

acknowledges the importance not simply of reading Bonhoeffer but seeing how others have read and represented him. The figures of the International Bonhoeffer Society are very much a presence throughout, and the volume draws fully from that extraordinary, indeed heroic, odyssey of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, in the largely parallel editions produced in Germany between 1986 and 1999 and in the United States between 1996 and 2014.

These two volumes certainly show to what extent Barth and Bonhoeffer continue to inspire new discussions within theology faculties. Both also reveal the extent to which North American scholarship now defines and dominates the field. Of the thirty-two contributors to the *Handbook* on Karl Barth, twenty-three are to be found there; of the thirty-two contributors to the *Handbook* on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the number is fifteen. To the Australian Mark Lindsay belongs the distinction of contributing to both volumes. There is much of substance here that confirms the wisdom of those long established as leading lights. Other names achieve much, if not more, in extending the scope of the general reflection. To be sure, the conventional historical picture is not very much altered by anything here. Even so, church historians will certainly take note.

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Missionaries in the golden age of Hollywood. Race, gender, and spirituality on the big screen.

By Douglas Carl Abrams. (Studies in the History of the Media.) Pp. 246. Cham:

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Missionaries often turn up in commercial films set in exotic locales. A romance or an adventure epic set in nineteenth- or twentieth-century Asia, Africa or the South Pacific might have missionaries as central characters, but more often they are like the palm trees, the tropical weather and the indigenous peoples. They make up the environment for the white explorers, diplomats, businessmen, naval officers, anthropologists and journalists whose stories the filmmakers want to tell. Douglas Carl Abrams is aware of this distinction between missionaries as central characters and as props. But in *Missionaries in the golden age of Hollywood* he applies this distinction sparingly. He makes missionaries more important to movies than they often are. Yet a result of this expansive view is all the more comprehensive a study of the topic. Most of Abrams's attention properly goes to American films from the early 1930s through the 1960s, but he studies seventy American and British commercial films ranging from early silent films like Raoul Walsh's *Sadie Thompson* (1928) to Martin Scorsese's *Silence* (2016).

The movies most relevant to Abrams's project are Lewis Milestone's *Rain* (1932), Frank Capra's *The bitter tea of General Yen* (1933), John M. Stahl's *The keys of the kingdom* (1944), John Huston's *The African queen* (1951), Henry Hathaway's *White witch doctor* (1953), Mark Robson's *The inn of sixth happiness* (1958), Fred Zimmerman's *The nun's story* (1959), Gordon Douglas's *The sins of Rachel Cade* (1961) and George Roy Hill's *Hawaii* (1966). Abrams has valuable things to say about all nine of these movies, but instead of taking each one on its own terms, and showing just what the missionary element means in each case, he confronts each film multiple times in a series of thematic chapters on race,

gender, class, spirituality, social justice and apostasy. The result is a regrettable mish-mash, in which the artistic and thematic unity of any given film is lost in Abrams's demonstration that some directors were more concerned than others to deal with his list of specific issues. Too often, moreover, Abrams comes across as a referee of an ethical sweepstake, giving points to directors who move in wholesome anti-racist, anti-misogynist directions, while withholding points from others.

The closest Abrams come to sustained analysis of a single film is his treatment (pp. 21–9) of *The bitter tea of General Yen*, in which Barbara Stanwyck plays an American missionary woman attracted to – and alternately repulsed by – a Chinese warlord. Abrams shows how this film approaches a non-racist perspective on the Chinese people, but is constantly drawn back into gestures of white and Christian superiority. *The sins of Rachel Cade* would have been a fine candidate for holistic analysis. The Belgian Congo in World War II serves as the setting for this movie's Hollywood-style sexual awakening of a missionary nurse played by Angie Dickinson. The spinster nurse becomes pregnant after an anxious moment of intimacy with a doctor briefly visiting the mission. She keeps the child and refuses the opportunity to marry and depart from Africa, preferring to continue her missionary work among the grateful and admiring Black inhabitants of the Congo. Yet the reader must put this together from eight of Abrams's scattered pages.

