

## Book Reviews

### **Revisiting Rahab: Another Look at the Woman of Jericho**

Russaw, Kimberly D.

Nashville, TN: Wesley's Foundry Books, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church

2021, 128 pp., paper, \$19.99

ISBN: 9781953052001

*Reviewed by Maggie Finch*

The story of Israelite spies escaping from Canaan and how one woman named Rahab helped save them plays an important part in both Jewish and Christian history. Numerous books have been written about the “red cord”, movies and television shows have captured her actions, sermons have been preached on her faithfulness and courage, and many children in Sunday School act out the spies’ harrowing escape with her help. But what if there was a different version of the story so many of us know?

Dr. Kimberly D. Russaw’s *Revisiting Rahab: Another Look at the Woman of Jericho* seeks to change the way many have understood this woman and her role in Israel’s story by revisiting it. Instead of leaving Rahab on the outside of the Israelite story, Russaw places her at the center. By the end of the book, Russaw has given readers exactly what she promised, a new way of looking at Rahab’s story and life.

The book is divided into an introduction and five chapters. In the introduction, Russaw lays out the story most readers have come to understand of Rahab and the Israelite spies. She then briefly overviews each chapter and its thesis. She reminds readers that this story is familiar to most, but that within each chapter she will take up a “different aspect of Rahab’s story and offer a distinct way of reading it” (6). Finally, she emphasizes that as a matriarch in King David’s family, her story and place in Israel’s legacy deserve a better understanding.

Chapter 1, “Representing Rahab--The Language of Zonah” takes the Hebrew word *zonah*--which has often been translated as “prostitute” or other similar terms--and looks at whether this is the best translation. Russaw breaks down the multitude of Hebrew words for “prostitute”, “whore”, and “harlot” and their uses in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Russaw shows that given its translation into “prostitute” or other variations of a female sex worker, in addition to the use of “prostituting” or “whoring” in other sections of scripture to connote unfaithful people, readers tend to view Rahab in a negative light going into the story.

Chapter 2, “Researching Rahab--Major Streams of Investigation” looks at the three commonly used approaches to reading and interpreting Rahab’s story: respectability, ethnic identity/group affiliation, and heroine. Russaw discusses that there is no one way to interpret or read Rahab’s story, but readers should hold different interpretations in tension.

Chapter 3, “Recasting Rahab--Reading Rahab with African American Literature” reads Rahab’s story through the lens of African American literature, specifically Nella Larsen’s *Passing* and *Quicksand*. This chapter discusses how Rahab’s story can be viewed through the idea of her “passing” in Israelite society. She uses Larsen’s characters to help readers better understand passing in general and for Rahab.

Chapter 4, “Revealing Rahab--A New Interpretive Strategy” Russaw utilizes rhetorical criticism to examine the power dynamics between Rahab and the Israelite spies. It is here that Russaw points out that, unlike how many read this story, Rahab may have been the more powerful in this setting. Rahab has something the Israelites need (protection from the Canaanites). She makes a deal with them for their safety to protect herself and her family. In this chapter, Russaw also points out the historical facts of what happened when Israel took over Canaan, something that is often overlooked when reading scripture alone.

Chapter 5, “Reconsidering Rahab--Possibilities in the Midst of the Israelites”, considers what life looked like for Rahab after Israel took over Canaan. Her story seems to end with the closing of Joshua, but in the New Testament (Matthew, Hebrews, and James) readers are given insight into Rahab’s later life. Readers often romanticize the life of Rahab after Joshua, imagining a happy marriage and raising children. Unfortunately, that is not likely the case as women were treated as spoils of war, often given in forced marriages to the winners of the war. This chapter challenges readers to rethink the romanticized versions of Rahab’s life that we have grown

accustomed to and instead view the lineage of King David as marginalized people brought about through acts of war.

Dr. Kimberly Russaw's book will make readers stop and think about Rahab's story. The book is an important read for anyone, but may take some time to understand if the reader does not have as strong a background in Biblical studies (i.e., the Hebrew language or Inductive Bible Studies). Her writing from a womanist perspective should not deter those who disagree with this theological perspective. Reading Rahab's story through the lenses of a marginalized person, instead of the story of the victor as we have so often done, gives us new insight into the real Rahab.

