

8 *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England*, ed. Kate Aughterson, London, 1995, pp. 31, 41.

9 Amanda Vickery has noted a growing emphasis in the Augustan literature 'on women's innate moral superiority and a declining preoccupation with uncontrollable female sexuality': *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, London, 1998, p. 6.

10 Evans, *Lone Mothers*, pp. 4, 207, 75–7.

11 Evans, *Lone Mothers*, p. 99; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-century Britain*, London, 1992, chap. 2.

12 Evans, *Lone Mothers*, pp. 108, 126, 193, 205.

13 Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, pp. 69, 83, 139, 199, 70, and cited on p. 113.

14 Douglass C North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*, Princeton, 2005, p. 6.

15 Chastity was an ancient prerequisite of the ideal woman, and visions of female nature 'had for centuries oscillated between impossibly pure and irredeemably depraved': cited in Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 6.

16 Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, p. 204.

17 North, *Economic Change*, p. 50.

18 Nancy C. M Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, Boston, 1983, p. 247.

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## Imperial Pieties

by Susan Thorne

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*Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington, The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series, ed. Wm. Roger Louis, Oxford University Press, 2005; xiii 332, £32/\$55US; ISBN 0-19-925347-1.

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World religion poses a particular challenge to social historians of modern capitalism inasmuch as it expresses aspirations that transcend individual moorings and economic self-interest. 'Give all that you have to the poor and follow me' is perhaps less well remembered than Jesus's injunction to 'Go forth unto all lands'. Nevertheless, the command captures the potential challenge of the conversion experience associated with the Evangelical Revival that gave birth to the modern missionary project. To be born again is to cast off all that once defined you or at the very least to subordinate self-interest to the will of God. And missionaries did sacrifice their own and their family members' health and often lives in service to the mission cause.

In the immediate aftermath of decolonization, indigenous and other critics of Empire dismissed European missionaries as hypocritical functionaries of the colonial ruling elite. That the transformative agenda at the heart of their gospel was somehow implicated in the changes being wrought by the British colonial state is a premise whose roots lie deep in the colonial period

itself. Christian missionaries of all denominational stripes and national origins proselytized in British colonies, often working with the full support and authorization of the colonial state, whether to ensure permission to operate or to secure fiscal subsidies. The state returned the favour by invoking missionary services to colonized peoples as a justification for European imperial advance, designating Christianity pre-eminent among the gifts bestowed upon the rest of the world by western civilization.

John and Jean Comaroff were prominent among the anthropologists and historians whose research, published during the 1980s and 1990s, complicated this postcolonial tendency to reduce missions to Empire. Their magisterial two-volume study *Of Revelation and Revolution* was an important contribution to a broad effort to rethink the culture of colonialism as a more contested and contingent space.<sup>1</sup> The Comaroffs underscored the marginality of most missionaries in the colonial social order, even while framing them as lightning rods of the many tensions of Empire, citing their energetic defence of colonized people's land and their recurring conflicts with traders, settlers, the military, and official bureaucracy. The Comaroffs, however, insist on the distinction between motive and consequence. However much missionaries may have intended to befriend the 'native', their presence contributed to the consolidation of European colonial hegemony. The textual transmission of Christian doctrine along with the quotidian realities of mission station life helped to colonize consciousness itself, and far more effectively than the brute expropriation of land and coercion of labour pursued by rival sectors of the European colonial community.

The editorial introduction to this skilfully assembled collection of essays argues that the missionary association with Empire is greatly exaggerated even if not especially by the Comaroffs and their successors. Etherington provocatively claims that 'the trajectories of missions and Empire hardly bear comparison', and that 'the history of missions can be written without much attention to Empire'. This volume bases its claims to the reader's attention on the alternative formulation 'that, although missions and the official Empire were quite different operations, they play related parts in a larger drama – the spread of modernization, globalization, and Western cultural hegemony'.

