THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Providential empire?

OPEN ACCESS

Providential Empire?

The Established Church of England and the Nineteenth-Century British Empire in India

Stewart J. Brown

For many nineteenth-century British Christians, the rapid expansion of the British Empire, and especially of British dominion over the vast sub-continent of South Asia, was inexplicable in worldly terms. Belief in the divine governance of the world led many to a belief that the British Empire, like other great empires in the past, formed part of the providential plan for the world. The spread of British trade, the conquests by British arms, the migration of British settlers – all must reflect a higher purpose. 'In the course of Providence', noted the *Evangelical Magazine* in 1813, 'Britain is become mistress of the East, and possesses facilities for the purpose of propagating the gospel beyond any other nation'.[1] 'May we not assume', asked the London Missionary Society missionary to western India, William Clarkson, in 1851, 'that the East India Company has been God's servant, relatively to his gracious design of converting the Eastern world?'[2] 'I doubt not' observed the high church Anglican missionary to South India, Robert Caldwell, in 1857, 'that the rule of the English in India rests ... on the will of the Most High, the Supreme Ruler of the nations, who has raised up England, and confided race after race, and region after region to her care'.[3]

For some, the British Empire was destined by God to be for the wider world what the ancient Roman Empire had been for the Mediterranean World – providing networks of trade and communication, a common language, general peace, and the protection of law, through

[1]   'Christianity in India', *Evangelical Magazine*, 21 (May 1813), 172.
[2]   William Clarkson, *India and the Gospel; or, An Empire for the Messiah*, 3rd edn (London, 1851), 291.
[3]   Robert Caldwell, *Lectures on the Tinnevelly Missions* (London, 1857), 3.

which Christianity would spread. In the first age of Christianity, observed L. Norman Tucker of the Church Missionary Society in Canada in 1907, the gospel and Church 'were planted in an empire prepared by His Providence', and 'all the resources of the Roman Empire ... the military highways, the Greek language, the prevalence of law, the protection of authority, the unity and peace' were used for the spread of Christian truth. 'The counterpart of the Roman Empire of the first century', he added, 'is the British Empire'. As a sign of this, he observed, 'the 300,000,000 of India, while kept at peace by British authority and evangelised by Christian missionaries, are being gradually and insensibly won' and 'India will be converted to Christ by the combined forces of the Nation and the Church'.[4] India, many further believed, was the cradle of the civilisations of the East, and its conversion would lead inexorably to the conversion of the whole of Asia.

Recent literature on the British Empire, and especially the impressive synthesis by John Darwin, has highlighted the provisional nature of the British Empire, or, as Darwin describes it, the British world system.[5] This nineteenth-century British world system, for Darwin, was a complex amalgamation of settlement colonies, sugar islands, trading outposts, coaling stations, crown colonies, dependencies, protectorates, and spheres of influence; it was a 'project of an empire', which was never completed. Many nineteenth-century British Christians would have shared this view of Britain's world system. But for them, its vastness, diversity, and extraordinary expansion indicated that it was not shaped by human hands and that its ultimate end was not what its human actors intended. During the sixty years since the French Revolution, the evangelical Anglican bishop of Calcutta, Daniel Wilson, observed in 1849, Britain had been 'raised ... to the possession of the most wonderful empire, and the widest influence which the world has ever seen, either in ancient or modern times'. 'And for

---

[4]   L. Norman Tucker, 'Canada (No. 1): The Church and the Empire', in J. Ellison and G.H.S. Ellison (eds.), *Church and Empire: A Series of Essays on the Responsibilities of Empire* (London, 1907), 133.
[5]   John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970* (Cambridge, 2009).

what purpose?' he asked. 'Why has India been given to us, as it were by miracle? Why are out Colonies extended over the universe?'[6] For Wilson, the true purpose of the empire could only be discerned through faith.

This article will explore the British providential discourse of Empire during the long nineteenth-century, with reference to the alliance of Church and Empire in India. In particular, it will consider the idea prevalent among Christians that God had given Britain dominion over India for the purpose of converting its peoples to Christianity, and that the best means for achieving this purpose was an alliance of Church and Empire, as expressed in the established Church. The essay will build on the valuable work on the Anglican Church in India by such scholars as Robert Frykenberg, Rowan Strong, Jeffrey Cox, Penelope Carson, Daniel O'Connor, Andrew Atherstone, Bernard Palmer, and M. E. Gibbs.[7] In its conception of a providential purpose for Church and Empire in India, the essay follows the approach of Anthony D. Smith, with his analysis of the idea that nations were 'sacred communions' and that as part of the general providence governing the world some nations were selected by God to be 'missionary peoples' for the global spread of divine truths.[8] The focus will be largely on the attitudes of the Anglican leadership, especially the Anglican bishops in India. It will show how the failure of the established Anglican Church to convert a large proportion of the Indian population to Christianity led to a waning confidence in the notion of a providential

---

[6] Daniel Wilson, *A Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Four Dioceses of Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Colombo* (London, 1849), 10.

[7] Robert E. Frykenberg, 'Episcopal Establishment in India to 1914', in Rowan Strong (ed.), *Oxford History of Anglicanism, vol. III: Partisan Anglicanism and its Global Expansion, 1829-c.1914* (Oxford, 2017), 296-317, Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire c.1700-1850* (Oxford, 2017), 118-97, Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* (Stanford, CA, 2002), Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion 1698-1858* (Woodbridge, 2012), Daniel O'Connor, *The Chaplains of the East India Company 1601-1858* (London, 2012); Andrew Atherstone, 'Introduction' in *The Journal of Bishop Daniel Wilson of Calcutta, 1845-1857*, ed. Andrew Atherstone, *Church of England Record Society* 21 (2015), xi-lii, Bernard Palmer, *Imperial Vineyard: The Anglican Church in India under the Raj from the Mutiny to Partition* (Lewes, 1999), M. E. Gibbs, *The Anglican Church in India 1600-1970* (Delhi, 1972).

[8] Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford, 2003), 19-65, 95-130.

purpose for Church and Empire in India. It will also suggest some ways in which this waning confidence may have affected broader British religious attitudes and beliefs.

Religious Awakenings and Overseas Missions: The Generation of 1790-1830

The modern British missionary movement and the modern British Empire both emerged amid the extraordinary generation of 1790 and 1830. It was this generation that a former President of the Ecclesiastical History Society, W. R. Ward, described in his presidential address of 1970 as 'the most important single generation in the modern history not merely of English religion but of the whole Christian world.'[9] It was this generation that was shaken by the French Revolution and the Revolution's unprecedented assault on the institutional Churches. This was the generation that experienced the sweeping movements of religious awakening which were linked with new movements of democratic nationalism and new notions about the capacities of the common people. This generation embraced heart-felt, emotive forms of piety, with emphasis on the evil of sin and personal conversion. This generation was troubled by apocalyptic visions of the impending end of the world, and of the signs and wonders that were the precursors of the end time.   It was drawn to biblical prophecies and visions of the coming millennium.[10] 'That there is a time of peace, prosperity and purity awaiting all the nations of the earth', proclaimed the *Evangelical Review* in 1793, 'appears evident in the prophecies and promises in the sacred Scriptures'. 'From a serious attention to the signs of the times', it added, 'we may indulge the hope that this grand jubilee is at hand'.[11] The Revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare also contributed to revived beliefs across Europe in elect nations, in chosen peoples representing the divine will in history.

---

[9]   W. R. Ward, 'The Religion of the People and the Problems of Control, 1790-1830', in W. R. Ward, *Faith and Faction* (London, 1993), 264.

[10]   Stewart J. Brown, 'Movements of Christian Awakening in Revolutionary Europe, 1790-1815', in Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, volume 7: *Enlightenment, Revolution and Reawakening: The Christian World, 1648-1815* (Cambridge, 2006), 575-95.

[11]   Quoted in Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester, 2004), p. 60.

In Britain, many who embraced the intense religiosity of these decades joined Dissenting churches; the decades from 1790 to 1830 witnessed a phenomenal growth of Protestant Dissent in Britain. But many others remained within the established Churches – the United Church of England and Ireland, and the Church of Scotland – which claimed to represent the religious identity and higher purpose of the United Kingdom. There were at this time major movements of reform and reawakening within the established Churches of the United Kingdom of Britain and Ireland, movements that were, as I have argued elsewhere, linked to nation-building.[12] From about 1808, there were significant efforts to improve pastoral care, reduce pluralism and non-residence among the clergy, curb the abuses of patronage, build new churches, and improve popular education. Bishops in England, Wales and Ireland became more regular in visiting the parishes within their dioceses, published lengthy visitation Charges, and formed diocesan school-building, missionary and church-building societies. This formed what Arthur Burns described as a 'diocesan revival'.[13] The clergy on the whole became more effective parish ministers and were assisted by committed lay supporters; they were more zealous in visiting the poor and the infirm, distributing alms, and establishing Sunday schools and day schools. From the late 1790s, the Church of Scotland conducted missions to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, sending out a host of itinerant missionaries, and building scores of churches and schools, aimed at bringing Catholics, Episcopalians, and the irreligious into Scotland's established Presbyterian Church. From about 1808, moreover, there were growing efforts to convert the majority Irish Catholic population to Protestantism, and especially to the Protestantism of the established Church in Ireland, in part as a means of consolidating the Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

There were initiatives in overseas missions also. In 1792, the Baptist Missionary Society was formed, followed by the London Missionary Society in 1795, the Glasgow

---

[12]   Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland 1801-1846* (Oxford, 2001).
[13]   Arthur Burns, *The Diocesan Revival in the Church of England, c.1800-1870* (Oxford, 1999).