Most of the films discussed in this book were inspired by novels or memoirs, but Abrams's often instructive explanations of how films differed from books are distributed among the chapter-fragments. This oddity in presentation is all the more frustrating since one of Abrams's chief findings – although he never states it clearly – is that movie-makers usually dumbed-down the religious particularity of the texts on which they are based, and often diminished the role of missionaries in the story as found in the books. Abrams is keen to impress upon the reader the importance of film as a distinctive mode of communication, but he downplays the role of the filmmakers' cultural tastes and commercial goals. Hollywood characteristically added '*The sins of*' to the title of *Rachel Cade*, a novel of 1956 by Charles Mercer.

Missionaries are little more than part of the woodwork in some of the movies that most engage Abrams. John Ford's undoubtedly major film, *7 Women* (1966), is driven by the actions of an American expatriate physician, played by Anne Bancroft, who saves a group of missionaries by selling herself as a concubine. Mae West enlivens Raoul Welsh's *Klondike Annie* (1936) by playing a woman of loose morals pretending, for a short while, to be a missionary, but at issue in this tale about a Yukon mining camp is only the clever use of a stereotypical missionary *persona* for comic effect. Abrams goes far afield with Hugh Hudson's *Chariots of fire* (1981), which treats only the pre-missionary life of the great Scottish track star, Eric Liddell. This exceptionally popular film respects the missionary calling Liddell later exemplified in China, but it says nothing about the practice or significance of missions. Abrams displays a sound understanding of the 1984 British television series *The jewel in the crown*, but his attention to the one prominent missionary character – Barbie Batchelor – also takes him far from the movies in which missionaries are important and far from Hollywood's golden age.

A deeper problem with this book is Abrams's tendency to blur missionary engagements with more general religious concerns. A revealing case is *The bridge*

at *San Luis Rey*, a 1927 novel by Thornton Wilder that became the basis for three films (in 1929 by Charles Brabin, 1944 by Rowland W. Lee and 2004 by Mary McGuckian). A priest searches for signs that God had good reason to allow the deaths of five individuals killed when a bridge in the Peruvian Andes collapsed. Why them, instead of others? The priest is indeed an eighteenth-century Franciscan missionary. But what troubles the priest is general to Christianity, not specific to missions. Why does God do what he does, or allow to happen what happens? The saga has enjoyed such wide and enduring appeal because of how easily this classic theological dilemma can be detached from the missionary matrix that justifies Abrams's attention to it.

One finding which Abrams articulates clearly is that the movies of the mid-twentieth century decades accurately reflected the real-life role of foreign missions in expanding the horizons of the average American, exposing them to the diversity of humankind and challenging racial prejudices and the uncritical support of colonial empires. This effect is much more visible in some films than others, and one wishes that Abrams had kept some of them in focus long enough to see how this effect is achieved, and, equally important, where it is not. Abrams is well read in scholarship on missionaries, and successfully integrates his findings with the latest books and articles in the field. *Missionaries in the golden age of Hollywood* falls short of the superior book it might have become, but it gives us the most comprehensive account we have of missionaries as characters in commercial films.

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Britain and the German Churches, 1945–1950. The role of the Religious Affairs Branch in the British zone. By Peter Howson. (Studies in Modern British Religious History, 43.) Pp. xx + 285 incl. 1 map, 1 chart and 10 tables. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2021. £75. 978 1 78327 583 0
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‘What can one say of the Religious Affairs Branch?’ writes Peter Howson. ‘It is now rarely even a footnote to history’ (p. 255). In fact, he finds a great deal to say of it and there is much of value to learn from this patient, often meticulous, book. Howson is surely right to argue that the period which followed the defeat of Germany in May 1945 has been too little explored by historians of religion, who have often been preoccupied by the German church struggle in the years of the Third Reich. Once British Christians had viewed German events from abroad, at most coming and going, reflecting, protesting and intervening as best they could. But with the occupation and division of Germany British forces and government servants of all sorts not only lived in that country but became a part of its troubled narratives of political and economic reconstruction. Direct military occupation yielded a largely civilian Allied Control Commission charged with the task of overseeing demilitarisation, denazification and democratisation. An administrative structure for the whole, devastated country had to be invented quickly. Inevitably, it was a clumsy affair, once succinctly described by a British church report, quoted by Howson, as ‘an amateur bureaucracy struggling with colossal problems in a foreign country and largely through interpreters’ (p. 197). Berlin, now an island