Unlike most scholarship on missions (or Empire more generally for that matter), this volume adopts a comparative perspective and a broad chronological sweep. The contributors' geographical areas of expertise encompass most of the major foreign-mission fields that became part of the British Empire (although there is considerably more emphasis on the neglected Pacific than the relatively more attended Atlantic theatre). The authors were encouraged to adopt a thematic rather than a geographical focus, resulting in useful reflection on topics ranging from missionary encounters with settlers, missionary relations with indigenous authorities

in not yet colonized regions of the world, convert evangelism, syncretism, women, language, anthropology, medicine and decolonization. That comparative perspective illuminates one of the volume's inescapable conclusions: the indeterminacy of individual missionaries' relationship to Empire. While some missionaries actively advocated colonial expansion and defended colonial policies at home in Britain as well as abroad, others voiced opposition on a wide range of issues, however much they pledged their loyalty to an imperial ideal. Moreover, some missionaries repudiated Europe's imperial mandate altogether, particularly during the era of decolonization.

Eliga Gould begins the volume by pointing out that eighteenth-century missions in British North America were not at all concerned to colonize the consciousness of indigenous populations. The primary purpose of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge was instead to secure the salvation of the only nominally Christian European settlers.<sup>2</sup> As Gould points out, however, ministering to European settlers in North America involved practices, policies, and pieties that were 'far more similar to its missionary counterparts than is sometimes realized'. This is in accordance with the argument I've made elsewhere, that the qualitative distinctions between home and foreign missions, between lapsed Christians and pure 'heathen', in Britain itself would not be 'fixed' along geographical or cultural lines until well into the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The missionary societies that would eventually focus their sites on the 'heathen' world were founded during the 1790s, in the aftermath of the Evangelical Revival. The birth of these self-styled modern missions coincided with the massive increase in Britain's colonial holdings in the aftermath of the Seven Years War and the shift from the first Empire of settlement to the second Empire of conquest following the American Revolution, a temporal coincidence conducive to the conflation of missions and Empire that Etherington rightly indicts. In fact, Britain's newly established missionary societies dispatched many of their first deputations to the Pacific islands, which were at that point outside British or any other European imperial jurisdiction. In such places 'where the missionary frontier ran ahead of Empire', missionaries were dependent upon indigenous elites. John Barker makes the important observation that missionaries' relationship to Empire would continue to be affected by the receptivity of indigenous elites. In the Pacific, elite co-operation ensured missionary support for indigenous self-government. In much of Africa, by contrast, elite opposition encouraged missionaries to support European colonial advance.

Moreover, those missionaries who were sent to regions *within* the British Empire faced bitter and sometimes violent opposition from the established colonial order: the East India Company on the one hand and on the other the West Indian planter lobby. Frykenberg reminds us that British

officialdom's administrative interest in the preservation of social order required sensitivity to indigenous religious sensibilities. Hindus and Muslims alike were deeply offended by Protestant missionary indictments of their faith and Company officials responsible for internal security did everything in their power to frustrate missionary operations. Similarly, planters in the Caribbean were rightly afraid that missionary influence would be subversive of slavery and did all they could to delimit missionary operations on their plantations.<sup>4</sup>

Alan Lester's essay attends to the very real divisions between the humanitarian lobby including missionaries and the white settlers of the British Empire. Humanitarians came to enjoy considerable influence during the first third of the nineteenth century, and missionaries benefited accordingly. The East India Company had to be forced to admit missionaries into its territories by Parliamentary decree in 1813. Missionaries celebrated the defeat of the powerful West Indian lobby when slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834. Subsequent settler success in wresting home rule and eventual independence from the British Colonial Office's oversight, however, represented the death knell for the civilizing mission policies advocated and pursued by missionary and other humanitarian organizations in the Empire. Henceforth, the missionary lobby would be increasingly on the defensive.<sup>5</sup>

Easily dispensed with, then, is any presumption that missionaries were simply agents of the colonial state. Missionaries themselves were often marginal figures in the colonial community, as they had been in Britain.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, most of the missionaries working in the British Empire were not even British. In addition to the German, Dutch, and Swiss agents, this volume draws our attention to the striking predominance of 'native' agents, as they were referred to by Europeans, in mission fields around the world. As numerous contributors point out, the role of Christian converts in spreading the missionary gospel is just beginning to receive the scholarly attention warranted by its influence.<sup>7</sup> Indigenous converts were responsible for the vast majority of the encounters associated with Christianity's global expansion during this age of Empire. The native evangelists profiled in Peggy Brock's essay were all committed Christians. While judgemental towards indigenous counterparts who had not yet converted, they were far from deferential towards Europeans. As Brock suggests, the analytical implications of native agency are far reaching: 'If as some assert, the missionary movement was part of a larger imperial project of cultural colonialism, it is important to recognize that the foot soldiers of the advance were the indigenous preachers' (p. 132).