### **A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship: Understanding the Ideas that Reshaped the Protestant Church**

Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2021, 368 pp., paper, \$44.99

ISBN: 9780801098284

*Reviewed by Dylan Crosson*

In the book's title, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship*, authors Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong introduce a term whose definition accounts for the book's contents: "Contemporary Praise & Worship." According to Ruth and Lim, this term exists as an amalgamation of "Contemporary Worship" and "Praise & Worship"—two historically distinct phenomena that are often erroneously equated with one another. Over the course of its 300-page body, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship* combines archival research, personal interviews, and a broad review of literature to correct this false equivalency by tracing the ideologies of foundational figures within each respective branch. Instead of offering a list of impactful musicians or music within each branch, this book details the origins of the theologies undergirding each one. As readers will witness, this prioritization of how key figures "wrestled with the foundational text of their religion" (307), results in a chronology notably different from those histories concerned primarily with recording artists or stand-out albums. After clearly demarcating the boundary between "Contemporary Worship" and "Praise & Worship," Ruth and Lim splice the two together to explain

how the theologies and ideologies of each contribute to today's iteration of Contemporary Praise & Worship.

To illustrate the histories of Praise & Worship and Contemporary Worship, Ruth and Lim model each movement as a river, beginning with unique headwaters that carve wider channels as time progresses before ultimately merging together. *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship* begins with a focus on the headwaters of the "Praise & Worship" that takes readers to Canada in the 1940s. Here, one learns of the Pentecostal preacher Reg Layzell and the broader Latter Rain movement that reciprocated his worship philosophies. As the "apostle of praise," Layzell became a well-known speaker who championed worship modeled on Psalm 22:3 and Hebrews 13:15. Interpreting Psalm 22:3 as a promise, Layzell believed that God will not fail to be present when believers worship him. Turning to Hebrews 13:15, Layzell argued that this praise must be offered up regardless of one's emotional state as an act of obedience or as a "sacrifice of praise." Additionally, early Praise & Worship thinkers grafted onto their own worship frameworks the Old Testament worship typologies of both David's tabernacle as well as that of Moses. Beyond affirming the core tenets laid out in Layzell's two key verses, this strategy contributed to Praise & Worship's theological nucleus three additional principles: that the worship portion of a church service was primarily concerned with music, that the worship leader be a separate position from that of the church's minister that nonetheless takes up a priestly role, and that Praise & Worship was "a biblically derived, God-given pattern for worship" (126). For Praise & Worship adherents, music used during church services edified the congregation by ushering in God's presence so long as those gathered remained committed to worship as an act of faith.

While those of the Praise & Worship lineage felt music ought to benefit established Christians, practitioners of Contemporary Worship had a different aim for their music: evangelism and outreach. Ruth and Lim contend that this evangelistic orientation predates that of Praise & Worship as they trace its lineage through the United States' history of Christian revivals. In both the eighteenth and nineteenth century, these movements typically involved the pragmatic use of music to entice potential converts to religious gatherings, such as camp meetings, where preachers would urge attendees to commit their lives to Christ. Catering to their target audience, these evangelists freely emulated the music of the broader culture with the understanding that a change in musical form—in this case, the adoption

of popular music style—did not interfere with the music’s lyrical content containing scriptural truth. This principle makes not only the “subterranean stirrings” that constitute the origins of Contemporary Worship river, but it continuously feeds this branch throughout its history. As such, Part Two of *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship* traces different iterations of this ideal in action primarily between 1940-1985, whether it be in the youth musicals of Ralph Carmichael or its centrality to the music of the Church Growth Movement. While musical style may change, the conviction remains the same: music is best used to present the Gospel to the unchurched in a culturally relevant way.

*A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship* concludes with a section documenting the confluence of these two rivers in the mid-1990s resulting in the present paradigm that is Contemporary Praise & Worship. For many churchgoers, the evidence of this merger is everywhere; after all, how often has someone heard a worship leader encourage their congregation to bring a “sacrifice of praise” before launching into a pop-oriented worship song? Banking on the self-evidence of the phenomenon, Ruth and Lim do not dwell long on the present state of hybridity but they do mention some of the infrastructure, whether it be college degree programs in worship, or popular worship manuals in places that perpetuate this combination, before ending the book.

