

From “the poor heathen” to “the glory and honour of all nations”: Vocabularies of Race and Custom in Protestant Missions, 1844–1928

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Imagine, if you can, that you are a child in England in 1844. You belong to a middle-class and pious evangelical family. You worship at the local Congregational chapel, and you save your spare pennies to place in a missionary box supplied by the London Missionary Society (LMS). Your parents have eagerly devoured a best-selling book by Robert Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, published two years previously, in which Moffat described his mission work among the Batswana people at Kuruman in what is now the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. On this particular evening your bedtime story is read to you by your mother from the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*, the newly launched children’s periodical of the LMS, 100,000 copies of which are circulating through the denomination and wider afield.¹ Are you sitting comfortably? Then I shall begin:

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

I have just been reading the book of Mr. Moffat, the Missionary, which tells all about his travels in Africa, where the black people live. He says, “The lions sometimes come to devour them; and when they (the people) cannot get away themselves, nor frighten the hungry lion away, the parents will throw one of their children to the lion, that he may take it and go back to his den.”

O how cruel this is to the poor little children! Your parents would not throw you to the lions. No, indeed; they are not so hard-hearted as those African fathers and mothers. But, then, you know the poor Blacks had not heard the Gospel, nor known anything about the love of Jesus, who took little children into His arms and blessed them, and said, “Suffer little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” If the black people had heard of Jesus Christ, they would not have given their children to the lions. O send Missionaries to tell them all about Jesus, the children’s friend! and when you give your money to send the Missionaries, say, “I am going to save the little black children from the lions.”

Your parents would not give you to the lions, because they know Jesus Christ, and, therefore, you should say, “Thank God for giving me Christian parents, who have been taught to love me and take care of me, both in body and soul.” . . .

But the black people often love their children too. One poor mother kissed the hand of Mr. Moffat again and again, because he had brought her her boy, who had been taken away for a slave. Perhaps you will say, “Then, why do they ever give their little children to the lions?” Because they are so poor; some of them have no houses, and live in the open fields, and lie down at night in holes, and then, when the lion comes, they have no place to go to, and they are frightened; and you know, when we are frightened, we do what we afterwards wish we had not done.

But your parents have got houses, and we have no lions in England; because the Gospel of Jesus Christ has made us happier

than the Africans. But if you will send the Missionary to them, they will soon have houses, and they will not lie down in the fields at night, and will not be frightened so as to give their children to the lions. O give some Missionary money to save the poor black children from the lions!²

I am sure there would have been several extra pennies in the missionary box the following morning. So was the foreign missionary movement racist in its foundational ideology? Many scholars of postcolonial inclination seek to persuade us that it was, and at first glance, a horrendous passage such as this suggests that they are right. Early Victorian children were being supplied with an absurd caricature of African cruelty and inhumanity, which was designed to arouse sentiments of pity or even contempt, and their emotions and vivid imaginations were being manipulated in order to exploit their very considerable fund-raising potential. Children reared on such crude images would undoubtedly have grown up with stereotypes of African (indeed all black) people, which would have made egalitarian relationships virtually impossible if they were ever to meet a real African later in life. However, we need to notice two important points about this extract.

First, it is, obviously, a fictional account of southern Africa written by someone who has never been there, and who has found in Moffat’s book what he or she was determined to find. Allegations of the gross inhumanity of “heathen” parents to their children were a standard trope of early- and mid-nineteenth-century missionary magazines: whether little children were being offered to the Ganges out of the blind zeal of Hindu idolatry or thrown to the marauding lions of the South African wilderness, contravention of the natural ties of familial affection was a defining mark of the absence of Christian civilization.³ You will hunt in vain in *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* for any passage describing parents abandoning their children to the lions. What you will find, in a chapter devoted to lion stories, is the exact reverse: an extended passage, with accompanying illustration, describing how the poor in their daily struggle for survival may sometimes feel compelled to leave their weak and aged parents out in the bush with minimal rations, with the predictable result that some have been “devoured by beasts of prey.” Moffat actually tells of starving African mothers who will give all their available food to their children and take nothing for themselves. For Moffat, the alleged inhumanity of Africans was defined, not by parental treatment of children, but by adult children’s treatment of elderly parents who had formerly denied their own needs for the sake of their children.⁴

