In 1999 I received a copy of William Dalrymple's book, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* as a Christmas gift. It concealed itself in my bookshelves for several years but resurfaced in a moment of serendipity. At the time I was researching the impact of the Byzantine style on images of the suffering Christ in the West. I was intrigued by the fact that Dalrymple's travel journal told stories that intersected with the trade routes, Crusades, councils, papal politics, and socioeconomic developments that I had been studying from a strictly theological perspective. His book helped me to see beyond the christological significance of these topics, to the social and missiological importance of images of Jesus. Dalrymple's travelogue has been the single most valuable creative resource for my courses in the history of world Christianity.

*From the Holy Mountain* is, above all, a journalist's assessment of the state of Christianity in the Middle East. However, the author also has an acute, historical perspective and great insight into ordinary events. His itinerary, for example, was determined by a desire to trace the footsteps of a little-known sixth-century Byzantine monk named John Moschos as recorded in *The Spiritual Meadow*. Dalrymple illustrates the history of Christian Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt through vivid stories told by the people he meets along the way. Through their eyes he describes images, monasteries, hermitages, and holy figures, as they exist today compared with the honored position they held during the halcyon days of the Byzantine period.

Dalrymple captures the reader’s attention by reporting what he sees, hears, and feels during his encounters with Christian places and people. His imagination helps him to connect stories from the immediate present and distant past. This technique struck me as an important tool for students training for ministry, who must be prepared

*Amanda D. Quantz* is assistant professor of the History of World Christianity at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and, along with Gilberto Cavazos, translated *Loving the Church: Scriptural Meditations for the Papal Household* by Raniero Cantalamessa (Servant Books, 2005).
to name the treasures of the Christian tradition, and to discern their significance for the modern world.

A Collaborative Model for a Multicultural Church: The History of the World Christian Movement

Dale Irvin, Scott Sunquist, and the scholars associated with the History of the World Christian Movement book project strive to communicate the fact that church history has never been a series of isolated chronicles of past events, regardless of how the stories have been told. Like Dalrymple, they recognize the authority and vitality of believers' experiences. They value the individual's or group's capacity to convey skillfully the meaning of the practices, devotions, memories, anecdotes, conflicts, and communions that have shaped the history of each local church. The gift of this project is the authors' conviction that those who share pieces of the language, culture, worldview, piety, and struggles of their ancestors can most authentically describe the significance of their lives and work. What I first learned from Dalrymple, I am now growing into through my involvement in the History of the World Christian Movement project: that church history is an array of events that are either remotely or proximately related to the present. As Christian historians, we keep one eye on the future, while recognizing that the past never really evaporates.

In the planning stage for volume two of Irvin and Sunquist's book, several colloquia were convened for the purpose of discussing issues around imagination, culture, race, class, and gender in writing church history. These gatherings took place in California, New York, and Malaysia, and included scholars from countries as diverse as Uruguay, Puerto Rico, Pakistan, and Singapore. Each meeting was marked by sincere efforts at interdenominational collaboration. With each objective, metanarrative, or ecumenical issue, the foundation for our discussions was the real, often painful stories of the members of the Body of Christ. Gradually we are growing in our understanding of how each community is an ecclesia in ecclesia (i.e., a little church within the church), and the fact that we are responsible for what we include and exclude in our storytelling.

Walking a Tightrope or Academic Artistry?

While the church history curriculum at Catholic Theological Union is polycentric by design, I wanted to offer courses that would utilize resources that exemplify the diversity of customs and cultures of world Christianity. Integration would require a multicultural, intertextual approach to the tradition. I found help in the poetic, architectural, narrative, hagiographical, iconographical, and musical resources that encourage students to revisit their perceptions of the Christian tradition.

As I was preparing to teach “Byzantine Influences through Church History,” both Dalrymple's book and the model embraced by Irvin and Sunquist were at the forefront of my mind. Drawing on his own experiences and the authority of local people, Dalrymple makes subtle yet pointed observations about the state of Christianity in regions where the church once flourished. In one incident, he arrives at the ancient church of Hagia Eirene in Istanbul. Delighted to find the doors unlocked, he tries to enter but is swiftly turned away for security reasons. He is told that Turkey's top models are posing for a beauty contest inside the church. A single, incisive observation completes his commentary: "Hagia Eirene is the worst possible place to have a beauty contest: it is dark, gloomy and badly lit."
From the Holy Mountain discerns issues of mission and migration, the roots and gradual uprooting of Christianity, and the force with which serenity becomes chaos when cultures collide. Its protean function helped me to introduce the interdisciplinary structure of my course on Byzantine church history. Dalrymple’s colorful descriptions, wit, devotion, and literary acumen captured and held the students’ interest. And, inadvertently, they learned church history. Following Dalrymple’s itinerary, the students became familiar with the theology, culture, and topography of the Byzantine landscape. Having read his accounts of Byzantium, then and now, in conjunction with excerpts from Moschos’ The Spiritual Meadow, time collapsed in a way that the history of Byzantine Christianity emerged as a diorama depicting the fidelity, weaknesses, and resilience of a holy people. Two additional texts that served as commentaries on this dramatic narrative are Byzantine Art by Robin Cormack and A Concise History of Byzantium by Warren Treadgold. I also relied on two new books by John McGuckin for their fresh perspective on Byzantine history: The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology and Standing in God’s Holy Fire: The Byzantine Tradition. The latter is thoroughly interdisciplinary, with chapters such as “The Beauty of God: The Byzantine Theological Aesthetic” and “God’s Singers: The Byzantine Poetic Tradition.”

Another appealing feature of Dalrymple’s historical travelogue is its self-communicative assortment of photographs. There is, for example, a picture of a woman named Lucine, who is the last Armenian in Diyarbakir, as well as snapshots of the monastery of Mar Theodosius near Bethlehem, where John Moschos lived, and the Basilica of St. Symeon Stylites in Syria. These and other photos prompted questions about social justice, Israeli-Palestinian relations, and early Christian monasticism. We were often rendered silent by the stories that depict suffering communities that were once thriving. The Eastern Christians who still feel the effects of the schism of 1054 elucidated the tragic history of Byzantine-Roman Catholic relations. It became clear that, for the Orthodox, this is not a remote event that precipitated the Crusades. These accounts also prepared the students for the mixed reception they received at the Byzantine liturgies they attended. The Eastern liturgical styles, architecture, and piety that the students read about became three-dimensional, immediate, and experiential during their site visits. All of these resources helped the students to confront issues involving Byzantine-Catholic relations in a twenty-first-century context.

Church History in the Service of Ministry
Since one of the course goals was to convey the relevance of church history for students preparing for ministry in the church, the plight of modern Christians in the Middle East became a significant part of our discussions. Dalrymple effectively demonstrates the need to understand the soil in which cultures are rooted if ministers are to work for a fruitful harvest of justice in the modern world. With his practical concerns and journalistic integrity, his goals are similar to those of historians working in the area of world Christianity. Through a variety of fields, such as ethics and pastoral care, students return to the questions of interreligious dialogue, mutuality, and reconciliation throughout their programs. The interdisciplinary, historical perspective they acquire introduces the breadth, complexity, and challenges that characterize the rewarding ministry they have chosen.
References