At the end of the book’s body, readers will find an appendix which features a two-columned timeline outlining parallel summaries of the movements and figures detailed in the book. Acting as both a summary of the book as well as a visual aid to relay the coexistence of the two movements, this appendix embodies the authors’ organizational prowess that results in arguably the book’s best feature: clarity. Within the narrative of each ideological stream, the principles of the people studied within the book are presented as lists, making for an approachable read, easily cited reference, and a strong contender for classroom use. Its commitment to a history of ideas means an avoidance of musical jargon that further boosts its appeal to a general audience. For those interested a historical understanding of evangelical music making of the twentieth century or even congregational music in general, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship* is a must read.

## **The Samurai and the Cross: The Jesuit Enterprise in Early Modern Japan**

M. Antoni J. Ucerler, S.J.

Oxford: Oxford University Press

2022, 469 pp., hardcover, \$39.95

ISBN: 9780195335439

*Reviewed by Greg S. Whyte*

The early modern Jesuit enterprise in Asia remains a fascinating piece of history. The Catholic faith seemed to be making significant gains in Japan throughout the sixteenth century, and then the tide suddenly turned and Christianity was officially labelled as an enemy of the state. In *The Samurai and the Cross*, Antoni Ucerler approaches this puzzle through the lens of key intellectual dilemmas that emerged from the encounter between these newly arrived foreign missionaries and the realities of Japanese culture, religion, and politics, and he presents it through the exploration of primary source documents of debates and discussions from among the Roman Catholic world of that era.

In the first of three sections, Ucerler considers the debates surrounding cultural adaptation of the church and the training of local clergy, ideas championed by Alessandro Valignano. Through his use of primary source documents, Ucerler successfully indicates that the Jesuits were not completely unified under Valignano's mission philosophy. According to Ucerler, Valignano's policies were based on the conviction that the situation in Japan (and, by extension, China) resembled that of the early church – which is noteworthy because of the official policy of Catholicism for uniformity at this time. Important in this section is Ucerler's treatment of a catechismal document addressing the concerns and questions of Japanese Christians – which shows a certain level of adaptability in mission practice.

The second section of the book explores the views of those challenging Valignano's ideas – namely Alonso Sanchez in the Philippines, and Gaspard Coelho and Luis Frois in Japan, and their desire for conquest and the marriage of European colonialism with missionary conquest, similar to what had occurred in Latin America. The most poignant aspect of the narrative that Ucerler draws out in this section is the global nature of the controversy itself. There is a temptation to ignore the global for the sake of the local when considering history; however, Ucerler illustrates the

interconnectedness of the Jesuit missionary enterprise of the time – as well as the mutually-affecting nature of world events.

The final major section of the book describes the situation with temporal politics, including the donation of Nagasaki, a port town gifted to the Jesuits by the local lord, Omura Sumitada, and how this also affected the portrayal of the Jesuits by the Japanese government. An aspect of this explored by Ucerler was the documents showing official Japanese state propaganda even a century later of the ‘evil law’ that was Christianity, which showed that the concern of the Shogunate government was not so much foreign invasion but rebellion from within, such as what happened among certain Buddhist sects during the Warring States period.

Ucerler draws out some significant elements in the conversation about what happened to end the “Christian Century” of the early modern Jesuit mission in Japan. By providing the primary source details that he does, he allows us to catch a glimpse into significant elements that led to the Japanese government outlawing Christianity in the seventeenth century.

### **Do Everything: The Biography of Frances Willard**

Christopher H. Evans

New York, NY: Oxford University Press

2022, 408 pp., hardcover, \$39.95

ISBN: 9780190914073

*Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts*

Christopher H. Evans’s study of the nineteenth-century reformer and leader of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Frances Willard, is a detailed and critical look at an influential giant who has faded from contemporary view. While the culture surrounding the temperance movement and the history that led to Prohibition may seem like an antiquated cul-de-sac in the American experiment, *Do Everything* vibrates with parallels and antecedents that show how this era was formative in shaping the political and social conversation of today. This seems especially true of the areas where Willard had her strongest base of support, the American Midwest. *Do Everything* is a masterful explication of a single life which, even long after ceasing to be a household name, continues to cast a massive shadow.



