

Christian Missions, Anti-Slavery and the Ambiguities of ‘Civilisation’, c. 1813-1873¹

Brian Stanley

University of Cambridge

1. Introduction

During this period Protestant forms of Christianity were implanted in southern and western Africa and Australasia, greatly extended their existing limited influence in south Asia, the Caribbean, and the Dutch East Indies, and gained precarious footholds in east Africa and the vast Chinese empire. In terms of geographical coverage, though not of numbers of converts, this was an age of rapid Protestant missionary expansion. At the beginning of this period, the Catholic presence in the non-western world was weak in comparison. Despite Napoleon’s reconstitution of the French religious orders in 1805 and Pius VII’s re-establishment of the Jesuit order in 1814, Catholic missions had not yet recovered from the catastrophes of the revolutionary era. It is estimated that in 1815 there were no more than twenty missionary priests in India, and 270 throughout the globe.² By 1873, Catholic missions were again a force to be reckoned with, and increasingly feared by their Protestant rivals. Old orders had been reconstituted, and new ones founded, among them the Marists (1817), the Missionaries of the Most Holy Heart of Mary (1841), and the Society of Missionaries of Africa or White Fathers (1868). Other missionary orders, such as the Paulist

¹ Some of this paper was subsequently published in my article ‘Christian missions, antislavery, and the claims of humanity, c. 1813-1873’ in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds.), *World Christianities, c. 1815-c. 1914: The Cambridge History of Christianity volume 8* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 443-457.

² Delacroix, *Histoire universelle*, III, p. 169.

Fathers (1858), owed their origin to the vision, shared by Catholics and Protestants alike, of the evangelisation of the burgeoning European immigrant communities in North America: the United States continued to be classified by the Vatican as a mission territory until 1908.

The majority missionary tradition in this period – that of evangelical Protestantism – displayed three predominant features, all of which had implications for the ways in which missions related to indigenous peoples, colonial authorities, traders and settlers. First, the tradition, to an extent that is rarely appreciated, was marked by an international and pan-evangelical or ecumenical character. In this period, to a greater degree than in the decades that followed, its missionaries were people for whom national identity and the imperial designs of their respective governments were matters of secondary importance. Second, evangelical missions exhibited what may now appear as a paradoxical blend between evangelistic zeal, simple biblicism, and the Enlightenment motifs of progress, liberty, civilisation, education, and the unity of humanity. The very close association between the missionary and anti-slavery movements exemplifies this union of evangelistic and humanitarian impulses. However, the apparent failure of that common project to deliver the pattern of ‘improvement’ of the African race that was originally expected carried consequences in terms of racial attitudes and imperial outcomes that were played out into the high Victorian period and beyond. Third, Protestant missions were infused by a voluntaristic philosophy, in relation both to their domestic organisation and to their commitment to the planting of churches on the mission field which would enshrine the voluntary ideal of independence in terms of finance, personnel, and dynamic for expansion. The movement’s severest challenges were posed by the obstacles which

persistently thwarted the full implementation of this ideal. At many points, though not at others, these three emphases were paralleled in the Catholic missionary tradition, and some of these similarities will be noted as this paper proceeds.

2. The changing shape of international Protestant fraternity

As the offspring of the eighteenth-century evangelical awakenings, nineteenth-century Protestant missions were connected by networks of information and personnel that crossed national, denominational and indeed continental boundaries. Paradoxically, Protestant missions in this period were more internationalist than most Catholic orders, which were more strictly national in recruitment and perspective. Evangelical approaches to missionary training and accreditation sat more loosely to national and denominational affiliation than subsequently became the case. A Lusatian recruit to the London Missionary Society, Gottlob Brückner (1783-1857), reveals the intricacy of the weave of the European evangelical tapestry. In 1806 Brückner entered the Berlin mission seminary run by the pietist, Johannes Jänicke, who later founded the Berlin Missionary Society (1824). On request from the (largely Dutch Reformed) Netherlands Missionary Society (NMS; 1797) Brückner was sent in 1808 to Holland, including a spell at the Moravian settlement at Zeist, to prepare for service in India. Diverted by the Napoleonic wars to England, he enrolled at the Gosport seminary run by the Scottish Congregationalist, David Bogue. Ordained in London by a Dutch Reformed minister, he was sent by the LMS to Java in 1814. There Brückner became a Baptist, joining the Baptist Missionary Society and worked for over forty years, chiefly on translating the New Testament into Javanese. Despite his Baptist affiliation, Brückner's work prompted the NMS to expand its work in Java, and

another German, J. F. C. Gerické of the Netherlands Bible Society, used his translation as a basis for his own Javanese version, published in 1848.