Framed somewhat differently, one might argue that the Christian faith was no more reducible to its missionary packaging than missions themselves were to the imperial contexts in which they operated. Missionaries were engaged in a work of translation, and as Paul Landau argues, this work was at least a two-way street. The struggle to explain Christian precepts via

concepts and in languages that made sense to their indigenous audiences sometimes converted European missionaries in the process; 'going native' was the calculated risk of missionary efforts to better understand the colonized peoples they were proselytizing. Indigenous audiences appropriated these translations, in turn, rendering Christianity in many ways their own. European missionary agents might have carried the gospel 'out' in to the world (from which it originated in many instances). However, they could not control the reception of their message, nor could they retain their monopoly over its conveyance, although they would make every effort to do so.

Interestingly, missionary efforts to maintain European control over the Empire's indigenous Christian communities and their institutions intensified over time. Andrew Porter's essay describes this transformation over the course of the nineteenth century, focusing specifically on the relationship between missionaries and indigenous converts. Early missionary commitments to the rapid establishment of self-governing churches were displaced during the second half of the nineteenth century by presumptions about the necessity of European oversight for the foreseeable future.

Porter discounts the influence of secular ideologies (and specifically race) on missionary efforts to curtail the institutional autonomy of indigenous Christians in this period. While missionaries' increasingly critical assessment of converts' capacity to govern themselves may have paralleled the increasingly authoritarian and racially inflected representations of British rule in the secular media, Porter insists that changes in missionary conduct towards converts were a consequence of theological rather than colonial developments. Porter is certainly correct in maintaining that theology has been neglected in social histories and ethnographies of foreign missions and that monocausal explanations are not adequate to the task of explaining missionary praxis – or colonial policy for that matter. However, evidence presented elsewhere in the volume suggests that the imperial context in which modern missionaries operated shaped the increasingly racist resolution of tensions between European missionaries and Christian converts.

Here Porter returns to the retreat of the Church Missionary Society' (CMS) during the closing decades of the nineteenth century from its long-term commitment to the ideal of a self-governing 'native' church. This commitment was embodied in the person of the Rev. Samuel Crowther, who became the first African Bishop (of the Niger Territories) in 1864. Following the death of CMS Secretary Henry Venn in 1873, CMS missionaries waged a successful campaign to convince their home office that Crowther was not fit to occupy his exalted position. Crowther was removed from his office under humiliating circumstances in 1890. It was not until 1951 that the Church of England would appoint another African to any bishopric. Porter argues that the missionary criticism of Christian converts in this period was not related to the oft-cited hardening of white supremacist attitudes at

the end of the nineteenth century. It was, rather, the result of the more 'perfectionist' theology associated with the Keswick Conventions of the 1870s and 1880s and the displacement of a largely artisanal missionary-field force by university-educated men and women. Keswick's language of personal holiness and spiritual mastery and its privileging of personal piety over good works was not, in itself, colour coded. But it was applied unevenly to say the least. Europeans who sinned were individually censured; converts who sinned disgraced their race.<sup>8</sup>

Robert Edgar's fascinating account of the new religious movements that sprang up in the missionary wake repeatedly attests to convert communities' resentment of European missionaries' racial prejudice and racially discriminatory practices. Social relations on mission stations – not theology – appear to have been the primary stimulus to the schisms that fragmented African Christianity from the Crowther debacle onwards. Imposing discriminatory pay rates and racially-segregated worship and living arrangements, European missionaries demonstrated their professional stake in re-establishing white monopoly control over the gospel's dissemination against African or African-American interlopers.

That mounting tensions between European and African Christians were not the inevitable consequence of metropolitan theological developments is apparent in many of the movements Edgar surveys. They were distinguished in most cases from the European churches from which they broke away by the colour of their leaders' skin rather than by doctrine or liturgy. In its mission philosophy, the African Methodist Episcopal Church to which central Africans were flocking 'differed little from European missions'. At issue in the break by these new religious movements with 'mainline' Christianity were the restrictions on convert promotion and congregational autonomy by which European missionaries protected their chokehold on access to the ministerial guild.

