The book begins with an acknowledgement of fact: the world is becoming more and more pluralistic. If the editors were to choose one word to describe the greatest difference between years 1910 and 2010, it would certainly be “plurality”. They point out that among the over 1200 delegates to the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 only twenty represented non-European countries. When an anniversary event was organized in 2010, the majority of delegates “came from the South, were nonwhite and women”. At the same time the editors present themselves as believers which means, they seriously think, that in the contemporary pluralistic world there is still an important space left for Christian mission and for the proclamation of Jesus Christ. On one condition – humility on the part of Christians.

There are four sections in the collaborative effort to actualize the heritage of the missionary movement which found its expression in the Edinburgh conference of 1910. Each of these sections corresponds to one of the approaches which could be largely though not exclusively described as: historical, theological, ecclesiological, and missiological. The first section (History and Future of Missionary Movement) is historical and statistical. Brian Stanley (Edinburgh) reminds us that the celebrated Edinburgh conference of 1910 was only third in line of similar but less remembered Protestant initiatives, one in London, 1888, and the other in New York, 1900. He deals then with other facts and legends related to this event, its connection to the developments of the twentieth century ecumenism being one of the issues that need clarification. Thus this precise and brief historical reflection is the starting point for the other authors. The statistical overview of Kenneth R. Ross (Edinburgh) describes some trends in the development of Christian mission: the move towards South and East, questions of migration, the rise of Pentecostalism, etc. Werner Ustorf (Birmingham) describes the development of Christianity from a missionizing religion into a “world religion”. Mission studies should no longer be focused entirely on the process of spreading the message but on the conditions and terms of its reception. Closely related is the need to acknowledge the pain associated with the presence of Christian missionaries. The author asks one important question, “Did the coming of Christianity and, in particular, of the world mission project, help to take away humanity’s pain? The victory-oriented foreign mission is prone to forget its own vulnerability” (p. 41). He calls for renewal of the concept of mission in the new global Christian context. This call for renewal is further analyzed by Birger Nygaard (Denmark), who concludes his essay with a good set of questions regarding the future of missiology, a discipline recently called by one scholar “an academic field that does not exist”.