Throughout the evangelical world ‘missionary intelligence’ was circulated and devoured with scant attention to national or denominational provenance. Leading missionary publicists exerted an influence far beyond their own country. On both sides of the Atlantic, for instance, the awakening of evangelical interest in China during the 1830s was largely the result of the writing and (in Europe) public speaking of the maverick Pomeranian, Karl Gützlaff (1803-51). Like Brückner, Gützlaff was schooled in Pietist spirituality at Jänicke’s Berlin seminary before undergoing further training in Rotterdam. In 1826 he went to the Dutch East Indies in the employ of the NMS. His passion for China led him to sever his links with that society and operate free-lance, travelling up and down the Chinese coast, distributing tracts and preaching. In 1834 he succeeded Robert Morrison as Chinese secretary to the British East India Company in Canton, and he continued to work for the British during the Opium War of 1839-42. His rather dubious reputation today rests in part on his links with the opium trade and the British authorities, but it should be noted that as a Pomeranian he had no interest in furthering British ambitions in China. As so often, missionary ‘imperialism’ had relatively little to do with nationalism. Gützlaff’s legacy was diverse: one of his pamphlets inspired David Livingstone’s call to missionary service; his mission principles exerted a profound influence on the Basel and Rhenish Missions in their work among the Hakka Chinese, and supremely on James Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission (1865), pioneer of the interdenominational ‘faith missions’.

Patterns of correspondence and interchange varied from one sector of evangelicalism to another, and also shifted with the passing of time. The Anglican Church Missionary Society maintained strong links until the 1850s with Lutheran pietists, but had few transatlantic connections, as the small Protestant Episcopal Church of the USA was largely unaffected by evangelical influence. The CMS did not send its first English clergyman (William Greenwood) to the mission field until 1815; until then it relied wholly for ordained personnel on German Lutherans. For several decades thereafter, the ranks of the CMS were studded with German names, many of them trained in the Berlin or Basel mission seminaries (the latter, founded in 1815, gave rise to the Basel Mission). Some were notable scholars and linguists: Johann Krapf and Johannes Rebmann in East Africa, David Hinderer in Yorubaland, Sigismund Koelle in Sierra Leone and the Near East, Karl Rhenius in south India and Karl Pfander in north-west India, all bear witness to the deep impact of continental piety and learning on the evangelical Anglican missionary tradition. It is no accident that the second and most distinguished of the holders of the Anglo-Prussian Jerusalem bishopric was Samuel Gobat, product of the Swiss *réveil*, student in the Basel Mission seminary, and former CMS missionary in Egypt and Abyssinia. By the 1850s, the link between the CMS and the Basel Mission was weakening, the victim of hardening national sentiments and the new suspicion of Lutheran orders instilled in Anglicans by the Oxford Movement. Henry Venn, the influential secretary of the CMS from 1841 to 1872, filled the gap to an extent by engaging in regular transatlantic correspondence with Rufus Anderson, foreign secretary of the (largely Congregationalist) American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM; 1810), but this American connection was never more than a personal one.

By the 1870s, the horizons of the CMS were more narrowly, and dangerously, confined by English perspectives than at any time in its previous history.

Baptists and Methodists provide a contrasting model of missionary internationalism in that their transatlantic connections were always stronger than their inter-European ones, for in the early nineteenth century they had no significant continental European tradition from which they could draw. Although the BMS had a Dutch auxiliary and recruited a few missionaries from the Netherlands, Germany, and Scandinavia, there was no natural constituency in early nineteenth-century Europe for the support of Baptist missions. Baptist work in Germany and later in Russia and eastern Europe was itself a product of the nineteenth-century *Erweckung*, associated particularly with J. G. Oncken (1800-84). Oncken was engaged in 1835 as a missionary to his native Germany by the second foreign missionary agency formed by American Protestants, the Triennial Convention (1814), known from 1845 as the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU). The first corresponding secretary of the Convention was an Englishman, William Staughton of Philadelphia, who had been one of the founders of the BMS with William Carey at Kettering in 1792. Links between the BMS and the ABMU remained strong throughout this period. The 1845 schism over slave-owning that split the swelling ranks of American Baptists between north and south reinforced the ties between Baptists in the northern states and in England, but isolated the Southern Baptist Convention, whose Foreign Mission Board was to grow into the largest of all Protestant mission agencies.

