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**Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853)**

**Robert Bernard Dann**

**Waynesboro GA: Authentic Paternoster, 2004.**

**606 pp. ISBN 1884543901 \$19.99/£8.99.**

The world had to wait for more than a century and a half before a good life of Anthony Norris Groves could be published. He has been repeatedly recognised and honoured (as he is in Rob Dann's title) as the 'Father of faith missions' and yet for all this time the only source of information for his life has been the Memoir prepared by his widow immediately after his death. This was a useful account as far as it went, judiciously using the subject's journals, inevitably tending in places towards hagiography and omitting anything that might be considered controversial. The second and final edition appeared in 1857 and therefore there have been many people who have known about Groves but have not had access to any detailed information about him. The delay in such a book being written has been partly because original materials relating to Groves are hard to find. Over a period of some thirty years your reviewer has only tracked down a limited number of Groves's original letters and the few that have turned up are scattered as far afield as Alnwick, Birmingham, London, Cambridge and Basel. Rob Dann has made use of these materials but his work is principally based on printed sources from which he has produced a convincing and, it should be said, challenging interpretation of Groves. By bringing to life a wonderfully human Groves he has produced something more inspiring than hagiography.

But this brings us to a more important reason why the world had to wait so long for this book to be written. Partisan loyalties have been too strong. As recently as 1985 Bishop Stephen Neill, in his *History of Christianity in India* could not lay to rest the hostile criticism of Groves voiced by the Church Missionary Society in the 1830s and 40s. He claimed that 'wherever this man went he created division—frequently, it must be said, with intent' (ii.408-9). One

could not help feeling that Groves's chances of getting a balanced biography from Anglican evangelicals were slim. Ironically the generous inclusiveness of his Christianity (which eluded Bishop Neill) was far too ecumenical for many Brethren, many of whom felt, as William Kelly maintained, that Groves 'never shared their decided convictions, but retained to the last a link with the ordinary ways of Christendom...[and] never had the least real light on the nature of the church' ('Review of Teulon's Plymouth Brethren', *Bible Treasury* xiv.) One Brethren writer, G.H. Lang, wrote a somewhat tedious book, masquerading as a biography of Groves, but in reality he used Groves selectively as a stick with which to beat certain Exclusive practices that he had abandoned. Thankfully it may be said that today a significant number of Christians have discovered that they can maintain their more distinctive beliefs without belittling or clashing with those who disagree with them and these are the folk who will rejoice to have Dann's biographical masterpiece in their hands.

Groves was a man who both inspired and irritated other people but his gentle humility usually won their affection. Dann treats his early years, the development of his distinctive approach to wealth, his association with the earliest Brethren, the break with the CMS and his decision to go to Persia as a free-lance missionary as episodes in their own right and not merely as a prelude to his later career. Dann is familiar with the world of Islam and he writes with sympathetic understanding of Groves's tragic experience in Baghdad. His account of the later years in India is similarly enlightening.

Without adopting the didactic tone of a G.H. Lang, Dann identifies with Groves's missionary perspective but he gives other figures in the story a sympathetic ear. Particularly valuable are the chapters in which we learn of the background and later lives of men like John Kitto, Frank Newman, Karl Pfander and Edward Groves—folk who have previously had to make do with a walk-on part in the Groves story. There are valuable appendices, maps and a useful genealogical tree in Dann's book but it has to be read and savoured if one is to be infected by the generous, self-effacing and loving faith of Groves himself—a faith that is manifestly shared by his biographer.

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