



Review of Erik Sidenvall, *The Making of Manhood Among Swedish Missionaries in China and Mongolia, c.1890–c.1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 189 pp. and Yvonne Maria Werner (ed.), *Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011) 322 pp.

Joseph Gelfer

Back when the very first edition of JMMS was in preparation I received an email from Yvonne Maria Werner of Lund University introducing me to a large research project focused on constructions of Christian manliness in Northern Europe between 1850 and 1940. The network of researchers connected with and inspired by this project produced various papers for JMMS including Werner's own "Manliness and Catholic Mission in the Nordic Countries," "Christian Social Reform Work as Christian Masculinization? A Swedish Example" by Anna Prestjan, "The Exemplary Lives of Christian Heroes as an Historical Construct" by Alexander Maurits, "'Heroes of the Heart': Ideal Men in the Sacred Heart Devotion" by Tine Van Osselaer, and "Domestic Heroes: Saint Nicholas and the Catholic Family Father in the Nineteenth Century" by Josephine Hoegaerts. This collection of papers alone comprises one of the more significant historically and regionally focused explorations of Christian masculinities for some time. The two books under review here provide further fruits of the project: Erik Sidenvall's monograph *The Making of Manhood Among Swedish Missionaries in China and Mongolia, c.1890–c.1914* and Werner's edited collection *Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, which includes a contribution by Sidenvall as well as old JMMS hands Prestjan, Maurits and Van Osselaer.

Sidenvall's book is based around a series of micro-biographies of missionaries in Northern China and Mongolia, deriving minute detail from letters and diaries, which is held in tension with a broader context of both Swedish and international missionary endeavor of the time. Sidenvall focuses on the how working-class men engaged in a process of "self-making," while embodying a particular contradiction: "On the one hand, a discourse emphasizing the primacy of religion and the subordination of human ambitions to a greater Divine cause—the progress of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, a gender discourse, widely circulated within society, about what true manhood was" (p. 13). We see this contradiction, for example, within the experience of missionary Olof Bingmark who was able at once to engage in sincere missionary activity in China, but also secure a livelihood and social standing that would have been elusive to him in Sweden. Specifically, Bingmark reached "several years earlier than most men of his social background, the coveted position of the married man" (p. 60). Further still, the fact that Bingmark and his wife were of a working-class background, coupled with their being in the missionary field,

meant that the typical division of labor along public and private lines was blurred, with a more fluid understanding of the couple's responsibilities within both domestic and missionary work. This complements much of the previous literature surrounding gender and mission that is considered largely in a middle-class context where the distinction between public and private labor and men and women's responsibilities is more distinct. In conclusion, Sidenvall views such missionary work as an alternative form of self-making for Swedish men. While secular men may have engaged in self-making through being "dextrous and conscientious, the missionary world ... pointed at the importance of the respectable (i.e. bourgeois) Christian marriage" (p. 159).

Werner's edited collection—divided into five parts—spans a broad thematic and geographic territory. Part 1, "Key Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives" includes two chapters: Olaf Blaschke shows how both German Catholic and Protestant churches perceived the feminization thesis and sought to make Christianity more appealing to men (a concern still expressed today); Callum Brown explores similar themes within the context of Great Britain, where masculinity was perceived as inherently more secular than femininity, but also how women's changing relationship with the church proved to be equally responsible for secularization. Part 2, "Visions and Ideals of Christian Manhood" includes four chapters: Van Osselaer and Maurits extend their previous JMMS articles with an examination of Christian heroism in Sweden and Belgium; Marit Monteiro demonstrates the importance of clerical authority in the construction of masculinity for the Dominicans in the Netherlands; Prestjan reveals aspects of Swedish Christian masculinity through a reading of numerous clergy obituaries; David Tjeder shows how two Swedish church leaders resisted the feminization thesis, arguing for an intellectual understanding of Lutheranism that was inherently manly. Part 3 is "Missionary Masculinity" which provides an example of Sidenvall's missionary masculinity and China, and Werner's understanding of Catholic missionaries in Scandinavia whose pious celibate masculine performances were in stark contrast with Protestant expressions of masculinity. Part 4 is "Fostering Christian Men" in which Elin Malmer examines how the evangelical Swedish Mission Covenant sought to influence the lives of soldiers, and Nanna Damsholt charts the discourse of masculinity within the Danish folk high school movement. Part 5, "Transgressing Gender Boundaries" includes three chapters: Inger Littberger Caisou-Rousseau unpacks representations of Christian masculinity in a number of Swedish novels; Anders Jarlert shows how Sweden's Queen Victoria can be considered under the influence of Charles Kingsley and high church Lutheranism as "manly"; Gösta Hallonsten analyzes the "new feminism" of the Catholic Church and how this problematizes the assumptions upon which "Christian Manliness" was historically based.

There is a downside to both these books, and that is one of analytical depth. Sidenvall's use of micro-biographies offers a compelling window into the lives of Swedish missionaries. Indeed, it is quite possible to read these chapters as simply an interesting account of missionary activity of the time. However, within the thematic context of JMMS the discussion of masculinity is often eclipsed by missionary detail (although given this book has been published in Brill's Studies in Christian Mission series this is entirely to be expected). As a relatively short book, more could have been made of the analysis of masculinity without the theme becoming unwieldy; but

it is nevertheless very readable and well-argued. Similarly, because Werner's is an edited collection we are provided with chapter-length treatments of subjects that often would benefit from extended discussion. Of course, this is a limitation of the edited collection form, and hopefully it will serve as a springboard for further work by some of the authors.

Situating these books within the wider literature (at least for those familiar with Christian masculinities, if not Northern European Christian history), naturally enough Sidenvall notes the experiences of his subjects were in parallel with the phenomenon of muscular Christianity. This context is something of a two-way street: certainly, these Swedish missionaries would have been aware of how such a muscular Christianity was being imagined and were influenced by this; however, at the same time the kind of missionary activity in which they were engaged was exactly the type of muscularity being praised by the likes of Roosevelt and Baden-Powell. Similarly, muscular Christianity—through the work of Charles Kingsley—and, in general, the feminization thesis of the time, is cited on various occasions throughout Werner's collection.

However, from the perspective of English and North American studies of muscular Christianity—that has almost become synonymous with any discussion of Christian masculinity in this historical period—both these books provide a useful complement, showing how the phenomena also occurred in Northern Europe, as well as more distant mission fields. But instead of a mere complement, it might be more appropriate to consider both these books as a challenge to English and North American studies of muscular Christianity, as they catalogue a far broader spectrum of masculinities, dreams and anxieties than we have come to expect. In this regard, Sidenvall and Werner provide a significant leap forward in how we understand Christian masculinities of the time, both in terms of the masculine performances they document and the assumption that we view this period in history only through the lens of the English-speaking world.

Joseph Gelfer
Melbourne College of Divinity/AUSTRALIA
e: joseph@gelfer.net