That the Methodist pattern exhibits some similarity to the Baptist one may appear surprising in view of the indebtedness of Methodism to the Moravian tradition. The

register of missionaries serving with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society is the most uniformly Anglophone in character of all the English evangelical societies. Methodists and Moravians were first cousins, but as such had gone their separate ways despite the Wesleyan overture to Benjamin La Trobe in 1785-6, probably initiated by Thomas Coke, which had briefly raised the prospect of a Methodist-Moravian union.³ Moreover, the WMMS, from its origins as a national body in 1818, was not an independent voluntary society, but rather the means whereby the Methodist Conference organised its expansion in Ireland, Europe, the British colonies, and beyond. For Methodists, even more than Baptists, continental Europe was not a source of missionaries but a mission field. Wesleyan missionaries were of necessity almost all English or Irish. The most famous half-exception, Thomas Birch Freeman of the Gold Coast, was the son of an African ‘freedman’ father and an English mother. The facts that Wesleyan missionaries were so uniformly British and were sent out for the support of colonial Methodism as well as the evangelisation of the ‘heathen’ may have made it more difficult for the society to distinguish between humanitarian and national concerns in situations where indigenous interests were under pressure from British settlers. The architect of South African Methodism, William Shaw, was sent to the Cape Colony in 1820 as chaplain to a large group of British colonists. As such, Shaw famously disagreed with John Philip of the LMS over the politics of the eastern frontier during the Xhosa wars of the 1830s and 1840s. Yet Shaw’s faithful witness to the Methodist principle of a single multiracial church embracing settlers and Xhosa had enduring significance in South Africa.

³ J. C. S. Mason, *The Moravian Church and the missionary awakening in England 1760-1800*, pp. 143-4.

British and American Methodists had maintained close relations from the beginning, but the connections became still stronger from the 1830s as a result of the scale of Irish Methodist emigration: over 26,000 Irish Methodists emigrated between 1830 and 1869, mainly to the United States, Canada, and Australia.⁴ Some of them became pioneers of Methodist missions in their adopted country and in regions beyond. William Butler (1818-99), the founder of American Methodist missions in India and Mexico, was born and converted in Ireland. James Thoburn (1836-1922), the first Methodist missionary bishop of India and Malaysia, was born in Ohio of Irish stock.

A third model of inter-relationship, mid-way between the other two, balanced continental connections with transatlantic ones, and with a growing preponderance of the latter as the century proceeded. The LMS had contributed to the foundation both of the NMS and of Jänicke's Berlin seminary. It drew its early missionaries from the Netherlands, Germany, the Austrian empire, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, France, as well as England and (notably) Scotland. Yet the society also developed increasingly close connections with American evangelicals. Six of its seventeen Foreign Directors in 1815 were from the United States. The LMS and the ABCFM shared a keen interest in the evangelisation of the Pacific islands; William Ellis, former missionary in Polynesia and LMS Foreign Secretary from 1831 to 1841, corresponded regularly with Rufus Anderson on mission strategy. The LMS and the ABCFM underwent a similar evolution from original interdenominationalism towards a predominantly Congregationalist constituency. As their denominational base narrowed, the two agencies grew closer to each other, and the transatlantic nexus gradually supplanted the older European ties.

⁴ Taggart, *The Irish in world Methodism*, p. 38.

A similar trajectory is observable in the case of Scottish Presbyterians. In the first non-denominational phase of the Scottish missionary movement, before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sent its first missionary, Alexander Duff, to Bengal in 1830, Scottish evangelicals were closely linked through the LMS and the associated Glasgow and Edinburgh Missionary Societies to continental pietist movements and the developing Genevan *réveil*. Thomas Chalmers avidly read the *Periodical Accounts* of the Moravian missions, and the local missionary society over which he presided at St Andrews from 1823 to 1828 was a liberal donor to Moravian mission funds. After 1830, however, the evangelicals in the Church of Scotland threw their weight behind the Church's own foreign missions, and their participation in pan-European evangelical ecumenism weakened. Although Chalmers remained president of the Edinburgh Association in aid of Moravian Missions until his death in 1847, he had also accepted honorary positions with the New York Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church and the ABCFM. The Disruption of 1843 did not halt this growing re-alignment in a transatlantic direction. The Free Church Foreign Missions Committee sent Alexander Duff to the USA and Canada in 1854, where his advocacy of the missionary cause had a great impact. His first address, to a crowd of 3-4,000 in Philadelphia, referred to America and Britain 'shaking hands across the Atlantic as the two great props of evangelic Protestant Christianity in the world'.⁵ It was a sentiment that could not have been uttered in the 1790s, or even in 1813. It presaged the tone of the missionary movement over the next 60 years, culminating in the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, at which the descendants of continental

⁵ Smith, *Life of Alexander Duff*, II, p. 268.

European pietism at times felt oppressed by the weight of the British-American evangelical axis.

