*, 301.

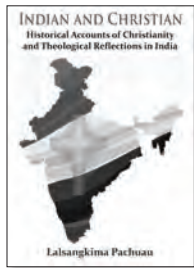
²¹ Long, *Rainforest*, 385n21.

²² Long, *Rainforest*, 210.

²³ Long, *Rainforest*, 301.

Indian and Christian: Historical Accounts of Christianity and Theological Reflections in India, by Lalsangkima Pachuau (Delhi: ISPCK, 2019), vii + 198 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This brief collection of seven previously published essays constitutes an excellent introduction to Christianity in India and issues related to the gospel among India's peoples. In his brief introduction the author refers to an "epistemic moment" on noticing a book on Ethnonationalism; that term encompassed a reality that the

author, a Mizo from the far northeast of India who is Dean of Advanced Research Programs at Asbury Seminary, had not yet been able to put his finger on. He goes on to describe his book by saying that "At the heart of these accounts is what it means to be an Indian Christian."

Part one is three essays on "Indian Christianity and Indian National Identity." The first essay is a stimulating discussion of Mahatma Gandhi and his meaning in and for Indian Christianity. The title is profound and provocative: "Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalit Movement to Christianity in India: Clashing of 'Mass Movements.'" Complex and controversial topics are handled with carefully nuanced arguments as the significance of nationalist India to Christianity is drawn out. Gandhi's discomfort with conversion has had a great influence on modern India; missionary and Indian Christian discomfort with Gandhi is helpfully analyzed. The practical wisdom evident throughout this small book is seen in the concluding sentence of this first chapter:

One should also recognize that Gandhi's disapproval and denigration of the missionary practice of mission also challenges Christians to be prudent in their understanding of conversion and practice of mission. (41)

Chapter 2 develops the Gandhian angle further by looking at nationalism and Indian Christians. This begins with a stark acknowledgement that "only a small minority elite group of Christians participated in the nationalist movement" (48). This is then nuanced with the fact that the nationalist movement was an urban elitist movement, and most of Indian Christianity was rural and poor and low caste, segments of the populace that in general were not interested in the political agitation. The main impact

of the nationalist movement on Indian Christianity is seen in strong moves to make the church more Indian. This is traced through the Madras Rethinking Group, the Christian ashram movement, and the much more conservative Indian Theological Conferences up through the dialogue and nation building focus to the emergence of Dalit theology.

Chapter 3 looks at the transition from foreign missions in India to the indigenous missions of the Indian church in the post-independence period. This includes a valuable summary of the progress of policies restricting foreign missionaries beginning in the early 1950s. The development of indigenous Indian missions is easily traced in early independent organizations, but gets too complicated for neat summary as foreign missions always relied heavily on local workers and then eventually passed on all responsibilities, and many independent churches and individuals are active now.

It is impossible to know how many Indian missionaries are working in India today. But it is clear that there are more "missionaries" in India today than ever before, and almost all of these missionaries are Indians. (97)

This chapter includes brief discussions of the evangelism vs. social action tension as it manifested in India, and on following Jesus outside of Christianity.

Part two is two chapters on "India's Theologies in Their Religious Contexts." The fourth chapter is perhaps the most ambitious in the book, as it takes on the interaction of Hindu and Christian traditions, focusing on their views on sacred texts. After summarizing Hindu views of scripture, the Hindu response to Christ and the Bible comes into focus, referencing both fundamentalist anti-Christian responses and positive absorption-of-Christ syncretism. Pachuau concludes his survey saying that "There is no room for haste in the Hindu world. The biblical message and essential Christian beliefs will have to be translated into practical and realistic living principles" (123). And the encounter of the gospel with Hindu traditions has to be from *inside* those traditions, not as an attack from a foreign religion (122–124).

Chapter 5 turns to the author's own Mizo people of north-east India, also the focus of his doctoral work. He begins with the confusion over "religion" and "tribal religion" based on the alien worldview of missionaries imposed onto an indigenous term.

Any study of the primal religion of most tribal groups such as the Mizos must avoid the highly western sacred-profane

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Pachau concludes his survey saying, “There is no room for haste in the Hindu world. The biblical message and essential Christian beliefs will have to be translated into practical and realistic living principles.”

dichotomy and look at the entire socio-cultural life system for the meaning of the people’s religion and religiosity.... The interconnectedness of all aspects of life in the society and the interlocking meanings of symbols of various domains of life do not permit such clear dichotomy, as life is seen and treated as one whole. (128)

The chapter goes on to argue against the idea that tribal ways were all abandoned in favor of the new way of Christianity; rather “traditional primal religion as well as religiosity live on in some form to become a foundation for the newly embraced Christian religion” (129). The total conversion of Mizos in about half a century shows there was resonance in serious areas, as outlined in this chapter. Even the Mizo Christian focus on revivals is traced to their tribal heritage. This is stimulating and important material for missiological reflection.

The final section of two chapters is on “Christianity and Nationhood in Northeast India.” Chapter 6 surveys the seven states in the region and how Christianity was introduced. This is an excellent brief summary of the area where over a quarter of Indian Christians live (157). In a one sentence summary:

If one is to give an overview of how Christianity spread in Northeast India, it may be said that the missionaries initiated the movement by introducing Christianity to a few individuals, and the native converts spread it. (175)

The concluding chapter “is a modest attempt to highlight the complexities of ethnopolitics in Northeast India” (194). Serious political unrest and movements to separate from India in the most Christian part of the country contribute to India’s unease with Christianity. Dual influences of Sanskritization (or Hinduization) and westernization are noted. “Tribal” identity is a constitutional category (“Scheduled Tribes”) but this is hardly a meaningful designation due to the diversity of peoples across India who are so listed.

