

"Bibliographia Missionaria: Thermometer of Missiology," reprinted from Missiology: An International Review 27 (Jan. 1999, #1): 35-39.

***Can German Catholic missionary bibliographers find happiness in a French Catholic missionary order and then adapt to working with conciliar and evangelical Protestant bibliographers?***  
***Bibliographia Missionaria's change from Italian to English also raises the problem of American cultural imperialism if all our reference tools are in English.***  
***Bibliographia Missionaria reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the modern missionary movement, especially cross-cultural development.***

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In the spring of 1968, when undergraduate students were taking over university administration buildings and sometimes burning the records at these universities, I was a 30-year-old priest enrolled for graduate studies in religion at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Like most priests in those days, I wore my Roman collar on campus, and like most people proclaiming their faith, I felt a little, and sometimes more than a little, out of place on campus.

One afternoon I was walking through the stacks in the very large library, looking for a book for one of my courses. As I glanced up, I saw the complete set of *Bibliographia Missionaria*. It was like meeting an old friend who shares my values of mission and evangelization. Then it was reassuring to realize that at least some of the people at this liberal, Ivy League university valued the scholarship in *Bibliographia Missionaria* enough to buy it for the library.<sup>1</sup>

*Bibliographia Missionaria* is a listing of every scholarly book and article on any subject relating to missiology published each year since 1933. Its publisher is that section of the Roman Catholic Church which oversees missionary activity, formerly known as the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, now known as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Within that Vatican group, there is the Pontifical Missionary Library, which is the actual publisher.

The story of how *Bibliographia Missionaria* was founded and grew reflects both the strengths and the weaknesses of the modern missionary movement. Let us begin with the founding.

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### Origins in Bibliotheca Missionum

The beginning of *Bibliographia Missionaria* centers on a remarkable event that took place at the Vatican in the Holy Year of 1925.<sup>2</sup> The pope of the time, Pius XI, was a former librarian with a special interest in missionary literature. He pushed for a permanent collection of books, articles, and artifacts on missions at the Vatican.

Robert Streit, a German Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, was called to Rome to prepare for the 1925 special missionary exposition and then to establish it into a permanent collection (which became the Pontifical Missionary Library). On 5 January 1925, he was put in charge of the literature section and told to arrange the 30,000 books on missions which had quickly arrived from all over the world (Henkel 1994:393). Streit, who at that time was 49 years old, was an expert on missiology: Jan Jongeneel (1995:79) calls Streit, Francois Daubanton, and Joseph Schmidlin "the real founders of the science of mission(s) as an empirical discipline."<sup>3</sup>

For over 20 years, Streit had been collecting both materials and reports on Oblate missions from all over the world. Perhaps a brief background on the Oblate missions would be helpful. Missionary Oblates are one of the best-kept secrets of the Roman Catholic missionary effort. Oblates ruefully joke that they have a special talent for hiding their role in God's missionary accomplishments. In 1910, when Streit began to collect artifacts from Oblate missions and to write about Oblate work in the mission countries, Oblates numbered 2,063, with 298 of them seminarians. By 1939, Oblates numbered 5,196, with 1,347 seminarians (Levasseur 1989:459). Missionary Oblates have been very much a part of that great recent expansion of Christianity that made the twentieth century the missionary century.<sup>4</sup>

Streit did some of his seminary training in Holland and some in France, where Irish seminarians were part of the student body. He was in touch with French and German writings, both Catholic and Protestant (Henkel 1994:391). Streit discovered that mission materials were buried in various libraries, inaccessible to missiologists. He began collecting bibliographical notes, starting with the older religious orders, such as the Franciscans and the Jesuits. He wrote and spoke about the need to publish a master bibliography of such materials. At a remarkable conference in Berlin, 22 January 1910, Streit spoke about the necessity of introducing missiology into seminaries as part of the curriculum. Funding for a writing project came from this meeting; eventually *Bibliotheca Missionum* would comprise 30 volumes (Streit, et al 1916-1974), originally planned for only a four-volume work. Currently the collection is available from the German publisher Herder.<sup>5</sup> Scholars such as Kenneth Scott Latourette "have made extensive use" of it (Henkel 1994:396).

### Development and Evaluation of *Bibliographia Missionaria*

Streit died suddenly at the age of 55 on 31 July 1930. Fortunately, two other German Oblate bibliographers of mission were already assisting him or in training, Johannes Dindinger, OMI (1881-1958), and Johannes Rommerskirchen, OMI (1899-1978). Dindinger did the lion's share of carrying on *Bibliotheca Missionum*: Rommerskirchen was the one who saw the need for "a working bibliography of current scholarly literature for mission studies" (Henkel 1994:394-395). He published the first volume of *Bibliographia Missionaria* in 1935. Rommerskirchen did his doctoral thesis under Joseph Schmidlin in 1930, with a dissertation on the Oblate missions in Sri Lanka. He supervised *Bibliographia Missionaria* until his death in 1978, when the current editor, Willi Henkel, OMI, took over.

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On Monday, 27 March 1961, Rommerskirchen posted a notice at our international seminary that he would host a visit to the offices of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith that afternoon. About 20 of us took the tour, gazing in amazement at the many files of preliminary studies for the Second Vatican Council, which would open a year and a half later. Rommerskirchen, serious and scholarly, was also a gracious host with a wry sense of humor.