3. Enlightenment, anti-slavery, and civilisation

The evangelical missionary movement was founded on the premise of the equality before God of all human beings. All were created in the image of God; all had sinned and descended into moral and social depravity; and yet all were capable of being raised by the grace of God to the heights of civilisation. Africans or Hindus or Chinese may have looked shockingly different from Europeans, yet missions could not predicate the absolute difference of the 'heathen' without collapsing into futility. Missionary support in the nineteenth century thrived on lurid tales of 'heathen' blindness and the savage cruelties of idolatry, but these tales would have been pointless if the 'blindness' and 'savagery' were innate. There has been considerable publicity given in the British press to the Fijian decision to hold a traditional ceremony of apology on 13 November for the cannibal murder of the Methodist missionary, Thomas Baker, in Viti Levu in 1867. Tales of indigestible missionaries in cannibal pots even now have the capacity to send a shocking tingle down the spine of the British popular imagination. But in Victorian Britain such occasional disasters in no way cast doubt on the validity of the missionary enterprise; they simply confirmed what unregenerate humanity without (supposedly) the restraining rule of law was capable of. Missionary advocates, whilst notoriously prone to gross and offensive caricatures of the 'heathen' whom most of them had never seen, did so precisely in order that they might magnify the capacity of the gospel to emancipate the 'heathen' from their barbarism. For evangelical Christians, in contrast to much secular opinion,

the barrier separating 'civilised' from 'savage', though formidable at first sight, was in principle and practice surmountable. Missionary literature thus united extreme statements of cultural difference with strong assertions of humanitarian identity.

In insisting on the fundamental unity of humanity, missions were advancing an emphasis which was not only deeply Christian, but also peculiarly characteristic of the theistic mainstream of the Enlightenment. Although the Enlightenment's zeal for the systematic classification of human phenomena contained the seeds of later biological racism, the majority of Enlightenment thinkers subscribed to an ideal of progress towards civilisation which, no less than the missionary hope of global conversion, depended on a presumption that what all humans had in common was more significant than what divided them. If what made 'the heathen' so different from us was the result of external conditions, and if those conditions were, as much Enlightenment thought argued, amenable to human engineering, then the potential was there to transform not just individuals but ultimately also the world. The premise of this confidence was, however, the assumption that processes of religious and social change would be subject to missionary control.

Almost all participants in the Protestant missionary movement shared this optimism. It was, for example, as evident among the Württemberg pietists of the Basel Mission in the Gold Coast as among the American Congregationalist missionaries to the Sandwich Islands. This ideology of Christian improvement under missionary tutelage was not a 'political theology' in the modern sense. The societies instructed their missionaries to avoid political entanglements, and, most pointedly, in the slave societies of the Caribbean to urge slaves to be obedient to their masters, in accordance

with biblical teaching. But wherever political or social structures persistently thwarted the progress of Christian improvement, the underlying discourse of individual rights and the claims of humanity was thrust to the surface, and missionaries found themselves compelled to seek subversion of those structures.

The Caribbean was a religious laboratory which revealed both the power and the limitations of evangelical improvement. The dissenting chapels of the BMS, LMS, and WMMS created an alternative society of spiritual egalitarianism in which Bible-reading, preaching and prayer dissolved the distinctions between slave and free. The alarmed slave-owners placed increasing restrictions on missionary operations, but such repression, intensified following the slave rebellions in Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831, served to turn cautious evangelicals into strident advocates of emancipation. The abolition of slavery was now regarded as the only means of assuring gospel freedom and hence the raising of the degraded and enslaved African to the full dignity of humanity. Slave emancipation in 1833-4, and even more the ending of apprenticeship in 1838, were, as Catherine Hall has emphasized, hailed as turning-points in history, markers which set 'before' and 'after' in a juxtaposition that mirrored the transformation of Christian conversion itself. The slogans that reverberated through the celebratory meetings in Jamaica on 1 August 1838 proclaimed that 'Africa is free' and 'Britons never will be slaves'.⁶

The combination of liberationist and imperial motifs jars on the modern ear, but expressed an ideology of Britannia's empire as a realm of Protestant faith and civil liberties that had solidified into the dominant narrative of British imperial expansion

⁶ Hall, *Civilising subjects*, pp. 117-20, 180.

as early as the 1730s.⁷ The liberationism of which present-day nonconformists are so proud could and did lead with equal logic and facility to outcomes that are not so politically correct. The same anti-slavery dynamic that impelled Baptists and some Methodists in the 1830s to call for immediate emancipation inspired the Wesleyan campaign from 1872-4 for the annexation of Fiji. The 'Pacific slave trade' that supplied the proliferating cotton plantations of Fiji posed a similar threat to evangelical objectives as plantation slavery had done in Jamaica; the difference was that as an existing British colony, Jamaica could be subjected to the weight of the nonconformist conscience: Fiji had to be brought into the empire before that conscience could come into play.