Missionary Society and the Edinburgh Missionary Society in 1796, the Church Missionary

Society in 1799, and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1818. As Susan Thorne

has shown, several thousand gathered in September 1796 at Woolwich to witness the

departure of the first group of LMS missionaries for Tahiti; it marked for them a new epoch

and they fully expected divine intervention in support of the venture.[14] In 1804, the British

and Foreign Bible Society was founded in London and rapidly established local societies

across Britain and Europe. Its aim was both simple and grandiose – to provide every

inhabitant of the globe with a copy of the Bible, translated into their own language: this

would hasten the evangelisation of the world and the return of Christ in glory. The older

missionary societies within the Church of England, the Society for Propagating the Gospel in

Foreign Parts [SPG] and the Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge [SPCK], experienced

new levels of public interest and commitment. British society was permeated by local

branches of the national missionary societies. These branches developed networks through

overlapping membership with anti-slavery societies and a host of charitable and home

mission societies. They formed what scholars including Catherine Hall, Susan Thorne,

Esther Breitenbach, and Alison Twells have described as a philanthropic missionary public,

largely middle class and including women activists.[15] This public subscribed to missionary

periodicals, absorbed missionary biographies, histories, reports, and fictional stories about

missionaries, attended missionary meetings, and raised funds to support missionaries.

Believing firmly in the providential direction of the world, they worked for more humane

societies at home and overseas.

---

[14]   Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford, CA, 1999), 60.

[15]   Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge, 2002), 292-301; Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture*; Susan Thorne, 'Religion and the Empire at Home', in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006), 143-65; Esther Breitenbach, *Empire and Scottish Society: The Impact of Foreign Missions at Home, c.1790 to c.1914* (Edinburgh, 2009); Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792-1850* (Basingstoke, 2009).

A few comments about providentialist thought are in order here. Most of those comprising the missionary public believed in a 'general' providential ordering of the world through gradual developments reflecting the natural laws of cause and effect. As part of this general providence, they believed, God singled out certain peoples to play pivotal roles in history, as had been shown by God's use of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. Alongside this general providence, some also believed there were also special acts of 'particular providence', manifested in sudden, intense, sometimes violent divine interventions in human affairs, such as the destruction of Napoleon's grand army in Russia in 1812.[16] As Andrew Porter has observed, 'it was not always easy to distinguish between the two modes of operation, nor was attention to Providence necessarily to be associated with a particular interest in apocalyptic and eschatological matters'.[17] Many, to be sure, were convinced by the upheavals of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars that the world was entering a new dispensation and that the millennium approached. But others, including most of the Anglican leadership, emphasised the actions of providence in the more gradual developments in human affairs, including improvements in manufactures, the growth of new technologies, the spread of commerce, the migrations of peoples, and the expansion of empires. Regardless of the perspective, most British Christians holding providentialist beliefs saw themselves as a new chosen people charged with preserving divine truth and spreading it through the world. 'Latterly, indeed', observed the evangelical East India Company chaplain, Claudius Buchanan, in 1809, 'it should seem as if God had selected this nation, as formerly his chosen people, Israel, to preserve among men a knowledge of true religion'. 'Amidst the ruin or infidelity of other nations', he added, Britain had emerged as God's great missionary nation.[18]

---

[16] Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford, 19860, pp. 13-17, and *passim;* David Fergusson, *The Providence of God: A Polyphonic Approach* (Cambridge: forthcoming), chap. 3.

[17] Porter, *Religion versus Empire*, pp. 58-63, quotation on p. 59.

[18] Claudius Buchanan, *The Star of the East; A Sermon Preached in the Parish-Church of St James, Bristol*, 2nd edn. (Greenock, 1809), 39, 41-2.

The Beginnings of the Established Church in India

In 1813, the missionary public directed its attention to India, and the great work of converting the peoples of South Asia to Christianity. For many promoters of the India mission, Britain's conquest of India was only explicable in providential terms. The rapid extension of dominion over most of the South Asian sub-continent, representing about a fifth of the world's population and located thousands of miles away from the British Isles, otherwise seemed incomprehensible. Much of this military conquest had taken place between 1793 and 1815, when British public attention was focused on Europe and the armed struggle with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. As the reality of Britain's control over India became clear, there came a conviction that this control carried with it a higher religious responsibility. Before 1813, British missionary activity in India had been severely restricted. The eighteenth-century East India Company, the private trading Company that governed India with support from the British state, had supported chaplains for its European officials, soldiers and traders, and it had quietly tolerated some missionary activity by its chaplains. From 1728, moreover, the SPCK provided financial support to German Lutheran missionaries in South India. The East India Company opposed, however, opening its Indian territories to unrestricted missionary activity, believing – on the basis of strong evidence – that missionaries would antagonise the Hindu and Muslim populations, foment civil disorder and undermine the loyalty of its sepoy army. But from the late 1780s, there were growing calls from British Christians, including high church and evangelical Anglicans, for the opening of India to Christian missions.[19] In the lead-up to the renewal of the East India Company Charter by Parliament in 1813, the mission public, led by the Claphamite group of

---

[19]   Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 124-9; Penny Carson, 'The British Raj and the Awakening of the Evangelical Consciousness', in Brian Stanley (ed.), *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), 53-8.

Anglican evangelicals, including William Wilberforce and John Venn, and with SPG and CMS support, campaigned vigorously for opening India to unrestricted missionary activity. Supporters of opening India to missions sent 895 petitions, with nearly half a million signatures, to Parliament.[20] Significantly, there were also calls for the formation of an established Church in India – calls which reflected the emerging state-supported reform movement within the British established Churches. 'The perpetuity of the Christian faith among Europeans in India, and the civilization of the natives,' observed Claudius Buchanan in 1805, 'appear to me to require … an Ecclesiastical Establishment'. 'Can any one believe', he added, 'that our Indian subjects are to remain for ever under *our* government involved in their present barbarism?'[21] At the renewal of the Charter in 1813, Parliament required the East India Company not only to open India to Christian missionaries, but also to use Company revenues, derived in part from taxes on the people of India, to endow an established Anglican Church for India, with a bishop in Calcutta and archdeacons in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The formation of the Anglican establishment in India was controversial. It was to be supported by taxes levied on the Indian people, who did not want it, and many anticipated that this might well lead to unrest. The Church of England bishops in the House of Lords blocked a motion to create a second established Church connected with the Presbyterian Church of Scotland (though later a modest Presbyterian establishment was provided).[22] Because of strong opposition in some quarters to the idea of an established Church in India, the first bishop of Calcutta, Thomas Middleton, was quietly consecrated in Lambeth Palace Chapel in May 1814, the consecration sermon was not published (contrary to normal practice), and he arrived in India later that year with no fanfare. The authorities need not have been concerned. The general view among Indians, as Stephen Neill observed, was

---

[20]   Carson, 'British Raj and the Awakening of the Evangelical Consciousness', 66-7.
[21]   Claudius Buchanan, *Memoir of the Expediency of an Ecclesiastical Establishment for British India* (1805), 2nd edn. (London, 1812), 3, 47.
[22]   *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* 15 (August 1817), 99-101.

'that the Company was at last resolved to follow its Hindu and Muslim predecessors in giving official recognition to the religion which it professed'.[23]

The fledgling Anglican establishment in India represented the belief that the Empire, as Rowan Strong has observed, 'would now develop as an Anglican as well as a British one'.[24] Bishop Middleton was a high churchman, with a strong commitment to the alliance of Church and State, who firmly believed that India had 'been given by Providence to a distant island in the west' for the purpose of its conversion. Soon after his arrival, he began asserting his episcopal authority. 'We greatly err', he observed in a sermon in 1815, 'if we imagine that empire is conferred upon nations merely to gratify their avarice or their ambition'.[25] 'The day has at length arrived', he stressed in his charge of December 1815, 'when the purest and most powerful of protestant churches is completely established in a vast region of Asia'.[26] Indeed, he insisted in 1819, 'in the revolution of ages, no event has apparently been more propitious to the interests of the Gospel than the acquisition, by a Christian state, of the sovereignty of Hindoostan'.[27] And at this great moment in history, he himself represented the alliance of Church and Empire for this providential purpose. In his first episcopal tour, which lasted from December 1815 to December 1816, he travelled through much of India at government expense with a retinue of over 300 chaplains, secretaries, servants and armed men. In his episcopal Charge of 1821, he compared the prospects for Christianity in British India with those of early Christians in the Roman Empire, noting with approbation how 'one of the most obvious differences is, that instead of our being

[23]   Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858* (Cambridge, 1985), 262; John Kaye, *Christianity in India: An Historical Narrative* (London, 1859), 290-91.

[24]   Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 177.

[25]   Thomas F. Middleton, 'National Providence: A Sermon Preached at St John's Cathedral in Calcutta, on the 13th April, 1815', in *Sermons and Charges … with Memoirs of his Life* (London, 1824), 39-56, quotation on 54.

