

Biography As Missiology: A Reflection Upon The Writing of Missionary Lives

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Biographical writing in one form or another has dominated the historiography of Christian mission since Luke set down for Theophilus the Acts of the Apostles. Much of our knowledge of Christian expansion prior to the seventeenth century would be lost without the biographical data provided by medieval hagiographies and histories such as Adamnan's *Life of Columba*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, and Rimbert's *Life of Anskar*. The unprecedented global expansion of western Christianity that accompanied modern European colonialism has likewise been chronicled in a seemingly endless stream of biographical narratives. Indeed, during the high imperial era of the nineteenth century, Protestants in North America and Western Europe exhibited an insatiable appetite for missionary biography, a genre that powerfully shaped colonial images of the exotic "cultural other." Although missionaries have lost much of their public stature during the twentieth century, Christian publishers such as Regal, Moody Press, Bethany House, William Carey Library, and Harold Shaw continue to sell missionary biographies to evangelical consumers at a brisk pace that shows no sign of slowing. The mission historian Ruth Tucker, who authored the best-selling *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: a Biographical History of Christian Missions*, is probably correct in her observation that there have "been more biographies and autobiographies of missionaries per capita than of any other profession."³