With slavery dispatched, the pathway to Christian transformation of the African population of the Caribbean seemed clear. The chapels were full, and in Jamaica Baptist missionaries settled former slaves in 'free villages' intended to turn them into prosperous independent producers and church members capable of sustaining their own gospel ministry. But from the 1840s such dreams evaporated as the sugar trade collapsed and Christian stewardship with it. In the Baptist churches of Jamaica, Trinidad, and the Bahamas, many of which owed their origins to black preachers from the United States rather than missionaries, the indigenous traditions of African American Christianity re-asserted themselves, challenging the word-centred orthodoxy of British evangelicals with a Holy Spirit religion of power and ecstatic experience, shading at its dark edges into the syncretism of myalism and *obeah* sorcery. A BMS deputation in 1859-60 responded by vainly trying to reassert missionary tutelage, looking to more pastors from England and a longer period of

⁷ Armitage, *Ideological origins, passim*.

collegiate pastoral training for Jamaicans to stop the rot. By the 1860s evangelical hopes for the regeneration of the children of Africa had shifted from the Caribbean to West Africa.

In other parts of the globe, missionary humanitarians were by the 1830s finding the progress of Christian transformation blocked by the hardening impact of European settlers and traders on indigenous peoples within or near the frontiers of British settlement, such as the Maori, or the Xhosa of the Cape Colony. The Parliamentary Select Committee on Aborigines was set up in 1836 in response to pressure from T. F. Buxton and the missionary lobby, to consider what measures should be adopted to secure for such peoples 'the due observance of Justice and the protection of their Rights; to promote the spread of Civilization among them, and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion'.⁸ Witnesses to the Committee included the secretaries of the CMS, LMS, and WMMS, and serving missionaries such as John Philip and William Shaw from the Cape Colony, William Yate from the CMS New Zealand mission, and John Williams of the LMS from the South Pacific. These witnesses were unanimous in their testimony that conversion to Christianity offered the only sure hope of eliminating 'savagery' and 'barbarism', a conclusion which pointed Buxton's Report firmly in the direction of seeing missions as the cement of a benevolent empire. Yet their evidence also revealed a growing sense among missionaries that pure evangelism might not be enough. Shaw, Yate and Williams all urged that the preaching of the word must be accompanied by a concurrent process of 'civilisation', challenging the social and economic structures of

⁸ *Report from the select committee on aborigines*, p. iii.

‘heathen’ societies by the introduction of the plough, the ‘useful arts’ and habits of ‘industry’.

Such testimony added weight to the thesis that John Philip had already advanced in his influential *Researches in South Africa* (1828). The apparent indolence of the Khoi population, Philip argued, was not to be attributed to any intrinsic defect in the African race. Rather ‘we are all born savages’ and are all naturally indolent. The continuing improvidence of the Khoi was the product of their status as virtual slaves, deprived of an independent economic base and the freedom to sell their labour to the best market. Philip cited Adam Smith, Fergusson, Malthus and Ricardo in support of his contention that liberty was the necessary precondition for industry, but civil liberty in itself was inadequate without the aid of Christianity, whose conviction of the incalculable worth of the human soul could alone impart ‘the thinking principle’ that was the first step towards true civilisation.⁹

By the late 1830s the arguments of Philip and Buxton’s *Aborigines Report* had become evangelical orthodoxy. Preaching the word remained as central as it was in the days of Wesley or Whitefield, but missionaries were now much more aware of the structural constraints that both slave and nomadic societies imposed on the process of ‘improvement’. Their persuasion of the necessity of an independent economic base for indigenous people owed much to Scottish political economy but also reflected the accumulating wisdom of field experience. Voluntaryism was intrinsic to Congregational and Baptist tradition, and by now part of Methodist tradition also. But on the mission field, it was increasingly the case that all, even Anglicans or

⁹ Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, I, pp. 362-78; II, pp. 315-16, 355-70.

Scottish Presbyterians, were *de facto* voluntaryists: the missionary objective was, as the Select Committee's terms of reference put it, 'the voluntary reception of the Christian Religion', and voluntary reception implied voluntary support. The preoccupation of early and mid-Victorian missions with instilling the virtues of agricultural production and free commercial exchange has been blamed by John and Jean Comaroff for unleashing the spirit of capitalism in the world of the southern Tswana, and contributing to the creation in South Africa of a 'population of peasant-proletarians trapped in a promiscuous web of economic dependencies'.¹⁰ If this was indeed the result, it was the very opposite of missionary intentions, which were remarkably congruent with the goals of modern development theory in its concern to enable rural communities to achieve the economic independence which permits human capabilities to develop and flourish.

T. F. Buxton applied the conclusions of the Aborigines Report to his African Civilisation Society (1839) and the resulting Niger expedition of 1841. Buxton's concern was to counter the African slave trade by drawing out 'the capabilities of Africa, and thence to deduce the possibility of her becoming peaceful, flourishing, and productive, by the force of legitimate commerce'. Yet true evangelical that he was, Buxton placed no confidence in commerce or civilisation without the saving grace of the gospel: 'It is the Bible and the plough that must regenerate Africa'.¹¹ Although the Niger expedition ended in disaster, the theory that lay behind it lived on in the principles of Henry Venn and David Livingstone. Venn's African Native Agency Committee (1845) sought 'the social and religious improvement of Africa by

¹⁰ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution*, II, pp. 163-4.