[26]   Thomas F. Middleton, Charge, Calcutta, December 1815', *Sermons and Charges*, 189.

[27]   Thomas F. Middleton, 'Charge of 1819', *Sermons and Charges*, 213.

here an obscure and persecuted people, we are the dominant power'.[28] He insisted that there was a need in India for an 'ecclesiastical polity' with the 'sanction and protection of the state'; and that the Anglican clergy in India should give 'the same attention to established order, which is generally expected at home'. His aim was that the whole of India would in time be organised into parishes, each with its parish church and incumbent clergyman, supported by churchwardens, 'as the parochial clergy are in England'.[29] The people of India, as subjects of the same imperial state, deserved the same benefits of religious instruction and pastoral care through the established Church as did the peoples of Britain and Ireland. Significantly, there was no effort to co-operate with the Catholic Church, which had been introduced centuries earlier by the Portuguese and which in 1815 had seven bishops and 1,500 native clergy in South India alone.[30] No, God had given Britain dominion in order to convert India to its Protestant religion.

Middleton viewed the Anglican missionaries, and especially those of the evangelical CMS, with suspicion. For him, the missionaries seemed to wander where they wished, without settled charges or episcopal authority. He insisted that Anglican missionaries must be licensed, and he remained cool towards them. He deprecated how the Act of 1813 had allowed Dissenting missionaries to enter India; this had introduced 'sectarian schismatic sentiments', so that Indians encountered competing missionaries who 'agreed in nothing but in mutual accusations of error'.[31] His own best hopes for converting India lay in the Anglican Bishop's College, which he established in Calcutta with generous donations from the SPG, SPCK, and CMS. The College was to educate young upper-caste Indians in Christian principles, train Indian converts to serve as catechists, promote the study of Indian languages, and support the translation of the Scriptures and Christian theological works – all

---

[28]   Thomas F. Middleton, 'Charge, Calcutta, December 1821', *Sermons and Charges*, 239.
[29]   Middleton, 'Charge, Calcutta, December 1815', 193, 192, 191.
[30]   'Church Missions', *Christian Remembrancer* 38 (October 1859), 377.
[31]   Carson, *The East India Company and Religion*, 155; [J. J. Blunt], 'Church in India', *Quarterly Review* 35 (March 1827), 450.

under the canopy of the established Church. It would combine 'into one [Anglican] system' the hitherto diverse efforts being made to 'advance the Christian cause'.[32] He laid the foundation stone in 1820, and the Bishop's College was opened in 1824, two years after his death. In 1824, moreover, Parliament passed an act permitting the Bishop of Calcutta to ordain Indians – at this time mainly students of Bishop's College – as clergy of the established Church of England in India. For all these high hopes, however, Bishop's College was not a great success in its early years; there were only ten students in 1829, and fifteen in 1835.[33]

Indeed, despite the claims of the providential purpose for the Anglican Church establishment, its early years saw relatively few Indian converts. In 1824, Middleton's successor as Bishop of Calcutta, Reginald Heber, lamented that the Church's adversaries 'taunt us' over 'the tardy progress of Christ's kingdom in the East'. For Heber, the slow progress resulted largely from a lack of public support in England, where a 'general ignorance' prevailed concerning 'these important but distant territories'.[34] The established Church of England in India also encountered resistance from Indian communities. There was communal Hindu and Muslim violence directed against converts to Christianity, who were frequently declared to be legally 'dead' by communal leaders, their marriages dissolved and their property and inheritance rights forfeited. From the early 1820s, there were numerous incidents of church and school burnings, murders and death threats; these included violent attacks in 1827-28 directed against Shamar women converts to Christianity for seeking to cover their breasts.[35] As Penelope Carson has shown, officials of the Company state restricted the movement of missionaries after 1813 for reasons of public peace, while some Company officials, among them Major General Sir Thomas Munro of the Madras Presidency

[32]   Henry Kaye Bonney, 'Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Fanshaw Middleton', in Middleton, *Sermons and Charges*, lxxix.
[33]   Neill, *History of Christianity in India 1707-1858*, 264-7.
[34]   Reginald Heber, *A Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Calcutta* [1824] (London, 1827), 5.
[35]   Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 170-75.

and Mountstuart Elphinstone, governor of the Bombay Presidency, were openly hostile to missionary activity. Some British military commanders, moreover, refused missionaries access to their sepoy soldiers and dismissed sepoy soldiers who converted to Christianity.[36]

The Company state's attitudes towards the established Church and Christian missions in India began to change in 1828 with the arrival of a new governor-general, Lord William Bentinck, a liberal Whig with evangelical sympathies. Although cautious about supporting missionaries, Bentinck was open about his own Christian faith. He also believed that the Company state had a duty to protect people of all faiths, including the Christian converts. In 1829-30, morally appalled by the practice and influenced by public protests in Britain, Bentinck outlawed *sati*, or the ritual burning alive of widows. The practice was largely restricted to the higher castes in parts of Bengal and among the Rajputs. Nonetheless, although *sati* had influential Hindu critics, the British abolition of *sati* was met with popular anger and viewed as unacceptable state interference in India's religion and culture.[37] There was further such interference. In 1831 Bentinck's administration banned discrimination against employing Christian converts in government posts, and in 1832 it ended the operation of Hindu law by which Christian converts became outcastes and forfeited claims to heritable property. However, Bentinck resisted Christian calls to end the Company's involvement in the collection of the pilgrim tax at Hindu holy places, or the Company's maintenance of Hindu temples. Nor was he an advocate of the established Church in India. 'One of the great objections to the introduction of an Episcopacy into India', he asserted to Daniel Wilson, Bishop of Calcutta, in June 1834, 'is, that the greater the pomp and power and predominancy, you give to your own religion, the greater will be the distrust excited'.[38]

---

[36]   Ibid., 154, 158-70.

[37]   John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: The Making of a Liberal Imperialist 1774-1839* (London, 1974), 211-14.

[38]   Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 188; Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck*, 212.

Despite Bentinck's misgivings about the established Church in India, there was a growing respect among officials in the Company state for the work of its clergy, especially in the field of education, where Church schools helped prepare upper-class Indian boys for Company positions. The prospects for the alliance of Church and Empire were brightening. In Britain, there was a recognition that India was far too large to be organised as one diocese under a single bishop and that overwork might well have contributed to the early deaths of the first four bishops of Calcutta. At the renewal of the East India Company Charter in 1833, Parliament agreed by large majorities to enlarge the established Church in India, creating new bishoprics of Madras and Bombay; the Bishop of Calcutta now became Metropolitan of the Church of England Province of India.[39] The new bishoprics were to be supported from Company revenues. In 1845, an additional bishopric of Colombo was created for the British Crown Colony of Ceylon; this became part of an enlarged Church of England Province of India and Ceylon. From 1839, a newly formed Council of Education in India, based in Calcutta, began making grants-in-aid to both government and Christian schools, a practice which emulated the government's education policy in England. The India policy was confirmed in Sir Charles Wood's dispatch on education of 1854. The Indian grants-in-aid increased steadily from £30,000 in 1839 to £190,000 in 1852-53, with most of this money going to Christian schools. These schools were not exclusively Anglican, but by the 1850s most of them were, and the grants represented an additional state subsidy of the Church's evangelising work. By 1853, Anglican and other missionary schools were educating 101,192 pupils, as opposed to 23,163 in government schools.[40]

In 1832, the Anglican establishment received forceful new leadership with the consecration of Daniel Wilson as Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan. Wilson was both an

---

[39]   *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 19 (17 July 1833), cols 797-807; 20 (26 July 1833), cols. 14-50; Carson, *East India Company and Religion*, 199.

[40]   Ian Copland. 'Christianity as an Arm of Empire: The Ambiguous Case of India under the Company, c.1813-1858', *HistJ*, 49 (2006), 1042, 1046.

evangelical and a staunch Anglican churchman with high views of his episcopal authority.

He believed that India should have an established Church similar to that in England, with a

well-defined episcopal system, parish structures, regular services, pastoral care, and a

disciplined, resident clergy. This Anglican establishment, he believed, was vital to the

providential purpose of Britain's India empire. 'India', he maintained in his Charge of 1838,

'presents a spectacle to the Christian world. It is the first instance of any of the Reformed

Churches being established, after the Apostolical model, in the expanse of such an empire'.

Indeed, he observed, 'Palestine in the heart of Western Asia was scarcely more calculated for

a centre for the diffusion of the Gospel in the time of the Apostles than Hindostan in the heart

of Eastern [Asia] is now'.[41] He insisted, by 1837 successfully, that the bishops should

exercise clear authority over the missionaries supported by the CMS and other Anglican

missionary societies, including their placement and discipline, while he acted to remove non-

Anglican missionaries from employment by the Church societies. This included the able,

charismatic German Lutheran CMS missionary and scholar, Karl Rhenius, dismissed by

Wilson in 1836.[42] Wilson further insisted that the chaplains maintained by the Company

state must be regarded as under his authority as clergy of the established Church in India.