Can we now see why Jongeneel calls Streit and Rommerskirchen "undoubtedly the most important bibliographers of mission" and their joint achievement of *Bibliotheca Missionum* and *Bibliographia Missionaria* "the largest bibliographies of our time"? (1995:4-5). In evaluating them, I believe it is most important to note that these works began as German-produced reference tools in a French missionary congregation. We must remember the atmosphere of rivalry between British and German colonialism at the beginning of this century. David Bosch describes thoroughly how both British and German missionaries struggled with this issue (1991:303-315). As World War II ended, there was also the fear that German guilt would frustrate missionary efforts, as it had at the end of World War I. Visser't Hooft describes this poignantly in Rouse and Neill's *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (1967: 715; see also Baumgartner, 1986:xii). As we shall see quickly, the cross-cultural implications of this reference tool are amazing.

The first volumes of *Bibliographia Missionaria* had fewer than 1,000 entries, mostly in German and French. The more recent volumes have about 3,000 entries, with English the predominant language and Spanish a growing second.<sup>6</sup> An increasing number of the English entries are by authors whose native language is Arabic, or from Asia, or Africa. What are the implications for American missiologists toward other languages and cultures?

*Bibliographia Missionaria* was thoroughly reviewed on its fiftieth anniversary in 1986 by a Swiss Catholic missiologist from the Society of the Missionaries of Bethlehem, Jakob Baumgartner, *SMB* (1986:v-xxii). Among the features of his study is a statistical analysis of the number of entries in each year. He began:

It is evident that the founder of *Bibliographia* understood long before the (Vatican) Council that mission, as we now know, belongs to the very nature of the Church, and should have a privileged place in theological research. For this reason he made an indispensable research tool available. (1986:v)

Both Baumgartner (1986:viii) and Henkel (1994:397) present the growth of ecumenism in *Bibliographia Missionaria*. Nor should one forget Bosch's comment on Schmidlin's ecumenism (1991 :491 since Rommerskirchen studied under Schmidlin. One should note that the July 1974 Lausanne Covenant made the next possible issue of *Bibliographia Missionaria* in 1975.

Baumgartner finds *Bibliographia Missionaria* contributing to the unfolding of one mission into four main lines of direction: economic/social development, dialogue with religions, inculturation, and the growing importance of local churches (1986:xv-xxii). He also calls attention to the volume published during World War II, when the flow of literature was interrupted. The editors concentrated in *Bibliographia Missionaria* 9 (1942) on an appendix of missionary councils and synods; "this is a great importance for the history of young churches and also for the methodical study of evangelization" (Baumgartner 1986:vii).

Baumgartner was joined by Joseph Masson, SJ, a Jesuit missiologist, in favorably assessing *Bibliographia Missionaria*. Masson notes the growth of the category of the laity (1993:931), perhaps hinting that the Roman Catholic missiology has always struggled with the tension between clergy missionaries and lay missionaries. It is in the context of the growth of the categories into which *Bibliographia Missionaria* is divided, from the initial 19 to the current 26, that Masson calls *Bibliographia Missionaria* "a sort of thermometer of interests which change" (1995:634). Human rights, social justice, and inculturation are relatively new categories in *Bibliographia Missionaria*.<sup>6</sup>

On the negative side, Henkel, OMI, the current editor, cites the circulation for 1996 at 800, which is "slightly rising" (1998). Does this rather small number for an "indispensable research tool" (Baumgartner 1986:v), a worldwide publication, represent a problem internal to *Bibliographia Missionaria*, or a problem with missiology in general?

I welcome the response from experts in circulation and publication. With the price already at \$45.00 a copy for Europe and North America, and \$30.00 for the rest of the world, a suggestion to include photos would probably raise the cost and be counterproductive. The layout appears very readable, and both Baumgartner (1986:viii-x, xix) and Masson (1993:930-932; 1995:633-634) praise the technical apparatus.

Probably the problem is not with *Bibliographia Missionaria* but with the marginal role missiology plays both in theology and in the life of the church. As we approach the year 2000, it is my fond hope that our reference tool, which originated in German Catholicism and grew through a formerly French missionary order, will that the world may be of more use to all Christians, "so that they may all be one believe" (John 17:21) in Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. *Bibliographia Missionaria* first appeared in 1935; the 1997 issue is volume 61. Reviews of important books began in 1951 (vol. 15). For Europe and North America, the cost is \$45.00 per volume for one year; \$75.00 for two; \$100.00 for three. For the rest of the world, the cost is \$30.00 for one year. It can be ordered directly from the Pontifical Urbaniana University, 00120 Vatican City. University of Pennsylvania Library no longer has it.

2. Josef Metzler, OMI, describes what a Holy Year is and the missionary interest of Pius XI: "Pius XI, 1857-1939, The Missionary Pope," in Gerald Anderson's *Mission Legacies* (1994:55-61).

3. Jongeneel is carefully distinguishing Gustav Warneck's work in the theology of missions from the works of Daubanton, Streit, and Schmidlin in the empirical side of missions.

4. Membership peaked at 7,628 (1966). Seminarians rebounded after World War II to 1,339 (1955). Statistics for 1997 are 4,747 total and 548 seminarians (Courvoisier 1998). The decline has been greatest in Europe (except for Poland and Italy), Canada, and the United States. Numbers are actually growing in developing countries. For the Oblate founder, Eugene de Mazenod (1782-1861 see Hoist (1998:39-40).

5. Herder, Freiburg, Germany. (Volumes 1-10 are out of print). The last volume (1974) updated the literature from 1909 to 1970 for Asia.

6. The title (with an J) and the technical apparatus were in Italian until 1986 (vol. 50), when both were changed to English (the title with ph). However, the book reviews continue in any major European language.

7. The citation is from the New American Bible, revised New Testament.

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