Colonial officials apparently had good reason to support European missionary exclusion of indigenous Christians from positions of clerical authority. When European missionaries were called into service during the First World War, black evangelists and convert teachers who assumed responsibility for the management of missionary institutions in place of Europeans called home or to the front encouraged African soldiers and policemen 'to challenge the colonial order' and discouraged Africans from enlisting. John Chilembwe was so incensed by missionary hypocrisy 'in preaching the Ten Commandments from the pulpit while condoning the colonial government's action in stealing African-owned land' that he led an unsuccessful uprising in Northern Rhodesia in 1915.

Was racism endemic to European-led Christian missions? Obviously not. Missionary discourse during the first half of the nineteenth century, while far from egalitarian, precluded the homogenizing pessimism of the closing decades of the nineteenth century that underwrote the repudiation of indigenous authority in the foreign-mission field. And even during the new

imperial heyday of white supremacy there were European exceptions to the racist rule, like the one-time Baptist Joseph Booth 'at odds with most European missionaries because of his egalitarian views'.

Gareth Griffiths speculates that European women constituted a collective exception to missionary efforts to silence indigenous voices, as they were responsible for translating most of the conversion narratives published in missionary periodicals. European women entered the foreign-mission field first as wives, many taking advantage of the backlash against mixed marriages resulting from sending single male missionaries into the field. Just as marriage became a requirement of male applicants for foreign missionary service, for many evangelical women in Britain, marrying a missionary became a divinely ordained 'calling' if not outright occupational goal. The contribution of missionary wives during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century paved the way for the entry of single European women into the profession and by the end of the nineteenth century single women were the largest group of European missionaries at work in the foreign field.

Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock's essay draws attention to the puzzling disjuncture between the proliferating body of feminist research on white women missionaries and the mainstream mission historiography. This gulf is apparent in this volume as well; few of the other essays focus on white women, despite their numerical predominance in the European missionary-field force. For Grimshaw and Sherlock, women's agency, like native agency, is further evidence that 'Western activities in the East were not solely about white men conquering the world'. They suggest that unlike or more than European men, European women were engaged in a modernizing rather than a colonizing mission.

Single-women missionaries' own careers were a testament to modernity; and the emancipation of women was held up as the primary index of civilization. However, as Griffiths notes, colonized cultures rarely fared well by this yardstick, and indigenous oppression of women was a frequent justification for the imposition or consolidation of imperial controls. Conversely, the employment opportunities enjoyed by white women missionaries were limited to the foreign field, and what social status and institutional authority accrued to them there evaporated upon their return home. For these educated daughters of the middle and upper classes, the foreign-mission field may have operated as a safety valve of sorts, siphoning off potential feminist pressures on metropolitan political culture.<sup>9</sup>

Female missionaries were 'bearers of ideas of modernity' not just in their identity as career women, but 'in the skills they attempted to transmit'. Precluded from preaching, they were disproportionately represented in educational and medical mission work, caring occupations that were viewed as a public extension of work long conducted by missionary wives. According to Maxwell, 'it was precisely in this modernizing project of education (and health care) that mission and colonialism came closest together'.

As Etherington points out, foreign missionaries were largely responsible for the Empire's educational and medical provisions. Missionary teachers, doctors, and nurses were invoked in defence of the colonial project, evidence of the Empire's contribution to colonial development, and in this capacity missions constituted a vital 'pillar of colonial rule'.

The editor is certainly correct in his assertion that there are no simple analogies that convey the complex, shifting relationship between missions and Empire. At the same time, however, the culprits responsible for the grosser simplifications to which he objects are not clearly identified and where they are, in the case of the Comaroffs, their arguments are unrecognizable caricatures. The Comaroffs' argument about cultural imperialism was premised on the distinctive quality of missionaries' imperial aspirations and on the double-edged character of the Christian sword, claims that are only reinforced by the essays in this volume. I doubt that the predominance of native agency would either surprise or confuse them. In their argument it is Christianity rather than its European emissaries that accomplishes the modernizing destruction of indigenous worldviews, creating subjects more amenable to Western colonial rule and nationalist resistance alike.