For Wilson, the established Church in India wass an integral part of the established

Church of England and Ireland, and had a vital role to play in consolidating British rule in

India. The Indian established Church, he maintained in his Charge of 1845, was part of 'the

National Church of the Government, Nobles and People of our religious country, at home and

abroad. It is the glory of our land; the main bulwark of Christianity in Europe and Asia'.[43] It

---

[41] Daniel Wilson, *A Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Calcutta, at the Visitation on Friday, July 6th 1838* (London, 1839), ix, 32.

[42] Hans Cnattingius, *Bishops and Societies: A Study of Anglican Colonial and Missionary Expansion 1698-1850* (London, 1952), 159-85; T. E. Yates, *Venn and Victorian Bishops Abroad* (Uppsala, 1978), 30-7; Robert E. Frykenberg. 'Episcopal Establishment in India to 1914' in Rowan Strong (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, vol. III: Partisan Anglicanism and its Global Expansion, 1829-c.1914* (Oxford, 2017), 303-6.

[43] Daniel Wilson, *A Farewell Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Calcutta*, 2nd edn. (London, 1845), 23.

represented the principle that the imperial state had a sacred responsibility to promote Christianity, and provide religious instruction and observances to all its subjects (especially the poor), alongside entire religious freedom for those who chose to remain outside the establishment. The same compelling arguments in favour of an established Church in Britain, he insisted, applied still more to 'the scattered flocks of Heathen India'.[44] Wilson brought the spirit of the English 'diocesan revival' to his diocese of Calcutta, establishing diocesan societies for infant schools (1833), church building (1834), the support of additional curates (1841) and the support of scripture readers (1848), all aimed at mobilising lay support and modelled on diocesan societies in England.[45] He claimed that 'our gentry all over India' were contributing money to building churches, just as the gentry were in England. As the influence of churches, schools and pastoral care spread, British India would become 'a second promised land'. This all pointed to 'the speedy winding up of the great scheme of Providence' in anticipation of Christ's return.[46] Between 1839 and 1847, the graceful Gothic St Paul's Cathedral, modelled on Norwich Cathedral and York Minster, and expressing in stone the 'apostolic commission' of its bishop, was erected in Calcutta.[47] The cathedral supported a model school for 1,000 Indian children, a Normal School for teacher training, and a number of missionary priests. By 1856, the three Anglican dioceses of India consisted of 326 clergy, including 146 CMS and SPG missionaries, and scores of churches had been built.[48] The Anglican missions had particular success in South India, in the region around Tirunelvēli. The second Bishop of Madras, George Spencer, was impressed with the growing number of Christian villages, which he described as 'parishes'; in 1841 he insisted 'that the

---

[44]   Ibid., 27.
[45]   Atherstone, 'Introduction', in *Journal of Bishop Daniel Wilson of Calcutta*, xxii-xxiii.
[46]   Wilson, *Farewell Charge*, 45.
[47]   G. A. Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire c.1840-1870* (New Haven, CT, 2013), 73-5.
[48]   'Minute of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society on the Question of "The Extension of the Episcopate" in India', 14 April 1856, LPL, Tait Papers 194, fols 180-81.

parochial system of the Church might be carried out as effectually in India as in England'.[49] In his Charge of 1842, he noted that the number of Anglican clergy in the diocese had nearly doubled in the past four years, from 31 to 61, while a new Madras Diocesan Institution, modelled on the Bishop's College in Calcutta, was training Indian clergy for South India.[50] In the diocese of Madras alone, 36 new churches were consecrated between 1837 and 1861.[51]

In Britain, India held a special place in the mind of the mission public. Between 1838 and 1873, half the missionary speakers at British provincial meetings of missionary societies came from India.[52] There were, by the late 1850s, twenty-five Protestant missionary societies and organisations active in India.[53] The British missionary public was intrigued as well as appalled by lurid accounts of *sati*, of murderous gangs of *thugs* who allegedly followed the goddess Kali, of devotees hanging by hooks or throwing themselves under the Juggernaut cart, of dancing girls and licentious festivals at the temples, of female infanticide and human sacrifice, and of slavery and the forcible seclusion of women. In pious treatises, magazines and novels, missionaries were portrayed as liberating the peoples of India from idolatry and superstition, ending immoral practices, and elevating the status of women, as well as spreading the gospel of eternal salvation. The Anglican establishment in India was engaged in a struggle against heathen darkness. 'In India Satan is indeed in his heaven', Wilson proclaimed in a sermon in 1846 while on furlough in England. 'There he has reigned, almost from the Deluge, undisturbed until lately'.[54] India, insisted the CMS *Church Missionary Intelligencer* in 1855, 'is a land full of idols, from the dark chambers of imagery of whose

---

[49]   George Spencer, Bishop of Madras, *A Visitation Charge addressed to the Missionary Clergy of the Church of England in Tinnevelly and Travancore* (Madras, 1841), 14.

[50]   George Spencer, *A Charge, delivered at his Second Triennial Visitation … on All Saints' Day, 1842* (London, 1843), 24, 40-44.

[51]   Frank Penny, *The Church in Madras*, 3 vols. (London, 1904-1922), 3: 34.

[52]   Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, 2001), 35.

[53]   Edward Storrow, *India and Christian Missions* (London, 1859), 43.

[54]   Quoted in Bob Tennant, *Corporate Holiness: Pulpit Preaching and the Church of England Missionary Societies, 1760-1870* (Oxford, 2013), 247.

temples the pure mind shrinks back with abhorrence – whose deities are stained with every

vice – and where the foulest crimes are perpetrated in the name of religion'.[55] As India took

an increasingly central place in the British Empire – economically, militarily and strategically

– Britain's responsibility before God for its Christian conversion and the fulfilment of the

providential purpose grew all the more compelling.

The 'Mutiny' of 1857-58 and its Aftermath

In May 1857, north-central India was swept by a number of mutinies among the Indian sepoy

soldiers, which quickly developed into a general uprising aimed at ending British rule and

restoring the Mughal Empire. There were widespread killings of European civilians,

including missionaries and their families, as well as of Indian Christian converts. The rising

was suppressed by British and loyal sepoy troops by July 1858, amid large-scale deaths of

Indian civilians and summary executions of suspected insurgents. The Crown called for a

'day of national humiliation' on 7 October 1857, and special services were held in established

churches and many dissenting chapels across Britain. For the missionary public, the 'India

Mutiny' was a divine call to Britain to redouble its efforts to Christianise India.[56] 'Who can

doubt', asked Samuel Wilberforce, the high church bishop of Oxford, in an address in

November 1857, 'that God has so dealt with us, in order that we may ... act, as we never yet

have acted, with true Christian zeal and courage in the administration of our Eastern

Empire?'[57] 'Not a few individuals, nor a mere band of enthusiasts', asserted the influential

evangelical Dean of Carlisle, Francis Close, in 1858, 'but the nation, with its royal mistress at

---

[55] 'The Urgent Need of Increased Efforts on Behalf of India', *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (April 1855), 78.

[56] Brian Stanley, 'Christian Responses to the Indian Mutiny of 1857', *SCH*, 20 (1983), 277-89.

[57] Samuel Wilberforce, *Speeches on Missions*, ed. Henry Rowley (London, 1874), 106.

its head, has publicly acknowledged that the late catastrophe, and the present difficulties in India, are judgements of God for our sins'.[58]

After the Mutiny was suppressed, the British Crown-in-Parliament took over the governance of India from the East India Company; this was followed by massive legislative reconstruction, which one recent historian has termed 'the legalization of India'.[59] Significantly, however, this 'legislative revolution' did not include heeding the urgent appeals of the British missionary public to adopt an aggressive policy of Christianisation. In her Royal Proclamation of 1858, the Queen affirmed her own Christian faith, but her government disclaimed 'alike the right and desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects'. That said, the imperial state in India did not become religiously neutral; it remained a Christian state which supported an established Church. There were no moves to disestablish and disendow the Anglican Church in India or to end the state grants-in-aid to missionary schools. 'It is not only our duty', the Whig prime minister, Lord Palmerston, assured a deputation on Indian education in 1859, 'but it is our interest to promote the diffusion of Christianity as far as possible throughout the whole length and breadth of India'.[60] In 1862, the state ceased collecting the Pilgrim Tax and helping to maintain Hindu holy places. The Anglican missionary societies increased their efforts. In the four years between 1857 and 1861, the number of CMS mission stations in India grew from 136 to 148, and the number of CMS missionaries increased from 218 to 258.[61] Anglican leaders continued using providentialist language in speaking of the Church and Empire in India. In his Charge of 1863, Bishop Gell of Madras proclaimed that 'the chief purpose for which God has subjected India to England and sent us all hither' was 'that we might make known from

---

[58]   Francis Close, *An Indian Retrospect; or What has Christian England done for Heathen India?* (London, 1858), 5.
[59]   Jon Wilson, *India Conquered: Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire* (London, 2016), 292-317.
[60]   Palmer, *Imperial Vineyard*, 18.
[61]   Tennant, *Corporate Holiness*, 273.