The list of criteria includes “tribal language, animism, primitivity, hunting and gathering, ‘carnivorous in food habits,’ ‘naked or semi-naked,’ and fond of drinking and dance.” The list, in my opinion, is simply absurd; and the criteria do not match those listed. (190)

This is simply ethno-centric prejudice, and “an honest recognition of the pain and harm caused by [this] marginalization” (194) is a necessary part of solving the political tensions. But this is a double-edged issue, and “Northeasterners also need to self-critically examine the practice of stereotypical constructions of the image of the ‘outsiders’” (194).

There are so many Christianities in India and so many complex challenges in that vast nation that a simple introduction is impossible. This book is not simple, and does not shirk the complexities of the gospel encounter with both existing Christianities and the variegated cultural traditions of India. It is not by any means a thorough introduction to Christianity in India, but it is a well-reasoned engagement with that complex world and is highly recommended for anyone who wants to start towards an understanding of that fascinating sub-continent and what “good news” means in worlds so foreign to traditional Christendom.

The Cow in the Elevator: An Anthropology of Wonder, by Tulasi Srinivas (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), xvii + 269 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



The odd title of this book illustrates one of the tensions under discussion. Auspicious cows are often part of house-warming ceremonies, but it gets a bit complicated when the “house” is an apartment in a high-rise building in Malleshwaram in modern Bangalore.

A peculiar benefit of this book is present in another oddity; the research was initially done in 1998, but was interrupted by the death of the author’s father (noted sociologist M. N. Srinivas). In her own words, “In the following thirteen years, in a vain attempt to return to my previously unbroken life, I forced myself repeatedly to Malleshwaram and to the temples” (59). When the author finally returned to her research, Bangalore (and Hinduism) had changed.

The book is not arranged chronologically, rather topically. Thus, the changes between the first and second phases of research are outlined in each chapter. An opening chapter introduces the key players, particularly priests at two Hindu temples but also including the city of Bangalore and Malleshwaram and the key concept of wonder as the heart of religious experience. A weakness of the book is that “wonder” sometimes seems forced into discussions, and dubious means of creating a sense of wonder are not adequately critiqued.

This statement prepares the reader for what lies ahead in the book:

Against expectations of growing secularism, India has seen a remarkable and visible growth in ritual acts largely due to the

Against expectations of growing secularism, India has seen a remarkable and visible growth in ritual acts largely due to the growth of the boomtown bourgeoisie. Ritual life allows people hope to survive and flourish. —Srinivas

growth of the boomtown bourgeoisie. Funds from the market economy have enabled temples to be built and restored, allowed forgotten pujas to take place, revived ancient ancestor sacrificial ceremonies, and resurrected many deities. . . . Ritual life is full, competitive, and intense . . . because it seemingly allows people hope to survive and flourish in times of extreme uncertainty and change. (15)

The first chapter deals with space and the remarkable transformation of Malleshwaram,

from low-lying, middle-class, and upper-caste small bungalows of local “old money” families to vertical upper-middle-class luxury apartment complexes, largely occupied by a new, boomtown bourgeoisie, a global software workforce, to whom locality and ecology seemed unimportant (38).

Uncertainty and insecurity fuel a return to Hindu ways, including Vaastu, which claims scientific confirmation for traditional patterns for the layout of houses and apartments.

Chapter 2 focuses on a common ritual where deities are taken from their temples on procession into surrounding neighborhoods. An extensive ethnographic description is provided with profound explanations comparing modern marriage relationships with the “marriage” of the temple deities. But during the interlude in the research, everything changed. One rather cosmetic change was a printed program with a timetable, in English rather than Kannada or Tamil. The order of the procession, which carried so much of the profound relationship to human marital relations, had been changed; more oddly, no one seemed to mind, and the traditional Brahman family had European members by marriage who were honored by the Brahman priests. Modernity is forcing massive adjustments to traditional Hindu practices and attitudes.

Money and wealth come into focus in the third chapter, and how wealth is flaunted both in society and in temples. Srinivas is troubled by this, and the corresponding neglect and even disregard for the poor: “Troublingly in Malleshwaram the pursuit of wonder led not to the ethical goal of inclusivity but to individual gain and the criminalization of the poor” (128). Yet with all the flow of money there is a breakdown of trust, and temple priests are not highly regarded figures. Both Hindu and Christian traditions (Christianity is not in the book; only mentioned here due to the context of this review) have long histories of distrust of wealth as a blinding and binding force over people; yet both now have prosperity theologies that are oblivious to the traditional perspectives. Technology and innovation, including new spectacles in the temples of Malleshwaram,

are highlighted in the fourth chapter. The wonder and money-making potential of new developments (a helicopter dropping rose petals, red powder and holy water on a deity and devotees is one example) draws crowds to the temple. Ritual and innovation are then discussed and illustrated, and Hindu ritual is “understood to inherently accept and promote experimentation . . . even juxtaposition of seemingly conflicting elements” (169).

The final chapter looks at time, both in traditional senses and in the disjointed sense of call center workers in Bangalore who work on USA time schedules (i.e., up all night and asleep all day). Everything has become rushed in the modern city, and new methods of coping are developed. A dilapidated Mariamman temple, traditionally a goddess to invoke about infectious diseases, has been reconstructed and is thriving as a talisman against traffic accidents (196–98).

In her conclusion Srinivas states:

I began this work suggesting that this book be read as a folio composed of fragments of creative experiments. But at the end, I realize that what I offer here is more a manual of wonder combined with a ledger of possibility. (214)

Readers will no doubt feel differently about aspects of the book, and many different conclusions can be drawn. At the least the book is valuable for documenting change in Hindu traditions in modern urban India. **IJFM**