



9-1990

Guardians of the Great Commission: The Story of Women in Modern Missions

Wayne A. Detzler
Sacred Heart University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac



Part of the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Detzler, W. A. (1990). [Review of the book Guardians of the great commission: The story of women in modern missions, by R. A. Tucker]. *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*, 33(3), 387-388.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact ferribyp@sacredheart.edu, lysobeyb@sacredheart.edu.

This points up the wisdom of the book and its main limitation. Because Noll thinks that the end of the political process is justice ("because God is supremely just and equitable in his dealings with humanity, the structures of government and the capacity for politics that God communicated to human beings should have as their purpose justice and equity"), he assumes that the primary Christian contribution to politics should be seeking justice. Every example of Christian politics he uses involves a reformer, a doer, a changer of the established order. I would argue that the great contribution of Christianity to our political heritage is that government is inherently limited precisely because we have allegiances that are higher than the state. Our very liberty depends on this great truth, which was not understood very well even by the men Noll cites as good examples. Madison thought that republics were based on virtue and was interested in the power of the local governments to foster that virtue. Lincoln was convinced that because divided houses cannot stand, the national government should take it upon itself to mend the division by force. Wilson thought the United States could teach the whole world democracy. And so on.

Noll says, "Honorable political action by Christians can be found in many unexpected corners of America's history, if only we know where to look." That is correct, and we should look most often to the great conservers. George Washington insisted on taking his oath of office with his hand on the Bible and retired afterward to St. Paul's Chapel for prayers and the *Te Deum*. He also knew that God had everything to do with the United States becoming the United States and with his own personal duties as leader and servant. Washington helped preserve unity and order over potential social violence and chaos because he understood both the relation of unity and order to religion and the limitations of the "powers that be." God provides justice. The political order strives for safety and the pursuit of happiness.

Washington was Episcopalian. The Anglican tradition produced many of the early Christian conservers and tried to present an alternative to the unfortunate activism of revival politics. Noll does not mention this tradition. Forrest McDonald, the greatest living scholar of the early republic, teaches us much about the understanding of human nature that made up American politics in that period. His works and his ideas do not appear.

Despite these rather major caveats, this is a book by a man who takes his religion and his politics (in that order) seriously, and the book should be taken seriously. Noll should expand his view of Christian politics to consider what it has conserved as well as what it has attempted to change.

John Wilson
Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI

Guardians of the Great Commission: The Story of Women in Modern Missions. By Ruth A. Tucker. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, 278 pp., n.p.

The award-winning author of *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, Tucker has broadened her influence with the book under review. Her thesis is simple: "The role of women in the modern missionary movement has been phenomenal. . . . Despite their active involvement in missions, however, women have been largely forgotten by missions historians" (pp. 9-10). It is this void that Tucker sets out to fill.

She devotes the first major section to a discussion of problems faced by women in missions. Citing Mary Livingstone's alcoholism and Dorothy Carey's mental instability, the author reveals the devastating effects of bicultural living on the

wives of David Livingstone and William Carey. Tucker also discusses the impact of persecution and disease on missionary wives. Many of them lost their lives and their children in the early years of the modern missionary movement. No less serious was the loss of dignity by other women. Perhaps the most potent challenge is the one issued by Lottie Moon of Southern Baptist fame: "What women have a right to demand is perfect equality" (p. 41).

A second major section discusses the numerous opportunities that women have found in missions. At home Mary Webb devised means of raising support for missionaries, while Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary as a training school for missionaries (pp. 64-67). Other women gave positive leadership to missionary enterprises, such as the Roman Catholic Anne Marie Javouhey and the missionary pioneer in Liberia, Eliza Davis George. Urban missions found a champion in Catherine Booth, wife of General William Booth (p. 75).

Some women were known as pioneers, such as Mildred Cable and Mary Slessor. Others made their mark as extremely able preachers mobilizing missionary interest, as did Annie Armstrong of the Southern Baptist Women's Missionary Union (pp. 102-103). More traditional missionary activities are also treated. The orphanage work of Amy Carmichael and Gladys Aylward are an example of this, as is the educational example of Pandita Ramabai (pp. 143-147).

In finishing the book, Tucker surveys the role of women on the cutting edge of current missiological thought. The popularizing work of Elisabeth Elliot and Isobel Kuhn is studied from a missiological standpoint. There is an unusually thoughtful discussion of power encounter in missions today (p. 229), and a final chapter brings the subject up to date with a survey of third-world women in missions.

In evaluating Tucker's writing, we may draw several conclusions. (1) Tucker has altered the writing of missions history. She blends sophisticated missiological insights with controversial, current assessments.

(2) True to her background as an historian, Tucker is meticulous in her research. A great deal of time is devoted to the study and evaluation of primary sources.

(3) She includes references to lesser-known personalities. Among them are Carie Sydenstricker, mother of Pearl S. Buck (p. 42); Clara Swain, the first woman missionary doctor; and Henrietta Soltau, a woman preacher within the circles of the Brethren (pp. 112-113).

(4) Tucker never shrinks from difficult assessment. She reports that the death of Carey's wife "was no doubt a relief to her husband" (p. 16). Likewise Tucker reports that Ann Hasseltine Judson (wife of Adoniram) did not "seek to understand the Burmese worldview" (p. 25).

(5) The addition of an extensive bibliography and index makes this book a valuable part of the missions professor's library. It is a worthy companion to *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* and enhances Tucker's well-deserved reputation as one of the most skillful writers in the field of missions.

Wayne A. Detzler
Calvary Baptist Church, Meriden, CT

Gentle Persuasion. By Joseph C. Aldrich. Portland: Multnomah, 1988, 247 pp., n.p. paper.

When it comes to "lifestyle evangelism," Joe Aldrich wrote the book. Although he is an educator by profession, he is a communicator by passion. Whether in the backyard or the pulpit, Aldrich is a communicator par excellence.