North to South the glorious message of Salvation which God has made known to us'.[62] 'We have this charge to administer', Bishop Samuel Wilberforce asserted with regard to British India in 1867. 'It is given to us that we may bless India by Christianising it. If we refuse to do it, some other people will be raised up to do the work of God there, and we shall be put down because we [refused to do it].'[63]

In the decades after the Mutiny, the bishops continued working to Christianise India primarily through the diocesan structures of the established Church. The broad churchman, George Cotton, a protégé of the liberal Anglican Thomas Arnold, succeeded Wilson as Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan of India and Ceylon in 1858. Cotton was no less committed to the ideal of the established Church than his high church and evangelical predecessors; he promoted diocesan societies, including an additional curates society, a church building society, and a district visiting society, and he worked to revive the Bishop's College.[64] He saw the diocesan and parochial structures of the established Church, and the nurturing of Christian communities through a settled pastorate, as key to the conversion of India. 'Our task', he insisted in 1859, 'is not to convert one man, but a whole nation to God'.[65] Following an episcopal visit to the region around Tirunelvēli early in 1864, Cotton wrote warmly to a friend of the parish system there. 'The whole country', he observed of the region, 'is now mapped into regular Christian districts, each furnished with a substantial church, parsonage and schools in the central village, and with small prayer-houses in the minor hamlets'. 'A thoroughly good simple vernacular education', he added, 'is given all over the country, and … in every parish there are short services morning and evening'. In playing fields around the schools, boys played cricket, while 'industry, order, cleanliness,

---

[62] Frederick Gell, *A Charge delivered … at the Primary Visitation* (Madras, 1863), 17.
[63] Wilberforce, *Speeches on Missions*, 133.
[64] George Edward Lynch Cotton, *A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Calcutta* (Cambridge, 1859), 34-104; George Edward Lynch Cotton, *A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese and Province of Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1863), 4-31.
[65] Cotton, *Charge* (1859), 66.

domestic purity, improvement in worldly circumstances, are all conspicuous among the Tinnevelly Christians'.[66] The Anglican establishment was also ordaining a growing number of Indian clergy. In 1861, there were 27 Indian clerics in the diocese of Madras, a number which grew to 154 by 1896.[67] There were also large numbers of Indian lay catechists, who assisted the clergy. In 1868, John Thomas, the CMS missionary at Mengnanapuram, South India, employed 52 Indian catechists, many of them leading worship in village congregations. About one in four of Thomas's catechists went on to receive Anglican ordination.[68] The missions had particular success among outcaste or lower caste communities, and among tribal peoples. This was not seen as a problem for an Anglican establishment which at home prided itself on being the 'poor man's church'.

And yet for all the efforts of the established Church, and for all the faith in the Empire's providential purpose, there was a worrying lack of progress in converting India. While the Church experienced success in the regions around Tirunelvēli and Chota Nagpur, this was not general. 'There has not', admitted Bishop Cotton in his Charge of 1863, 'been any marked increase of missionary success'. The total number of Indian Protestant Christians in India, Burma and Ceylon, the bishops observed in a joint *Pastoral Letter* of 1863 – fifty years after the formation of the established Church in India – was 213,182; however, this represented only 'perhaps about one in a thousand of the population'.[70] Hindu and Muslim communities continued to oppose missionary activity, often with violence. Far from being attracted to the established Church because of its connections to imperial power and authority, many Indians viewed an imperial established Church as a symbol of their

---

[66]   George Cotton to G. G. Bradley, 21 January 1864, in S. A. Cotton, *Memoir of George Edward Lynch Cotton, Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan* (London, 1871), 368-9.
[67]   Gibb, *The Anglican Church in India*, 247-8; Frederick Gell, Bishop of Madras, 'Statement sent to Sir H. L. Anderson on 1st April 1871, for submission to the Secretary of State for India', LPL, Tait Papers 194, fols 173-4.
[68]   Palmer, *Imperial Vineyard*, 61-2.
[70]   Cotton *Charge* (1863), p. 4; G. E. L. Cotton, F. Gell and J. Harding, *A Pastoral Letter from the Indian Bishops to Member of the Church of England* (Calcutta, 1863), 7-8.

subjection, and saw violence against converts as a justifiable form of resistance to colonial domination.[71] Indians often resented the missionary stations, with their comfortable bungalows, churches, schools, orchards, gardens and wells, which could be seen as outposts of 'missionary colonialism'.[72] As the historian Peter van der Veer has argued, antagonism to Christianity became associated with later nineteenth-century expressions of Hindu nationalism, including claims of Aryan racial superiority, wrestling cults, body building, and 'muscular Hinduism'.[73] The local Hindu elites, complained Bishop Gell of Madras in March 1876, 'will oppress and cheat their Christian labourers; villagers still present every obstacle … against the purchase of land for Christian purposes; almost all will do all that lies in their power to prevent a relative from being baptized'.[74] 'No one, till he comes to India', observed Bishop Cotton in 1863, 'can appreciate the greatness of the social sacrifices required from converts'.[75]

Also disturbing for proponents of imperial Christianity in India was the indifference or even hostility towards missionary activity among many British imperial officials. In the localities, British officials, isolated and responsible for governing vast non-Christian populations, could view Indians converts to Christianity, even to the Anglican Christianity of the established Church, as threats to public order. This was in part because the British government organised India, for administrative purposes, into Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities, each with its own system of laws rooted in traditional practices. As Gauri Viswanathan has shown, converts created difficulties for administrators, because they represented individual choice and insisted upon the individual's right to move freely between communities. Converts challenged the defined communal and caste identities on which local

---

[71]   Palmer, *Imperial Vineyard*, pp. 68-85; Copland, 'Christianity as an Arm of Empire', 1049-50.
[72]   Robert E. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford, 2008), 234.
[73]   Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, chaps 4, 6.
[74]   Frederick Gell to A. C. Tait, 11 March 1876, LPL, Tait Papers 226, fols 105-6.
[75]   Cotton, *Charge* (1859), 65.

government was based.[76] In 1850, the Imperial Parliament in London passed the Caste

Disabilities Removal Act, which provided a degree of protection of the personal property of

converts. Daniel Wilson, as Metropolitan of the established Church in India, had

opposed/denounced caste distinctions in public worship as early as 1834.[77] But British

officials often opposed any Church meddling with the caste system, and Hindu and Muslim

families expected local civil courts to order the return of young adults who had converted to

Christianity, so that family pressure could be exerted to secure their retractions. Bishop Gell

of Madras complained in 1865 that an English high court judge publicly denounced an

Anglican clergyman for preaching against the caste system.[79] Such behaviour, Gell argued,

was at odds with the state's maintenance of an established Church to create a Christian India.

British officials in India, Gell insisted in his Charge of 1863, must remember that theirs was a

Christian government, and that 'the establishment of the kingdom of Christ among all its

subjects [should be] its ultimate and far highest object'.[80] Another obstacle to Christ's

kingdom in India were British racist attitudes towards Indians, including Indian Christians.

Indian converts were denied burial rights in government cemeteries.[81] As Andrew Porter has

observed, 'the growth of nineteenth-century racial perspectives, so at odds with Christianity's

egalitarianism, both distanced missions from empire and undermined the missionary

enterprise'.[82] Many British residents would not employ Indian Christians as servants,

claiming they were 'uppity' and untrustworthy.[83] Racism grew more pronounced in the

second half of the nineteenth century, reinforced by the experiences of the Mutiny and then

by the influence of social Darwinism. When James Welldon arrived in 1898 as Bishop of

---

[76]   Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, 1998), 75-117.
[77]   Atherstone, 'Introduction', p. xxi; Robert E. Frykenberg, 'Christian Missions and the Raj', in Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, 2005), 120.
[79]   Frederick Gell to A. C. Tait, 28 April 1865, LPL, Tait Papers 84, fols 254-7.
[80]   Gell, *Charge* (1863), 14.
[81]   Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, 112.
[82]   Porter, *Religion versus Empire*, p. 283.
[83]   Mary A. Procida, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester, 2002), 90.

Calcutta and Metropolitan, he later recalled, he had 'expected to see many dark faces in the Cathedral; but, except on rare or few occasions, I saw few or none at all'. 'It is not improbable', he added, 'that the European worshippers would have resented a strong native element in the congregation'.[85] The British 'claim of racial superiority', the bishop of Lahore later lamented in 1907, had created a 'tremendous ... gulf between ourselves and Indians in this great land'.[86]

Renewal Movements in the Indian Established Church

In November 1873, the Indian bishops met at Nagpur for the first synodical conference of the Anglican Province of India and Ceylon. They made an urgent appeal to the Archbishop and Convocation of Canterbury, calling attention to what they perceived as an impending crisis in India. Their tone was far different from the earlier confident language of providence, Church and Empire. 'We would urge you', the Indian bishops exhorted, 'to consider that the season is critical. We are convinced that the future of India depends very much on what is done for it by the Church of England during the next few years'. The fabric of India's ancient civilization, they claimed, was unravelling. 'India, in the present century, is passing through a state of disintegration, and its habits and forms of life are subjected to influences which are affecting it seriously and fundamentally'. The forces of modernisation – Western education, science, railways, commerce – were rapidly dissolving traditional beliefs, and carrying the people of India 'almost without a will, and as if by a tide of circumstances, from a past, to which their hearts cling with regret, to a future, which is still unknown and indiscernible'. Nor was there any reason to believe that all this would lead to a Christian India. 'We should mislead you if we gave you to understand …', the bishops continued,

---

[85]   J. E. C. Welldon, *Recollections and Reflections* (London, 1915), 237.
[86]   George Alfred Lefroy, 'Our Indian Empire' in in J. Ellison and G. H. S. Walpole (eds.), *Church and Empire* (London, 1907), 68.

that the conversion of India is as yet imminent. There is nothing which can at

all warrant the opinion that the heart of the people has been largely touched,

or that the conscience of the people has been affected seriously.... In fact,

looking at the work of Missions on the broadest scale, and especially upon

that of our own Mission, we must confess that, in many cases their condition

is one rather of stagnation than of advance.