Credit must be given to Evans for his portrait of Willard. She does not come across as a person easily aligned with the recent political packaging of conservatives or liberals. Willard is a complex character with surprising depth that shifts and develops over time. She is a loyal Methodist and evangelical, but constantly at odds with her church's male hierarchy and open to people beyond the boundaries of her tradition. She pushes for women's suffrage and feminist causes but does so from a traditionalist position on gender roles and family life. While valorizing this view of family purity and becoming an American ideal of womanhood, she herself never marries and surrounds herself with female relationships. She takes great pride in her abolitionist family background and the openness of the WCTU to members of all races, yet she does not correct the racist points in her rhetoric even after being given notice, often takes the side of white Southerners regarding ongoing discrimination, and becomes embroiled in a legacy-damaging controversy with Ida B. Wells on the issue of lynching. She steers the WCTU through numerous political stances and comes to embrace a pro-labor, socialist view over time. Adored and renowned, with people talking about her being president of the United States someday, she was also frustrated in many of her causes, especially the one at the center of her organization: temperance. Willard defies being boxed into a neat political category, being both strongly conservative and surprisingly progressive for her time.

With all of her faults, contradictions, and shortcomings, though, even a critical summary of Willard's life reveals a woman of tireless courage who endlessly took on new causes and fought for wide-ranging issues that were not easily acceptable to the mainstream in the United States. Temperance, suffrage, labor, prostitution, policing, the Armenian genocide, education, leisure: the list of issues on which she was willing to lead the WCTU into the fray was ever evolving. This was her "Do Everything policy," a policy that gained her loud accolades and constant criticism. The criticism was often internal to the WCTU, with new planks in the Do Everything Policy becoming rallying points for questioning of Willard's leadership. Especially by tying temperance to women's suffrage, there were many who believed she was dooming both causes, and she did not live to see the culmination of either in amendments to the U.S. Constitution. However, even for someone who is not sympathetic to Willard's stances, there is something heroic about the way she attempted to use her fame and power to selflessly fill a lifetime with doing as much good as possible.



While Frances Willard and the temperance movement may seem removed from the debates of today, Evans's biography rewards the reader in many ways. Methodologically, it is worthwhile to watch a skillful historian draw together sources into a full-orbed description. It also develops an important thread in explaining how the contours of conservative politics and evangelicalism in the American Midwest came to be. As a biography, though, it rewards attention by allowing the reader to cross a distance of time and discover beneath the mix of successes and failures, praise and controversy, a human being.

**Perception and Identity: A Study of the Relationship between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Evangelical Churches in Ethiopia**

Daniel Seblewengel

Carlisle, England: Langham Monographs

2019, 463 pp., paper, \$47.99

ISBN: 9781783686346

*Reviewed by Calum Samuelson*

This book attempts something very important for the country of Ethiopia, especially when considering the tragic violence that has occurred in Tigray and other regions since its publication in 2019. Seblewengel Daniel is an appropriate person for this project not only because she is Ethiopian, but also because she was guided by the great minds of both Kwame Bediako and Andrew F. Walls. This monograph is the outworking of her doctoral program at Akrofi-Christaller Institute in Ghana and makes some useful contributions to the fields of Missiology and African Christian Theology. Daniel accomplishes this mainly through private interviews and by bringing to light material found in missionary journal manuscripts in the Special Collections of the University of Birmingham. Ultimately, this book is probably best understood as a signal for the colossal scale of work that still remains in bringing reconciliation between the Orthodox and Protestant Christians in Ethiopia.

The Introduction (Chapter 1) lays out some ambitious goals by citing three significant pieces of scholarship that the author intends to build upon: Bediako's *Theology and Identity*, Walls' *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, and Sanneh's *Translating the Message*. The author's

stated intention of using “mainly historical and theological frameworks” (3) is mostly adhered to throughout the book.

