

tinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future (*Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014*).

**John E. Sharp, *My Calling to Fulfill: The Orie O. Miller Story*, Herald Press, Harrisonburg, VA, 2015. 439 pp. \$29.99. ISBN: 9780836199338.**

This new biography of Orie O. Miller (1892–1977) by John E. Sharp is a richly textured account of a Mennonite leader who was involved in developing much of the institutional infrastructure through which Mennonite life, witness, and service were channeled between 1920 and 1960. Miller’s expansive vision and strong leadership contributed directly to constructing the trajectory that by the end of the twentieth century had transformed the Eurocentric Mennonite enclave into a global movement.

This biography can be read on several levels. Sharp crafts a compelling narrative of a man whose leadership gifts were recognized early and who would be called to play multiple strategic roles. The reader encounters a plethora of acronyms for the multiple agencies, committees, and boards in which Miller was a moving force. This is also a study of the intergenerational struggle of a conservative ethno-religious community to negotiate rapid cultural change in the tumultuous twentieth century. Finally, the biography traces the steady development of international mission and service ministries that have reshaped Mennonite reality. Visionary leaders will respond to crises as opportunities to mobilize intellectual, financial, material, and human resources to address the new issues.

In 1864 John F. Funk, a young Mennonite entrepreneur, founded *Herald of Truth*. Funk served well a church in transition by publishing German and English editions of the newspaper. He promoted a series of innovations and new structures. By 1910 evangelistic meetings and Sunday schools had become widely accepted, and the Mennonite Church had boards of missions and charities, publications, education, and a Mennonite General Conference. Parallel developments had taken place in other Mennonite groups. But Mennonites were not prepared for what lay immediately ahead.

World War I marked what Dutch historian Jan Romein called the “watershed of two eras.” For all churches, the modernist-fundamentalist conflict was a major expression of this multi-pronged crisis. Miller’s generation bore the brunt of these crises.

Orie Otis Miller was born and reared in a traditional, closely knit Amish Mennonite community in northern Indiana. Father and son had great respect for one another. Miller embraced the values he absorbed from his parents and local congregation, of which his father was the leader, and developed a rigorous form of discipleship based on a holistic understanding of the gospel.

Lacking their own organization in 1918 to respond to war-devastated Europe and the Middle East, Mennonite workers were placed with the Quaker and inter-church Near East Relief agencies. Miller was one of nine young Mennonites sent to serve with Near East Relief in 1919. Assigned to Beirut, he was soon made director of operations for that region. In 1920, following the founding of Mennonite Central Committee, Miller led a team of three young men in an attempt to get food and clothing to the Mennonites in southern Russia. These were formative experiences that he would draw on throughout his life. In addition to honing his administrative skills, Miller learned to know people of a variety of religious persuasions and saw the strengths and values each offered.

Over the years, as Miller led service and mission programs in many countries, he always made contact with one or two people in a particular country who were well informed. Each time he visited that country, he would call on these individuals. He valued the broader view of the present situation of those who kept their fingers on the pulse of the nation. He was also developing valuable relations with leaders of other churches, missions, and service agencies.

Since he was not “native born” and had graduated from Goshen College, Miller was mistrusted and censured by conservative Lancaster County Mennonites for his openness toward other Christians. One can only marvel at his humility and patience toward these critics. His love and respect for the church could hardly be questioned. Quietly attending assemblies of the International Missionary Council, he interacted with leading figures in Protestant missions. When he led Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) into cross-cultural missionary work in the early 1930s, he determined to avoid mistakes older missions were charged with. In preparation for finding a field for EMM in East Africa, Miller went to London to consult with the director of World Dominion, a group inspired by the writings of Roland Allen, a sharp critic of traditional missions.

Miller recognized that the kind of traditionalism to which Lancaster County Mennonites clung was a drag on effective cross-cultural mission. The traditionalist mindset could not be reconciled with Allen’s “indigenous church” ideal, but Miller knew that the resources needed to engage in world mission had to come from this supporting constituency. He was confident cultural change and adaptation would be byproducts of participation in world mission.

As Sharp amply demonstrates, Miller was a visionary leader. Repeatedly, Miller anticipated emerging needs and opportunities. The list of new agencies and programs launched as a result of his driving initiative provides a clue to the scope of his influence across four decades. Always working with others and with utter loyalty to the church, Miller helped Mennonites find their way through multiple crises and into varied ministries around the world. For more than a decade after he retired from administrative responsibilities, he restlessly traveled the world, always

in quest of “the next frontier.”

In a work of this complexity and scope, the author has admirably organized and effectively presented the material. Only occasionally does an error creep in. For example, the statement on page 190 concerning the Brethren in Christ mission movement is incorrect: Sharp claims that the “Brethren in Christ were several decades ahead of Mennonites in sending and supporting foreign missionaries.” In reality, Mennonite Brethren, the General Conference Mennonite Church, and the (Old) Mennonite Church were sending and supporting missionaries in Java, Turkey, and India at the same time as the Brethren in Christ. Also, the discussion on pages 222–24 refers several times to “George Brunk.” Since several key leaders in the Mennonite Church have carried that name, making clear which one is being referenced along the way would help the reader. Sharp has demonstrated the rich resources to be found in biographical studies. We are in his debt for this excellent portrait of a remarkable leader.

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