¹¹ Buxton, *Memoirs of Buxton*, pp. 443, 451.

means of her own sons', who were to be brought to England to train in useful arts such as brick-laying, printing, and the production and marketing of cotton.¹² Venn encouraged cotton cultivation at Abeokuta in the hope that a cash crop for export would stifle the illegitimate commerce of the slave trade and raise up an educated middle class that would prove the foundation of a self-supporting church. Livingstone similarly looked to Zambezi cotton to drive out the slave trade from east Africa and incidentally remove from Lancashire consciences the awkward burden of dependence on American slave-grown cotton. The 'colonies' which Livingstone envisaged for the Zambezi region were not staging posts for European expansion, but an adaptation for nineteenth-century Africa of St Boniface's eighth-century monastic communities in Germany, which were centres of education and agricultural innovation.¹³ For both Venn and Livingstone, 'commerce and Christianity' was no blueprint for imperial exploitation but a slogan for the development of self-sustaining African communities, whose channels of free commercial exchange would also be the conduits whereby the gospel would spread from village to village.

This ideology was not a British peculiarity. The Basel Mission responded similarly to the growth of the colonial plantation economy on the Gold Coast by encouraging the creation of autonomous village communities capable of sustaining themselves by skills in craft and husbandry. The Mission set up its own trading company in 1859 to encourage such communities to engage on their own account in the palm oil and cocoa trades, rather than remaining dependent on the existing networks of colonial trade. In the 1870s both the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland

¹² Shenk, *Henry Venn*, p. 68.

¹³ Ross, *David Livingstone*, pp. 122-3.

would pursue a parallel vision in what is now Malawi through their respective missions at Blantyre and Livingstonia (the latter with its own trading company, the African Lakes Company). Neither was the linkage of commerce and Christianity exclusively Protestant, although its most influential advocates were evangelicals. The Alsatian Catholic convert from orthodox Judaism, François Liebermann, who founded the Missionaries of the Most Holy Heart of Mary in 1841 and then presided over their merger with the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1848, emphasized the importance of making the laity ‘teachers, farmers and master-craftsmen’, if Africans were to be raised above subsistence level and enabled to develop their full human potential. Like Buxton, he argued both that the inculcation of industry was indispensable to civilisation and that true civilisation was impossible without Christian faith.¹⁴

4. The planting of an indigenous church

The objective of planting indigenous churches that would be capable of sustaining their own life, growing their own pastoral ministry, and initiating mission on their own account was shared by almost all missions in this period. Posterity has paid most attention to the statements of ‘Three-Self’ principles produced by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, but the fact that two mission strategists on either side of the Atlantic arrived independently at similar conclusions is less surprising if one regards them as seeking to elucidate the principles which would guarantee the achievement of a generally accepted goal. The conference on missions held at Liverpool in 1860 (the second in an ecumenical series begun in New York in 1854 and destined to culminate in Edinburgh 1910) was unambiguous in its commitment to the planting of ‘native’

¹⁴ Koren, *To the ends of the earth*, pp. 257-9.

churches that would be self-reliant, self-supporting, and self-controlling, and in its opposition to the persistent tendency of missionaries to retain control as the pastors of 'native' churches.

With appropriate ecclesiological nuances, these aims were shared by missions in the Catholic tradition. W. G. Tozer and Edward Steere, pioneers of the Anglo-Catholic Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA; 1857) were unequivocal in their insistence that the aim of the mission was to plant an independent African church, not one subject to European tutelage. Roman Catholic mission strategists echoed the refrain. François Liebermann argued that missions must follow apostolic precedent by basing 'ourselves from the very beginning on a stable organization indigenous to the soil which we want to cultivate. The formation of a native clergy ... supplies the only means whereby the light of the Gospel can be widely diffused and the Church solidly established in the countries where we are called to work'.¹⁵ Similarly, the Italian priest Daniel Comboni founded the Verona Fathers in 1867 as the first step towards the fulfilment of a vision for 'the regeneration of Africa by Africa' through the creation of an African apostolate.

The commitment to the implanting of independent churches contained multiple ambiguities both in theory and in practice. At the theoretical level, it was unclear whether 'civilisation' was a good or a bad thing. Inasmuch as civilisation implied the acquisition of the tools for economic self-sufficiency, it was to be endorsed. But if it meant the imposition of western patterns of organization and thought, missionary opinion was divided. Both Catholic and Protestant strategists, even as they

¹⁵ Koren, *To the ends of the earth*, p. 255.

commended the necessity of socio-economic ‘civilisation’, could advocate a repudiation of western cultural accoutrements. Thus Liebermann, who insisted that ‘our mission ... consists not only in announcing the faith but also in initiating the peoples to our European civilization’, also urged his missionary priests in Africa to ‘rid yourselves of Europe, its customs and mentality’ and ‘become Negroes with the Negroes’.¹⁶ In similar terms, Venn could set before Samuel Crowther in 1858 the vision of filling up ‘the distance between Lagos and the Niger with civilization, through missionary operations and lawful commerce’ yet also admonish J. C. Taylor, Crowther’s Igbo colleague in the Niger mission, when returning to West Africa after his ordination by the bishop of London in 1859, to ‘let all European habits, European tastes, European ideas, be left behind you’.¹⁷ By the 1870s, a strengthening reaction against the prominence of European habits was discernible in missions across the ecclesiastical spectrum from the UMCA to the CIM.