An adequate history of Ethiopian Christianity is provided in Chapter 2, something that is not an easy task considering the complexity involved. Here, the content is meant to serve the later discussion by informing readers of the characteristic features of the traditions involved. To this end, explanations about the *Gə‘əz* (ግዕዝ) language, Axumite and successive monarchs, monasticism, Judaism, and indigenous pagan beliefs are indeed helpful and necessary for ensuing discussions about the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC).

Chapters 3 and 4 offer the bulk of unique material in this book. Daniel draws upon extensive first-hand accounts to provide a detailed view of the realities at play during the missionary efforts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Especially noteworthy are the journal entries and letters of Rev. Samuel Gobat and Rev. Christian Kugler of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) because of their unprecedented encounters and unique methods. Daniel correctly highlights the fact that the CMS was distinct from most successive mission organizations because it did not attempt to plant new churches but rather sought to work with the indigenous, “Abyssinian” church.

Chapters 5 and 6 essentially rehearse the long-standing disagreements and accusations between the EOC and Evangelicals. These chapters are important but do not represent much unique material beyond what is already known by most Christians in Ethiopia. Finally, although the Conclusion (Chapter 7) is only twenty pages long, it introduces several new and intriguing ideas for the very first time (e.g. Globalization, methods of Bible study, the place of emotions in religion).

It is apparent that a great deal of careful research lays behind this publication and surely its greatest strength is the way that Daniel explicates the hand-written accounts of early Protestant missionaries in Ethiopia. These yield invaluable insights about the nature of the EOC at a pivotal time in history. In this process, Daniel is usually attentive to distinguishing between the missionaries’ perspectives (which are occasionally racist and biased) and the more objective reality. However, it is sometimes difficult for the reader to differentiate between the claims of the missionaries and the claims of the author, not least because quotations are often unmarked by correct punctuation. Indeed, the number of grammatical and typographical errors (as well as the introduction of new material in the Conclusion) give an impression that the author ran out of time to integrate fully all of her

findings. Overall, the greatest drawback of this book is that many of the arguments lack the nuance that would have made them truly original and impactful.

By highlighting the three important works in the Introduction (especially those from Bediako and Walls), many readers will anticipate interaction throughout the text. Unfortunately, little explicit engagement with or integration of these works occurs until the Conclusion nearly 400 pages later. Furthermore, while the book obviously “explores” historical and contemporary interactions between Orthodox and Evangelicals in Ethiopia (9), the overarching goal beyond providing “some recommendations” for improvement is somewhat less clear (10).

Because the Orthodox tradition in Ethiopia is clearly much older than Protestantism, Daniel appropriately focuses on the peculiar theological features of the EOC. The fact that knowledge of Protestant (and “Evangelical”) doctrine is mostly taken for granted strongly suggests that the anticipated audience will mostly be comprised of Protestants who are unfamiliar with Orthodox theology (cf. statement about “the Orthodox reader” on page 177). Moreover, Daniel deals quite effectively with the impact of key Ethiopian figures such as Täklä Haymanot and Zär’a Ya’əqob. Unfortunately, the discussion of core Orthodox concepts is problematic for several reasons, especially in Chapter 2. First, Daniel’s reliance upon obsolete resources (Kaplan, 1982; Kretschmar, 1966; Schaff and Wace, 1900) prevents her from accurately conveying the ideas accepted by contemporary Orthodox adherents. Second, much terminology used is unfitting. In order to fairly represent the “self-perception” of the Orthodox, “images” should be called “icons”, “traditional writings” should be called “Patristic writings” (or clearly distinguished from them), only “veneration” should be used with reference to the cult of saints, and the Western notion of “canon” should be abandoned—especially in the Ethiopian context (cf. Bruk A. Asale, 2016). Third, primary theological texts are never consulted in *Gə‘əz* but only in Amharic translation. Although this may give some sense of how the modern EOC understands certain concepts, it obscures the semantic range and motivations involved in the difficult process of translation. Ironically, this seems to affect Daniel’s grasp of Ethiopia’s quintessential response to Chalcedon since she fails to discuss the nuanced understanding of ተዋሕዶ (*təwəḥədo*) nor even mention the importance of Coptic “miaphysite” theology. To be fair to the author, however, the EOC is unusual in its position on the periphery of Orthodoxy and *Gə‘əz* sources are

notoriously inaccessible. Nonetheless, it is difficult for this reviewer to see how any Orthodox Christian would be encouraged or inspired by reading this book.