Rather than to Christianity, Western influences were drawing educated Indians towards 'a

scientific Pantheism', or a 'debasing selfishness'.[87]

The response to this appeal was a renewed effort to enlarge the episcopate of the

established Church in India. There had been a sense since the 1850s that the four dioceses in

the Province of India and Ceylon were far too large, both in territory and population, for

effective episcopal supervision. The Church needed more bishops to revive its mission. The

British Parliament, now with a significant number of Catholic and Dissenting MPs, could no

longer be expected to pass legislation to use Indian public funds to enlarge the established

Church in India, as it had in 1833. However, political leaders did agree to permit the Church

of England to enlarge its Indian episcopate through its own resources. To aid this process,

Parliament passed in 1874 the Colonial Clergy Act, which, among other provisions,

confirmed the right of Indian bishops to consecrate assistant or suffragan bishops. The

British government further agreed that new bishoprics could be legally formed, without a

---

[87] Bishops of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, 'To the Archbishops, the Bishops and the Clergy of the Province of Canterbury in Convocation Assembled', Nagpur, 17 November 1873, LPL, Tait Papers 202, fols 4-10; 'Minutes of Conference of the Bishops of the Province of India and Ceylon, held at Nagpur November 26th and 27th 1873', LPL, Tait Papers 194, fols 209-12.

further act of Parliament, in those territories that had been conquered since Parliament's India Church Act of 1833, and also in Indian princely states not under direct British rule.[89]

In November 1875, A. C. Tait, the broad church Archbishop of Canterbury, and a strong believer in the principle of an established Church, launched a public appeal in Britain to raise donations to endow new Indian bishoprics. Any legal obstacles to the creation of new bishoprics, he insisted, had now been removed, while the Committee of the Colonial Bishoprics Fund promised to give substantial funds for the Indian bishoprics. The greatest gift that Christian Britain could bring to India, Tait insisted, would be 'to make their civilization Christian'. An enlarged episcopate would help organise Britain's Indian Empire 'into Christian communities, held together by a well-compacted, ecclesiastical Government, and united with our Church at Home by the profession of our common faith and the love of a common Lord'. Unless the Anglican establishment were strengthened for the work of Christianising India, he warned, much of India would drift into an atheistic materialism, and this would have revolutionary consequences. For this reason, Tait observed, 'our wisest statesmen, who are best acquainted with India, now publicly acknowledge that the English Nation has no more useful or faithful servants than our Missionaries'.[90]

The coming years brought a remarkable extension of the established Church episcopate in India. In 1877, the established Church in India consecrated two highly experienced missionaries as suffragan bishops – the high church linguist, Robert Caldwell of the SPG, and the evangelical educator, Edward Sargent of the CMS – to serve in South India. Then, in the coming decades, new Anglican bishoprics were founded at Lahore (1877), Rangoon (1877), Travancore and Cochin (1879), Chota-Nagpur (1890), Lucknow (1893), Tirunelvēli and Madura (1896), and Nagpur (1903).[91] The costs of endowing these new

[89] Julius Richter, *A History of Missions in India*, trans. S. H. Moore (New York, 1908), 273-5.
[90] A. C. Tait, 'Pastoral letter: New Indian Bishoprics and the Day of Intercession for the Mission', 15 November 1875, LPL, Tait Papers 208, fols 281-4.
[91] Gibb, *Anglican Church in India*, 278-96.

bishoprics were met by the Colonial Bishoprics Fund and by voluntary donations. For many

Anglicans, the new bishops would be missionary bishops, on the model of the first Christian

bishops, and they would revive the established Church as a missionary Church. 'The great

missionary agency', insisted Reginald Copleston, high church bishop of Colombo (and later

bishop of Calcutta and metropolitan) in 1879, 'is a living Church, united, organized, and ever

spreading'; the Church would triumph through her 'internal vigour' and 'discipline'.[92]

Impressive cathedrals were built at Lahore and at Allahabad, in the diocese of Lucknow. The

synod of the Province of India and Ceylon held in Calcutta in early 1883 was attended by

nine bishops, and meetings of the Episcopal Synod now became regular events. Some

exceptional bishops served the late nineteenth-century established Church in India. The

evangelical Frederick Gell served for thirty-eight years as bishop of Madras, during which

time the number of Protestants in the diocese rose from 65,000 in 1861 to 152,000 in 1896.[93]

The first bishop of Lahore was the Oxford-educated CMS missionary and educator, Thomas

Valpy French, who arrived in India in 1851, founded St John's College, Lahore, in 1870, and

was known as the 'seven-tongued man' for his mastery of seven Indian languages.[94] French

had a high view of his episcopal office, and viewed the Anglican Book of Common Prayer as

the 'only wholesome representative of primitive catholic truth and order'.[95]

From the 1860s, moreover, single women missionaries brought new vigour to the

Indian established Church. The India missions had long benefited from the work of

missionary wives, who provided teaching, medical care and pastoral visiting. But now there

came unmarried women, fervent in their sense of vocation, many of them trained at London's

evangelical Mildmay Deaconesses Centre or the high church SPG deaconess training house

[92]   Reginald Stephen Copleston, *A Charge delivered at his Primary Visitation of the Diocese of Colombo* (Oxford, 1879), 23.
[93]   Gibb, *Anglican Church in India*, 247-8.
[94]   Vivienne Stacy, 'The Legacy of Thomas Valpy French', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13 (1989), 24; for French's remarkable life, see Herbert Birks, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French*, 2 vols. (London, 1895).
[95]   Birks, *Thomas Valpy French*, 2: 151.

in south London. This growth reflected a larger trend within the British missionary movement, which would see women represent over half the CMS missionaries by 1899.[96] As Jeffrey Cox has shown, the high church SPG sent over 300 unmarried women missionaries to Delhi and Lahore alone in the century after 1850, more than six-times the number of male missionaries sent to these cities during the same period.[97] Some of these women were members of high church Anglican sisterhoods, such as the Wantage Sisters and All Saints Sisters, who arrived in India in 1876. They lived disciplined communal lives in compounds, established schools and orphanages, and went into the surrounding communities for household visiting, teaching, or medical service. Other single women served as evangelical Bible women. In the 1860s, Scottish Presbyterian women missionaries pioneered zenana work, aimed at reaching upper-class women who often lived secluded in their homes. The work was taken up by the established Church in India, with a Church of England Zenana Missionary Society formed in 1880. As Geraldine Forbes has shown, the zenana missions had only limited success, in part because the men who controlled access to the zenanas, while they might value women learning Western needlework and domestic skills, definitely did not want women converting to Christianity.[98] Nonetheless, in missionary literature the zenana missions became symbolic of work for the elevation of the status of Indian women, and through their zenana work, Anglican women missionaries were portrayed as having a special 'responsibility for non-Western women and children in an age of rising imperialistic fervor'. Anglican women who served as missionaries often embraced the notion of a providential Empire bringing Christian civilisation to India; according to Steven Maughan, they 'had a

---

[96]   Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), p. 80; Jocelyn Murray, 'The Role of Women in the Church Missionary Society, 1799-1917', in Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (eds.), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), 82, 89.

[97]   Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York, 2008), 188-95; Gibb, *Anglican Church in India*, 301, 311-15.

[98]   Geraldine H. Forbes, 'In Search of the "Pure Heathen": Missionary Women in Nineteenth-Century India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21; 17 (26 April 1986), Review of Women's Studies, 2-8.

noticeable affinity for empire and its structures'.[99] The increasing presence of female

missionaries contributed to what was becoming a distinctive aspect of the India missions

from the 1870s, which placed greater emphasis on charity to the poor, visiting the sick and

infirm, caring for orphans, teaching poor children and providing basic medical care, than on

preaching or doctrinal instruction. These Anglican women missionaries were not ordained

and were not to preach. Their ministry was about social service; they would spread

Christianity through the example of self-less living. In their social work among the poor,

they reflected the growing social gospel commitments of the Anglican Church in Britain.

Church leaders in India continued to appeal to the providential purpose of Church and

Empire. 'I do believe', asserted the Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan, Edward Johnson, in

his Charge of 1881, 'that England has been led or drawn into her present relations with this

country by a force of circumstances … which we must regard as mysterious and

providential'. The work of Christianising India, he continued, was 'given to us as a nation to

do'. [100] Yet by the 1880s, such providentialist language was losing some of its power and

conviction. The prospect of India's conversion seemed to move further and further into the

distant future; the British Empire in India was not being consolidated under established

Christianity and the providential plan of Empire appeared ever more problematic. At the

current rate of Anglican Church growth, asserted Isaac Taylor in the London *Fortnightly*

Review of October 1888, it would take 'nearly a hundred thousand years to convert India'.[101]

As one author observed in 1873, it seemed 'that the Almighty is working out in India some

---

[99]   Steven S. Maughan, *Mighty England do Good: Culture, Faith, Empire and World in the Foreign Missions of the Church of England, 1850-1915* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2014), 228, 356.