Was human equality itself a ‘European idea’? Rufus Anderson, though confident that ultimately the gospel would raise the Hawaiian or the Hindu to the same exalted level of civilisation as that reached by New Englanders, developed a profound scepticism towards all missionary talk about ‘civilisation’ and its embodiment in education in the English medium, believing that such policies encouraged unrealistic and expensive expectations among indigenous Christians. His scepticism extended even to the wisdom of permitting ‘native’ pastors to enjoy equal status with missionaries. Those who were granted equal status would expect equal pay, with the result that self-

¹⁶ Koren, *To the ends of the earth*, p. 260.

¹⁷ Shenk, *Henry Venn*, pp. 33, 75-6.

support would never be achieved. Congregational independency without missionary hierarchy was doomed to futility.¹⁸

Anderson's doubts about whether pure Congregationalism was suitable for impoverished and poorly educated infant Christian communities were paralleled in a variety of contexts from the 1840s onwards. Missionaries were stationed by their home committees, and were thus effectively appointed as pastors over local congregations. Those congregations often worshipped in buildings erected with funds remitted from Europe or North America. Yet Baptist, Congregationalist, and some Free Church of Scotland missionaries professed an ecclesiology that vested the right to call or dismiss a minister, and the control of church property, in the gathered congregation. It is hardly surprising that from Spanish Town to Grahamstown disputes surfaced in which congregations asserted the democratic rights inherent in their own dissenting missionaries' traditions, only to find themselves opposed by the very same missionaries, appealing to the supposedly higher claims of paternal responsibility and the authority of the missionary committee.¹⁹ Racial pride, and convictions of the missionary's 'fatherly' role, pushed those of congregational principles closer to *de facto* episcopal or presbyterian polity, even as missionary strategists from established churches, such as Venn, looked increasingly towards nonconformist churches for their models of self-support and self-propagation. The resulting ecclesiological convergence contained the seeds of twentieth-century ecumenism, especially in India.

¹⁸ Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, p. 114.

¹⁹ Hall, *Civilising subjects*, pp. 192-9; De Gruchy, *The LMS in southern Africa*, pp. 120-55.

The difficulty of deciding whether denominational polity was a ‘thing indifferent’ or of the essence of the faith became apparent at the 1860 Liverpool conference. Joseph Mullens of the LMS Calcutta mission insisted that indigenous churches, no less than indigenous converts themselves, should not be ‘hybrids’: they should be expected to conform neither to western architectural taste nor even to such ‘technicalities’ of western ecclesiastical principle and system as the Thirty-Nine Articles or the Deed of Demission which effected the Scottish Disruption in 1843. He was, however, firmly answered by others speakers, including William Shaw for the Wesleyans and William Tweedie, Convener of the Free Church’s Foreign Missions Committee, who denied that their respective denominational principles were mere technicalities to be discarded on crossing the oceans. Shaw protested that Mullens’ insistence that missions ought not to export their own ecclesiastical principles to the native churches would in fact introduce Congregationalism by the back door. Although as a Wesleyan Shaw would judge it absurd ‘to perplex and plague a people just emerging from barbarism with opinions as to the ecclesiastical powers of the Wesleyan Conference’, he regarded it as no technicality, having formed a religious society among his converts, to teach them that missionaries were under the supervision of the Societies which sent them out, thereby inculcating ‘ideas of general responsibility and church order’. For Wesleyans, as for Anglicans and Presbyterians, church order was not simply a ‘thing indifferent’. The Liverpool conference minute on ‘native churches’ was a diplomatic masterpiece, designed to paper over the cracks between the two positions.²⁰

²⁰ *Conference on missions*, pp. 283-91, 309-13.