Chapters 3 and 4 are easily the strongest of the book. Daniel generally commends and critiques the behaviours of both missionaries and Ethiopians with a healthy balance. Daniel's observation that the "power encounter" with pagan systems and demonic forces was a common feature of both modern missionary activity and traditional monastic activity is especially helpful (43). It is also commendable that Daniel emphasizes the ineffectiveness of "propositional truth" in contrast to the sincere and loving lifestyle of the missionaries (174). One regrettable element of Daniel's presentation in this section relates to what she repeatedly calls "traditional writings," which she seems to think were passed down with "little or no reflection" (265). Her earlier claim that such writings held a higher status than the Bible that "resulted in a general decline of morality" is a shocking and unsubstantiated assertion (64).

The last two main chapters of the book (5 and 6) mostly offer a fair portrayal of "mutual antagonism and misunderstanding". Probably the best portions of this section are the quotations from Orthodox theologians whom Daniel interviewed. These quotes provide strong apologetic explanations on vital issues such as the role of Mary and the intercession of saints. Unfortunately, almost every instance of these explanations is followed by a rebuttal from Daniel, who consistently cites examples to the contrary from popular sources. Although this lends a helpful sense of the broad theological spectrum found in Ethiopia, this level of critique is not equally applied to problematic Protestant practices or doctrines. Thus, Daniel could have been more diligent in comparing "like with like". This is especially true when considering Orthodox priests and monks. Some Orthodox clergy receive very little education or even feign ignorance in line with the tradition of "holy fools". However, the EOC is quite clear concerning the most respected individuals who are entrusted as "guardians" or "custodians" of the sacred teachings of the church. These are known as መጋቤ ሐዲስ / ብሉይ (*mägabe baluy / haddis*), and it is regrettable that their perspectives could not have featured more prominently in this book—particularly to provide balance to the repeated examples of the missionaries' experiences with "ignorant", rural priests.

Just as Daniel frequently offers good perspectives that are either outdated or incomplete, some discussions about key features of the EOC are

mostly satisfactory except for important errors. For instance, her comments about the አንድምታ (*andamta*) are appreciated, but it is not true that the EOC views it as “infallible” (55). Again, Daniel is correct to note the Ethiopian reliance upon the LXX, but it is untrue that their only addition is the book of 1 Enoch (i.e. Jubilees).

Finally, as we have already mentioned, although the Conclusion to the book is quite brief, it contains a surprising amount of new material. Much of this is highly interesting and important. This reviewer simply wishes that such discussion could have been treated in more depth during the major sections of the book. Most disappointing is Daniel’s engagement with the important thinking of Andrew F. Walls. Just four pages from the end we finally revisit his threefold paradigm for approaching the dissemination of Christian faith. Daniel’s insights are astute and valuable, but she is unable to realize their full potential in relation to previous chapters. Similarly, the only clear original “recommendations” to be found besides general calls for “dialogue” appear in a single sentence of the penultimate paragraph and are directed towards Evangelicals: “to develop a positive Mariology and to stop encouraging people to leave the Orthodox Church” (404). These are certainly vital and in line with the book’s overarching thrust, but readers will almost inevitably be left with a desire for more concrete points of action. This reviewer believes that increased discussion about the influence of African Traditional Religions especially could have immensely bolstered this project and the exploration of the unique “identity” of Ethiopian Christians (which could have come from more focused engagement with Bediako’s text). Lastly, if this book is, indeed, primarily intended for Evangelicals unfamiliar with Christianity in Ethiopia, a simple map including the various locations discussed would have been a beneficial addition.

In sum, this book represents a vital step forward in the academic study of Orthodox-Protestant relations in Ethiopia. Despite its shortcomings, it will serve as a crucial resource for others pursuing similar studies and should encourage scholars to build upon its foundations.