[100]   Edward Ralph Johnson, *A Charge delivered by the … Bishop of Calcutta [and] Metropolitan of India and Ceylon … at his Primary Visitation* (Calcutta, 1881), 14.

[101]   Isaac Taylor, 'The Great Missionary Failure', *Fortnightly Review*, 44 (1888), 490.

great problem of His Divine will', and it was no longer clear that the solution would be a Christian India.[102]

New Interpretations of a Providential Empire

Increasingly, there was also doubt about the moral and civilising influence of the Empire in India. This included concern over the opium trade, by which opium produced in India was brought by British merchants, backed by British armed force, to China. Despite the devastating human costs of the trade, an attempt in 1875 to convince the Archbishop of Canterbury to express public support for the Anglo-Oriental Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade was met by a rebuff.[103] Moreover, during the 1880s, the Anglican feminist reformer, Josephine Butler, helped expose Indian state involvement in prostitution.[104] Butler had played a leading role in the long public campaign from 1869 to 1886 to abolish the English Contagious Diseases Acts, which forced suspected prostitutes to undergo invasive medical examinations for venereal disease, and, if found to be infected, to undergo treatment. For the campaigners, the Contagious Diseases Acts meant the state licensing of prostitution and the institutionalisation of an evil. Under public pressure Parliament abolished the English Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886. By then, Butler and her supporters had turned their attention to the similar Contagious Diseases Acts in India, where their investigations into the licensing system revealed that Indian women, often young widows sold by their families, were being procured by the Indian government and pressured into lives of prostitution in the military cantonments. Through the state licensing of prostitution, Butler

---

[102]   James Routledge, 'Our Present Position and Probable Future in India', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 27 (April 1873), 543.

[103]   F S. Turner to H M Spooner, 10 May 1875, Russell Gurney to A C Tait [May 1875], A C Tait to [F S Turner?], 5 June [1875], F S Turner to A C Tait, 8 June 1875, LPL, Tait Papers 210, fols 96, 102-4, 106-7, 108-11.

[104]   Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), 127-69; Jane Jordan, *Josephine Butler* (London, 2001), 236-49; Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp (eds.), *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns,* vol. V: *The Queen's Daughters in India* (London, 2003); Porter, *Religion versus Empire*, p. 275.

asserted in 1886, 'Indian women have been oppressed and outraged … by a *Christian* nation'.[106] This 'legalised slavery to vice' in India, she wrote in 1887, 'is tending to bring hell upon earth in the face of all our missionary efforts to advance the kingdom of God'.[107] In its military cantonments, the imperial state was enslaving Indian women, while the established Church remained largely silent on the matter. At a large public meeting to protest the Contagious Diseases Acts in Indian held in May 1887 at London's Exeter Hall, there were no Anglican clergy among the speakers.[108] Under mounting public pressure, the Indian Government repealed the Indian Contagious Diseases Acts in 1888, and the 'Cantonment Rules' for the regulation of prostitution in 1895.

Within Britain, meanwhile, many were being attracted to Eastern religions and ethical teachings. Interest in Eastern religions which had emerged in the later seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries with the British 'Orientalists', and they were revived in the 1870s and 1880s by the scholarship of F. Max Müller and the Theosophy movement of Helena Blavatsky, Henry Steele Olcott and Annie Besant. Earlier condemnations of Hindu idolatry and Indian barbarism were giving way to new appreciations of the spirituality of the East, of the beauty of Hindu poetry and art, of ancient wisdom teachings, mysterious Mahatmas and esoteric Buddhism. Annie Besant, a former Anglican, earlier a Church of England vicar's wife, at one time an impassioned socialist, embraced theosophy through Blavatsky's influence, and in 1893 settled in India, where she adopted Indian dress, studied Sanskrit, founded the Central Hindu College in 1897 and became President of the Theosophical Society in 1907. She developed her own vision of the providential purpose behind the British Empire. India, she observed in 1900, was 'a conquered nation, won by the sword, ruled by the sword'. But at the same time, India's ancient writings were now being translated into

---

[106] Burton, *Burdens of History*, 131.
[107] Josephine Butler, 'An Appeal to Missionaries', *The Sentinel*, 9 (May 1887), 53.
[108] 'Exeter Hall on the Empire', *Pall Mall Gazette* (21 May 1887).

English, and through the British Empire India's ancient wisdom was being spread throughout the world. 'Thus, while politically she is subject, her thought is beginning to dominate the whole of that Western civilisation.'[109] India under British occupation was spreading Indian spirituality, much as ancient Israel under Roman occupation had spread Christianity. While Bishop Middleton had maintained in 1821 that the connection of Christianity with the 'dominant power' in India was clear evidence of God's providential purpose, Besant was now suggesting that God's chosen peoples were in truth the conquered and the colonised of this world.

Some Anglicans were also reconceptualising the providential purpose for Britain's Indian Empire. Perhaps that divine purpose might be, not the conversion of the East to Christianity, but rather the drawing together of the spirituality of East and West, contributing to ever higher and fuller revelations of divine truth. God might intend the Empire to contribute to a distinctive religiosity that would represent a synthesis of the religions of East and West.[110] In an influential sermon given in 1872 at Cambridge, the regius professor of divinity, Brooke Foss Westcott, affirmed his belief in a providential role for Britain in India, but suggested that this role might be to promote dialogue between religious communities. 'God', Westcott argued of the British, 'has fitted us as a people and as a church ... to be the interpreters of the East to the West, and of the West to the East, to be the witnesses and heralds of truth recognised as manifold'.[111] In late 1873, F. Max Müller, Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford, gave an address at Westminster Abbey in which he spoke warmly of the growing emphasis on social service in the Christian missions in India. The result, Müller suggested, might not be individual conversions to Christianity, but rather the encouragement of ethical movements in Hinduism and Islam, so that through shared service

---

[109]   Annie Besant, *Ancient Ideals in Modern Life: Four Lectures delivered at … Benares, December 1900* (London, 1901), 9-10.
[110]   Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, 39-40.
[111]   Brooke Foss Westcott, 'The Universities in Relation to Missionary Work' in B. F. Westcott, *On Some Points in the Religious Office of the Universities* (London, 1873), 68.

to humanity all religions might be elevated.[112] As Rowan Strong has shown, such ideas infused the early India mission of the Anglo-Catholic Society of St John the Evangelist (the Cowley Brothers), a brotherhood founded in 1866 by Richard Benson. The Cowley missionary, Samuel O'Neill, travelled to India in 1874. Distancing himself from the established Church in India, O'Neill formed in 1880 a community in Indore, which included a simple, ascetic life, a genuine effort to embrace Indian culture, and charitable work among lepers and the most destitute poor, a model followed by other Cowley missionaries.[113]

Similar ideas lay behind the formation of the Cambridge University Missionary Brotherhood in Delhi in 1877. The members of the Brotherhood, including Edward Henry Bickersteth and George Alfred Lefroy, combined educational work and social service in the slums of Delhi. They distanced themselves from the power structures of the established Church, and sought to live as Indians and not as *sahibs*. 'I believe', wrote Lefroy in 1880, 'that our position as the ruling power puts a dead weight on the missionary enterprise which nothing but the direct grace of God can possibly enable us to lift'.[114] The brotherhood established St Stephen's College in 1882, which affiliated with the new state University of the Punjab. In 1879, members of Oxford University, led by Anglo-Catholics, formed the Oxford University Missionary Brotherhood for work in Calcutta, which also combined educational work, social service, and inter-religious dialogue. The Oxford group included Frederick Douglas, who arrived in Calcutta in 1892 and soon after established a mission station in Behala, where he lived simply in a modest hut and won local hearts, if not many converts, through decades of selfless charitable service.[115] In 1892, Trinity College, Dublin, established a missionary community in Chota Nagpur and in 1896 Westcott's sons, George

---

[112]   F. Max Müller, 'Westminster Lecture on Missions', in F. Max Müller, *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology and Religion*, 2 vols. (London, 1881), 2: 46-86.
[113]   Rowan Strong, 'Origins of Anglo-Catholic Missions: Fr Richard Benson and the Initial Missions of the Society of St John the Evangelist, 1869-1882', *JEH*, 66 (2015), 90-115.
[114]   H. H. Montgomery, *The Life and Letters of George Alfred Lefroy* (London, 1920), 20.
[115]   Anon., *Father Douglas of Behala* (London, 1952).

and Foss, formed an SPG missionary brotherhood based in Cawnpore, a former centre of the Mutiny and now a major industrial city; their aim was to explore the spirituality of East and West alongside a Christian social activism.[116]