All of the contributors to this book are “forward-thinking” and attempt “to respond to globalization and the enormous growth of religious pluralism world-wide” (from the cover presentation of the book). They present a wealth of material for reflection rooted in Protestant missiological and theological traditions and discussions. Let us look at some samples of statements from the second section (Christianity in Contexts of Plurality) which could lead to a fruitful exchange of ideas beyond the strict circle of Protestant historians or theologians. Stanley Hauerwas (Duke University) speaks of the challenge facing every person trying to advocate a missionary vision of Christianity (the church is not only missionary, it is mission). It consists of the fact that “many of us are held captive by the assumption that the great missionary effort of the church in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is definitive for understanding what it means for the church to be a missionary church”. It is a good introduction into the ongoing discussion about “paternalism, feelings of cultural superiority, connection to imperialism”, etc., of the earlier generations of missionaries. The true call of a missionary is to be a witness, which is not so easy after all, as is proven by many attempts to transform the concept of mission in the postcolonial era by excluding the notion of witness and thus make the practice of mission apparently better to respond to the exigencies of rational modernity. In a response to Hauerwas, two authors underlined their own
theological perspectives. The notion of witness is further analyzed by Jan-Olav Henriksen (Norway) from the Nordic perspective of continuity between creation and incarnation. Crucial for him is the witness of Christ Himself, a call to “community that is a sign of the kingdom and cannot exist without the reconciliation that overcome boundaries among humans, and between humans and God”. Niels Henrik Gregersen (Denmark) in response to the vision of the church as mission reflects on the nature of the church which for him is “a fluid community that always lingers between the visible and the invisible”, meaning that it cannot be fully expressed by the visibility of action. Friedrich W. Graf (Germany) begins his article with a short definition of what he understands by the terms used in the title “The Church in a Multireligious Europe” which are in fact “deconstructions”. Church and Europe are not universal concepts with the same meaning for everyone. In the article he dedicates much more energy to the description of the diversity of Europe than to ecclesiological considerations but eventually offers his conclusions in the form of some ecclesiological counsels. The churches must communicate within a pluralist society. Therefore they must offer “good quality products” (the essential of the gospel). They must accept the legacy of the Protestant Reformation which is “the tendency toward internal pluralization” and “religious individualization”. Finally there must be a common appreciation of politeness and good manners in a situation when people of radically different lifestyles are bound to share the same neighborhood. The author proclaimed clearly his identity as a West German European and a “liberal Protestant strongly influenced by Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy and other Enlightenment thinkers”. However, the next author, Arne Rasmusson (Sweden), assures us that even such an impressive and envious background does not yet represent the end of the line of human progress because that line leads directly to Sweden (according to www.worldvaluessurvey.org). The criteria of progress in this case are the “highest degree of secular-rational self-expressivism” and religious indifference as one of “essential preconditions for prosperous and happy democracies”. This article is in way a polemical reaction to Graf’s ideal of “good manners” as a social standard for pluralist society and proposes a higher level of interaction summarized by the word “hospitality”. The next two sections (Ecclesiology of Mission – Considerations in Context and The Future of Missiology) bring forward such keywords, key phrases and contexts such as reflection on “Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus” in the modern world with comparison between the imperial times when the phrase was created and contemporary empires; the experiences of churches in Canada with samples of their radical and rapid decline; an attempt to transform ecclesiology to keep up with the phenomenon of emerging churches; ecclesiological appreciation of such dimensions of church reality as “creativity, relationality, sustainability and proactivity”; the experiences of East German historical shift from established church towards less structured community of “engaged Christians” (the author appreciates however the importance of maintaining the public dimension of the church); the church as community in the age of “individuality and autonomy”; question of personal faith in the “age of authenticity”; the challenge of “world faiths among whom we have to live, especially the faith of Islam”; the evolution (or extinction) of missiology as an academic field; the change of missiology resulting from the polycentric nature of the contemporary church; mission as the process of understanding reality and not of evangelizing; new missionary spirituality of humble followers of Christ; transformation of the “defunct missiology” into intercultural studies while strengthening “the Christian identity of believers”; missiology as “the most pitiable among the theological disciplines” which requires more contextualization; and samples of new methods of theological and missionary formation (meaning close relation between missiology and ecclesiology).

The litany of subjects is as overwhelming as the plurality of today’s world itself. Each chapter is a good proposition for a university seminar and prolonged discussion of crucial contemporary issues which are not limited merely to the concerned Protestant communities and intellectuals. One observation emerges in my mind after the above quick examination of the contents of this precious volume. The book is a witness to an ongoing theological discussion within Christian Protestant traditions faced with the globalization, secularism, religious pluralism and other social trends. The authors are far from pessimism since the end of “established Christianity in its Constantinian
“shape” does not have to mean the extinction of Christianity in its creative powers. What is lacking in this optimistic view in my opinion is the sense of continuity with past Christian generations and a virtual absence of critical evaluation of the contemporary cultural processes in the world. Surprisingly, faced with dramatic changes all around them, the authors seem reluctant to “complain”, as if modernity were to be praised as an ongoing line of progress from traditional backwardness to modern individualistic self-expression. I am not a fan of complaining but as a voice in the discussion I would like to recall a hint that I took from Charles Taylor’s Malaise of Modernity, in which he calls for great care in the evaluation of the positive potential of progress in order to avoid its internal degeneration. In simple words – is a change always “for better”? So many changes in the contemporary world (farewell to paternalism, colonialism, social oppression, etc.) require positive response. Does that mean that the question is altogether irrelevant? Critical evaluation of the liberal theologies is as much needed as a critique of the traditions considered today as obsolete. A more critical stance towards modern theological intuitions and projects of the world-values survey kind, apparently opposed to the so called outdated traditional outlooks, is, in my opinion, sorely lacking in this collective work which remains nonetheless a great intellectual adventure. - Paweł Zając, OMI.