No doubt we are all struggling for a language adequate to convey the contradictory and unpredictable human condition embodied in the encounters between European missionaries and colonized peoples, converts and 'heathen' alike, not least because our analytical lenses are bequeathed to us from the very encounters we are studying. As Patrick Harries points out, missionaries played an important role in the establishment of the academic discipline of Cultural Anthropology. The latter would eventually abandon the interventionist goals of its missionary founders but it may have failed to dislodge the depiction of the colonized subject which missionary informants sought to change.

European missionaries were no more single-mindedly heartless imperialists than the rich man in the gospel was a craven caricature of a selfish hoarder. The power of this gospel parable lies precisely in the rich man's genuine love for Christ and the heartbroken self awareness with which he turns away. Camels have an easier time getting through the needle's eye than most of us have when it comes down to sacrificing privilege, power, and professional status or the material benefits they bring. Missionaries did not enter the mission field with the intention of serving the god of nation, Empire, or race. However, the colonial context in which they worked presented numerous temptations to which most succumbed at one point or another and many succumbed wholesale. Writing a history of missions without attending to the Empire would be to substitute the imperatives of religious discourse or the faithful's aspirations for the actions of Christianity's Victorian practitioners. Unfortunately, a lot of what passes for religious *history* is little more than that, a recounting of the theological talk without reference to the parochial walk. We need not reduce one to

the other, but history happens as a result of their mutually constitutive struggle for the religious actor's soul.

The history of missions recounted in these fascinating essays underscores the importance of the social relations of lived religion, of privileges defended and feet left unwashed. And it was on the shoals of white supremacy that foreign missions largely foundered. However, Christianity would survive its missionary betrayal – there are far more Christians in the formerly colonized world today than in the formerly Christian West even when the fundamentalist heartland of the United States is included. Many of those who resisted missionary authority were adamant in defence of their Christian faith or a variant thereof. Edgar quotes a Kikuyu protest song attesting to indigenous people's insistence on the distinction between the Christian religion and European missions, between God and his all-too-human servants: 'I am going to break all friendships, the only friendship I shall retain is between me and Jehovah'. It was, in the words of Watch Tower activist Elliott Kenan Kamwana,<sup>10</sup> the "'satanic alliance'" between mission churches and colonial officials [that] had to be destroyed.'

**Susan Thorne** teaches courses at Duke University on the history of modern Britain and on European colonial expansion. She is the author of *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-century England* (Stanford 1999).

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4 Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: the Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834*, Urbana, 1982; Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: the Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*, New York, 1994.

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6 John Comaroff, 'Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa', in *Tensions of Empire*, ed. Cooper and Stoler. And see John Barker, 'Where the Missionary Frontier Ran Ahead of Empire', p. 88.

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## Shocked and Forgotten

by *Peter Leese*

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**Peter Barham**, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004; pp. 451, £25; ISBN 0-300-10379-4.

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Elegy displaces anger; touches of the sacred are always at hand even when the author's purpose is to show the terrible waste of life and hope in the war. When irony dominates the account, it provides a natural distancing device, a way of looking at the war with detached sadness.<sup>1</sup>

As a research student in the mid 1980s beginning an investigation of 'shell shock' cases in the First World War I wrote to many organizations and institutions – veterans' support charities, working hospitals that had taken such cases – to find out what records or knowledge of such men might still exist. Usually the reply was helpful but unproductive, sometimes it was blandly polite, and occasionally it was hostile. 'We do not discuss such cases or allow access to records', I read in a letter-headed reply, 'for obvious reasons.' The right to privacy was indeed obvious, but it seemed to me that these were not the only 'reasons' to which the letter-writer referred. Rather, seventy years after the war, those most closely involved with veterans' affairs often still felt a lingering awkwardness that had less to do with rights and more to do with continuing stigma. First World War 'shell shock' and related conditions were still not entirely respectable, and those who suffered them remained tainted by associations with malingering, cowardice and madness.

Later, as I looked at a soldier's twisted hand or face in a medical textbook, watched a convalescent with a misshapen torso relearning to walk in a medical training film, or read an ex-serviceman's account of his failed or misfired attempts to speak, I was struck by the physicality of the conditions that affected the war's trauma cases. Such textbooks, films and memoirs evoked with startling clarity the mind's ability to grip and paralyze, to convey through the body what words could not express.