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***Mission Station Christianity: Norwegian Missionaries in Colonial Natal and Zululand, southern Africa, 1850-1890*, by INGIE HOVLAND. Leiden: Brill, 2013. xi + 263 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-25488-6.**

*Mission Station Christianity* is a social anthropology of Norwegian Missionaries in Colonial Natal and Zululand in the second half of the nineteenth century. The book explores two features of Norwegian mission work that shaped missionary practice in southern Africa, firstly the tendency for missionary work to be centred around a number of fixed mission stations as opposed to being itinerant, and secondly the increasing tendency of white missionaries to racialise their mission practice, that is to maintain a differentiation between Zulu converts and white missionaries despite their theoretical adherence to Christian universalism. These characteristics, Hovland argues, are linked and can be unpicked through careful ethnographic work in the archives.

The most significant contribution that *Mission Station Christianity* makes to the existing literature on Christian missions in southern Africa is to take Christianity seriously as a theological system and a subject of anthropological attention in its own right, rather than simply treating it as a tool of empire cynically used to justify colonial expansion. Over the past few years, scholars of missions from very different approaches have drawn attention to the omission of questions of faith or religion to the historiography of missionaries, otherwise a reasonably well-populated field. Andrew Porter, for example, has argued for 'the historian's need to recognise that Nonconformists, evangelicals and others took their theology and their religion seriously and applied them to considerable practical effect.'<sup>1</sup> Given how central Christian belief was to missionaries, its omission seems ironic at best and outrageous at worst – how can we understand those who sacrificed their very lives for a faith with which we will not engage? Missionaries were inspired by and committed to a religious project. This book demonstrates how Lutheran Christianity inflected the way in which missionaries saw themselves, viewed their bodies, imagined their souls, performed their everyday lives, conducted their familial relationships, and drove them in their missionary careers.

This is not to say that the relationship between Christianity, missionary practice, and colonialism is not interrogated in this study: there are two ways in which this is done. Most obviously, an excellent concluding chapter focuses on the Anglo-Zulu War. Here, Hovland demonstrates how, despite Norway's supposed political neutrality, and its position as a state in forced union with Sweden and thus possibly sympathetic to the plight of the colonised, during the Anglo-Zulu War, Norwegian missionaries became increasingly implicated in colonial practice. The political turbulence in the run-up to the conflict and the rumours that circulated had a destabilising effect on the Norwegian missions that the missionaries were anxious to have resolved. Missionaries also 'courted' the British Empire offering up local information that the British could essentially use to their advantage. As Hovland demonstrates, missionaries were also able to justify the British expansion into Zululand theologically through the so-called 'Humiliation Thesis' whereby it was believed (or at least hoped) that the crushing effect of the war would have a transformative effect on the Zulus, pushing them towards Christianity. As is demonstrated this had mixed success with some turning to Christianity whilst others associated the Norwegian missionaries with British imperialists, reading them simply as white profiteers of the conflict.

The second useful way in which Hovland interrogates the relationship between missionary practice and colonialism is by looking at the broader process by which missionaries came to differentiate between themselves as white, European, Christians and their black, Zulu, converts. This is a complex

process which Hovland illuminates well. Her chapter on converts for example, explores the way in which the missionaries operated a 'double vision' which held out 'the promise of a new Christian status to the converts on the one hand, while on the other firmly establishing that Africans would always be Africans' (117). She demonstrates this through using the examples of clothes (the adoption of western dress) and names (the practice of a convert gaining a new name – often Biblical and/or European upon conversion) to demonstrate the missionary desire to create converts in their own image, and yet their policing of a boundary between what Europeans were deemed to be and what converts were allowed to become. Clothes and names are also examples of ways in which Hovland is successful in challenging some of the assumptions of passivity that have characterised other missionary scholarship – the suggestion that Africans were simply 'renamed' or known by 'names that were not their own' within the mission is effectively challenged with evidence of the agency the Zulus exercised in this complex process of re-invention.

The space of the mission station is another area that Hovland is successful in illuminating for the reader. Chapter Six, 'The Missionary Imagination: Spatial Christianization', for example explores the space of the mission station from six different perspectives thinking about the mission station as a trophy, as a place of foreignness, loneliness or threat, the mission stations as a miniature model of an alternative society, Christianity, civilisation and colonialism, and mission stations as heterotopias. This chapter also contains some interesting image analysis looking at the discrepancies between the visual representation of the mission stations in *Norsk Missions-Tidende* (or *Norwegian Missionary Tidings* a missionary magazine and key source for Hovland) and what can be gleaned about the physicality of the mission station from missionary letters.

This is an anthropological work rather than a historical one and Hovland is clearly inspired by the work of the Comaroffs (though her book offers some useful challenges and nuances to this canonical work in southern African history). One of the features that characterises the writing is the attention to method. Chapters are often interrupted with 'a note on method' in which Hovland elucidates her approach. For the most part these breaks in the narrative are helpful offering valuable insights into the ways in which Hovland analyses the material.

Overall, there is much to commend this study. Whilst the focus of the book is relatively narrow, it offers historical, anthropological and methodological insights into missionary practice in southern Africa more broadly and is a welcome addition to the field.

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<sup>i</sup> Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester, 2004); pp. 10-11.