The sharpest ambiguities were those thrown up by field experience. India, where the dynamics of a caste society tied converts into more absolute dependence on missionary protection than anywhere else, proved the hardest school of all. All missions shared the same ideal of planting a self-sustaining Indian church, yet all failed to a greater or lesser extent to implement the ideal. In 1854 the CMS had a Christian community in north India of over 7,000 Christians, yet not one was ordained. In 1867, of the 56 churches planted by the BMS in India, only one had an Indian pastor wholly supported by the membership. In parts of the south, the churches were stronger and more able to support their own ministry. By 1870 the LMS Travancore mission had 11 ordained ministers and 210 native preachers. In Ceylon, missions initially prospered more in the Buddhist and Sinhalese south than in the Hindu and Tamil north. The Methodist mission, initiated by Thomas Coke in 1813, had seventeen Sinhalese ministers by 1863, but only two Tamil ministers in 1859, when John Kilner was appointed chairman of the Tamil District. Kilner was one of the few missionaries in the sub-continent who had some success in disentangling the structures of church and mission and freeing promising indigenous leaders from their status as paid agents of the foreign mission. By his return to England in 1875, there were 18 Tamil Methodist ministers. Conversely, in the Buddhist south, the outlook for the church deteriorated from the 1870s in the aftermath of a series of public debates between Buddhist and Christian champions. David de Silva, a Sinhalese Methodist minister and notable Pali scholar trained by Daniel Gogerly of the WMMS, led the Christian side in an epic confrontation at Pānadurē in 1873. Ironically, de Silva's attempts to vanquish Buddhism with the weapons of the Enlightenment proved counter-productive to the Christian cause; the Pānadurē debate is remembered to this day in Sri Lanka as a signal victory for

Buddhism and a milestone in the late nineteenth-century Buddhist renaissance. The future of Protestant Christianity in South Asia lay not with the handful of educated and usually high-caste products of missionary education, but with people movements among the poor and the outcastes, movements that missionaries neither initiated or directed.

© *Brian Stanley, 2003*

Bibliography

Primary sources

Buxton, Charles (ed.), *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Bart., edited by his son* (London: John Murray, 1851).

- - - *Conference on missions held in 1860 at Liverpool* (London: James Nisbet, 1860).

Philip, John, *Researches in South Africa: illustrating the civil, moral, and religious condition of the native tribes...*, 2 vols. (London: James Duncan, 1828).

- - - *Report from the select committee on aborigines (British settlements;) together with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, Parliamentary Papers 1836, VII (538).

Smith, George, *The life of Alexander Duff, D.D., LL.D*, 2 vols. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1879).

Secondary sources

Armitage, David, *The ideological origins of the British empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Comaroff, Jean, and Comaroff, John, *Of revelation and revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1997).

De Gruchy, John (ed.), *The London Missionary Society in southern Africa: historical essays in celebration of the bicentenary of the LMS in southern Africa, 1799-1999* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999).

Delacroix, S., *Histoire universelle des missions catholiques d'après la conception originale de J. L. Françoisprimo*, 4 vols. (Paris: Grund, 1956-9).

- Findlay, George G., and Holdsworth, W. W., *The history of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 5 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1921-4).
- Hall, Catherine, *Civilising subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
- Harris, Paul, *Nothing but Christ: Rufus Anderson and the ideology of Protestant foreign missions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- Hutchison, William R., *Errand to the world: American Protestant thought and foreign missions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Koren, Henry J., *To the ends of the earth: a general history of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1983).
- Mason, J. C. S. *The Moravians and the missionary awakening in England 1760-1800* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2001).
- Miller, Jon, *Missionary zeal and institutional control: organizational contradictions in the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast, 1828-1917*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, and London: Eerdmans and RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).
- Porter, Andrew N., *Missions versus empire: British Protestant missions and overseas expansion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).
- Ross, Andrew C., *David Livingstone: mission and empire* (Hambledon and London: London, 2002).
- Roxborough, John, *Thomas Chalmers: enthusiast for mission. The Christian good of Scotland and the rise of the missionary movement*, Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999).
- Shenk, Wilbert R., *Henry Venn - missionary statesman* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983).

Stanley, Brian, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992).

--- (ed.), *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, and Richmond: Eerdmans and Curzon Press, 2001).

Taggart, Norman W., *The Irish in world Methodism 1760-1900* (London: Epworth Press, 1986).

Walls, Andrew F., *The missionary movement in Christian history: studies in the transmission of faith* (Maryknoll, NY, and Edinburgh: Orbis Books and T. & T. Clark, 1996).

Walls, Andrew F., *The cross-cultural process in Christian history: studies in the transmission and appropriation of faith* (Maryknoll, NY, and Edinburgh: Orbis Books and T. & T. Clark, 2002).

Ward, Kevin, and Stanley, Brian (eds), *The Church Mission Society and world Christianity, 1799-1999*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, and Richmond: Eerdmans and Curzon Press, 2000).

Williams, C. Peter, *The ideal of the self-governing church: a study in Victorian missionary strategy* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1990).

Young, Richard Fox, and Somaratna, G. P. V., *Vain debates: the Buddhist-Christian controversies of nineteenth-century Ceylon*, Publications of the De Nobili Research Library (Vienna, De Nobili Research Library, 1996).