The purpose of the British Empire, Brooke Foss Westcott, now Bishop of Durham, insisted in November 1900, was to spread the 'spirit of England', 'the fulness of our highest aspirations' and the 'noblest in our character'. Moreover, there was a need now to atone for the past sins of the Empire by sending out self-sacrificing 'brotherhoods of men' who 'will touch those among whom they work by the force of social devotion'.[117] (There was a personal note here: Westcott's youngest son, Basil, had died of cholera earlier that year while serving with the Cambridge brotherhood in Delhi). Within the brotherhoods, some embraced a fulfilment theology, believing that Hinduism and Islam possessed elements of divine truth, and that these faiths would be fulfilled as they also embraced Christian truths. 'We must go to India to learn as well as teach', insisted a member of the Delhi brotherhood in 1910, 'we must realise that India as well as the West ... has her contribution to bring to the full knowledge of Christ'.[118] But this emphasis by the missionary brotherhoods on inter-religious dialogue could also seem overly intellectual, and was not without its critics.[119] The emphasis on dialogue, observed the former Anglican bishop of Sydney, Alfred Barry, in 1895, 'may suggest the idea, only too congenial to the Hindu mind, that Christianity is only a philosophy to be intellectually learnt, or a morality which can be disassociated from its doctrines'.[120]

The End of the Established Church in India

---

[116]   Martin Maw, *Visions of India: Fulfilment Theology, the Aryan Race Theory and the Work of the British Protestant Missionaries in Victorian India* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 295-324.
[117]   Brooke Foss Westcott, 'The Empire (1900)', in *Lessons from Work* (London, 1901), 378-9.
[118]   Quoted in Maw, *Visions of India*, 251.
[119]   Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, 140; Maw, *Visions of India*, 320-4.
[120]   Alfred Barry, *Ecclesiastical Expansion of England* (London, 1895), 137-8.

The last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed significant growth in the numbers of Indian Christians. In 1871, there were, according to the official state census, 1,270,000 Indian Christians of all denominations, including Roman Catholics and Syrian Christians. By 1901, this number increased to 2,776,000. Christianity was now growing at a rate faster than any other religion in India and faster than the population at large.[121] Between 1881 and 1891, the growth in Christian numbers was nearly 23% as compared to an overall population growth of 13%.[122] Yet, these growing Christian numbers, while in some senses impressive, paled into insignificance when set against the total population of British India, which was nearly 300 million in 1901. The Christian population, moreover, was unevenly dispersed, with substantial Christian populations in South India around Tirunelvēli or in East India in the region of Chota-Nagpur, but very few Christians in the north and northwest.

Further, the number of *Anglican* Indian Christians was only 492,752 in 1911; this was less than 20% of the Indian Christian population and less than 2% of the overall Indian population. Such numbers were disappointing after nearly a century of an Anglican established Church of India, representing that alliance of Church and Empire which many had believed was to fulfil the providential purpose behind Britain's dominion in India. As national identity and the independence movement in India grew in influence, the Anglican Church's links to the imperial state were no longer seen as a benefit, as part of the providential plan for India; rather, they were becoming more and more a liability. The Church in Ceylon (which was not formally part of the Indian Empire) had already been disestablished in 1881, and in Britain there were calls for the disestablishment of the Indian Church from the early 1880s.[123] At their synod in 1908, the Anglican bishops in India began planning for disestablishment, an end to state endowments, and the creation of an

---

[121]   Copland, 'Christianity as an Arm of Empire', 1053; Palmer, *Imperial Vineyard*, 84-5.
[122]   George Smith, *The Conversion of India* (London, 1893), 201.
[123]   Louis George Mylne, *Charge of the Lord Bishop of Bombay, Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese* (Bombay, 1884), 2-4.

independent Anglican Church with its own synodical government. There was no political opposition to Indian disestablishment, the imperial Parliament in London passed the necessary legislation in 1927, and in 1930, the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon became a self-governing Church within the world Anglican Communion.[124] Its role as symbol of the union of Church and Empire and of the providential purpose of the British Empire in India was now ended.

Many, to be sure, continued to speak of a providential purpose for the British Empire into the twentieth century. Referring to the Empire in India in his episcopal Charge of 1906, Bishop Lefroy of Lahore insisted that it was 'Almighty God ... and He alone, Who has called us to that extraordinary and unique position which we occupy' and 'that it is to Him that we shall one day, as a nation, have to give account'.[125] According to the *Report of Commission VII: Missions and Governments* of the World Missionary Conference of 1910 in Edinburgh, 'the Government of India is, in the opinion of most Indian missionaries … manifestly an agent of Divine Providence'.[126] Some Anglicans, among them Bernard Wilson and the India-born Bishop Henry Montgomery, continued to speak of a coming 'Church of the British Empire' or of the Church of England as the 'Imperial Church' into the early twentieth century.[127] Even Indian nationalists could refer to the Empire as part of a divine plan. John Darwin has observed how 'the "providential" nature of the British conquest of India was often invoked (with no sense of irony) by those who attended the meetings of the Indian National Congress before 1914'.[128] Gerald Studdert-Kennedy has noted how the British-Israel movement, 'an explicitly imperialist form of Christianity', with a providential view of

---

[124]   Palmer, *Imperial Vineyard*, 91-4.
[125]   Montgomery, *Life and Letters of George Alfred Lefroy*, 171.
[126]   World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission VII: Missions and Governments* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), 32.
[127]   Bernard Wilson, 'The Church and the Empire', in H. Hensley Henson (ed.), *Church Problems: A View of Modern Anglicanism* (London, 1900), 372, 393; Steven Maughan, 'An Archbishop for Greater Britain: Bishop Montgomery, Missionary Imperialism, and the SPG, 1897-1915', in Daniel O'Connor (ed.), *Three Centuries of Mission: The University Society for the Propagation of the Gospel 1701-2000* (London, 2000), 362.
[128]   John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London, 2013), 296.

the British Empire, motivated 'die-hard' defenders of the Raj during the 1920s and 1930s.[129] But this language of providential Empire had little meaning for the overwhelming majority of people in India. The number of Indians who viewed the British Empire as an instrument of 'God's providence', G. A. Lefroy, Bishop of Lahore, acknowledged in 1907, was 'infinitesimal'.[130]

Conclusion

This article has explored what many nineteenth-century British Christians believed was the providential purpose of British dominion in India – that of Christianising the ancient and sophisticated civilisation of India through the alliance of Church and Empire. Its focus has been on the discourse of the Anglican leadership and the belief that India would best be Christianised through an established Church. That project inspired a considerable investment of resources and the efforts of numerous highly committed and able men and women, many of whom experienced broken health and shortened lives for their efforts. It had represented belief that the Empire in India existed not primarily to enhance Britain's material wealth and power, but that it had a higher religious and moral purpose. To be sure, the belief that the established Church in India was part of the providential plan for India's conversion was not shared by all nineteenth-century British Christians, including Protestant Dissenters, Roman Catholics and, as we have seen, many Anglo-Catholics. But for large numbers of committed Anglicans, including evangelical, high church and broad church bishops of the Indian establishment, the established Church in India had been the means to bring the benefits of their own established religion to India, and also to unite Britain and India within one Church, with common diocesan and parochial structures, providing the peoples of Britain and India

---

[129]   Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, *Providence and the Raj: Imperial Mission and Missionary Imperialism* (London, 1998), 190-214; Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, *British Christians, Indian Nationalists and the Raj* (Oxford, 1991), 24.

[130]   Lefroy, 'Our Indian Empire', 66.

with common patterns of doctrine and worship, and shared moral and spiritual values. In sharing their established Church with India, many Anglicans, inspired by their own diocesan revival, believed that they were sharing the highest expression of their Christian civilisation. Their efforts within the Indian established Church were not without some success. There were millions in India, and not only Christians, who benefited from what the Anglican established Church contributed, including churches, schools, colleges, printing presses and hospitals. However, it is also blatantly clear that the nineteenth-century alliance of Church and Empire did not lead to a Christian India. It may well be, as Robert Frykenberg observed near the end of his magisterial history of Christianity in India, that 'Christian movements seem to have been most successful when least connected to dominion or empire'.[131] There was indeed something overly contractual in tone in much of the Anglican providentialist discourse, suggesting that God had elevated Britain among nations by giving it dominion in India, and in return Britain was to deliver the peoples of India to God by making them Christian.

That said, failure of imperial India to become Christian would have seemed a mystery to the many nineteenth-century British Christians who had embraced the providential purpose of Empire, and especially to W. R. Ward's 'great generation' of 1790 to 1830. It raised serious questions about the general providential ordering of history and the divine selection of certain nations to fulfil the divine purpose – beliefs that could feed a cultural self-confidence, even arrogance, as well as to inspire missionary effort. As we have seen, from the 1870s, despite the rising public enthusiasm for imperialism in Britain, some thinkers did seek to re-conceptualise the providential purpose of the Empire in India. Perhaps that purpose, they suggested, was to promote dialogue and mutual respect between the religions of East and West, or, perhaps, through the example of self-less service among missionaries, it

---

[131]   Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 455.

was to encourage moral reform movements within Hinduism and Islam. Or perhaps, as Annie Besant argued, it was to spread the religious thought of the East to the West. There was another possibility. Perhaps the Empire in India had no higher, divine purpose; perhaps it had after all been simply a matter of British military conquest, economic domination and self-aggrandisement. The failure of the Empire to Christianise India may have contributed to the waning British public faith, if not in Christianity, at least in a providential moral and spiritual purpose for their imperial state.