Second, we should observe that the alleged inhumanity of African parents is explained, not in racial, but in social terms. It is attributed, not to any intrinsic biological deficiency of moral sentiment or intellectual capacity, but to what we would call social deprivation. The “black people,” the readers of the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* are assured (though the assurance admittedly lacks total conviction), “often love their children too”; it is only “because they are so poor; some of them have no houses, and live in the open fields, and lie down at night in holes” that the



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imagined cruelty is said to take place. Conversely, the supposed moral superiority of Britain is attributed in the first instance to material progress in basic living and housing conditions. At a deeper level, Britain's advantage, even to the extent of the providential absence of lions from the landscape, is held to derive from the spiritual privilege and quality of communal life that a "Christian nation" enjoys: "But your parents have got houses, and we have no lions in England; *because* the Gospel of Jesus Christ has made us happier than the Africans."

"Soft" Racism and Christian "Civilization"

For most of the nineteenth century, if the missionary movement can be accused of racism, the racism was of a "soft" kind. It was based, not on any notion of permanent biological inequality between races, but on obstinately deep-rooted convictions about differences between "civilized" and "uncivilized" peoples, which were explained in terms of a causal connection between Christianity and the regenerative process of "civilization." The supposed inferiority of non-Western peoples was believed to be not intrinsic but environmental and conditional, hence in principle capable of transformation. If parental inhumanity to children was a symptom of the absence of Christian civilization, it followed that the implanting of the Christian message and its accompanying domestic values would remedy the defect. Through the irrigation of the Gospel, Indian or African family life could and would become no less loving and divinely ordered than middle-class Christian family life in Britain was alleged to be.

In France and Germany the impact of the Enlightenment on ethnology was at best ambiguous. The egalitarian dynamic latent in the ideal of a humanity united by reason was undermined by the placing of humans squarely in the natural world, to be subdivided and ranked according to the same principles of speciation as the animal kingdom; in nineteenth-century France especially, ideas of polygenesis were widely accepted, enlarging the potential for ideologies of racial subordination. In the English-speaking world on both sides of the Atlantic, by contrast, much Enlightenment philosophy exhibited an overtly Christian character; the pervasive influence of evangelicalism and the general acceptance of the historicity of the biblical account of human origins severely limited the appeal of polygenist theory until the later decades of the nineteenth century.⁵ In pre-Darwinian Britain, as also in the northern United States, concepts of the unity of humankind, its clear differentiation from the animal kingdom, and the attribution of the diversity of civilizational achievement between nations to varying degrees of degeneration from an original divinely revealed monotheism had near-paradigmatic status.⁶

The flip and darker side of this civilizational and universalist discourse was, as the extract from the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* graphically exemplifies, its intrinsic resistance to ideas of cultural plurality. Humanity had a single created origin but also a single redeemed destiny, and the temporal segment of that destiny was portrayed in terms set by the norms of Christian civilization familiar among the respectable families of England or New England. By the middle of the century, evidence was mounting from a host of mission contexts that the pursuit of Western patterns of civilization was not an unmixed blessing, as perceptive mission strategists such as Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn saw with sharpening clarity. But the policies of Anderson or Venn designed to achieve the indigeneity of native churches and the self-support of their ministry, though they attracted almost universal acclaim, were never permitted to place in fundamental question the commitment of the

missionary-supporting public to reshape Asian, African, and Pacific societies according to Western notions of civility and respectability. Victorian missionary thought was not racist, but neither was it keenly sensitive to cultural difference, and these two features were integrally, even causally, related.

Even in the 1850s and 1860s, when postcolonial historians such as Catherine Hall maintain that humanitarianism succumbed to the new biological Anglo-Saxonism propagated by such authors as Thomas Carlyle and Robert Knox,⁷ the great majority of Anglophone evangelical philanthropy continued to subscribe to the ideal of a single humanity capable of being raised by the Gospel and propelled toward a single goal of Christian civilization. To be sure, such alarming episodes as the Indian Rebellion or Mutiny of 1857, the Governor Eyre affair in Jamaica in 1865, or, at a later date, the controversy over Bishop Samuel Crowther's episcopate on the Niger subjected Western Christian faith in the essential unity and perfectibility of human nature to increasing and highly visible strain. Such apparent reverses on the mission field, coupled with the growing ascendancy of social Darwinist theory from the 1870s, produced a marked lengthening in the projected time-scale both of the wider process of civilization and, more specifically, of the devolution of power from foreign mission to indigenous church—yet these goals themselves remained largely intact.⁸

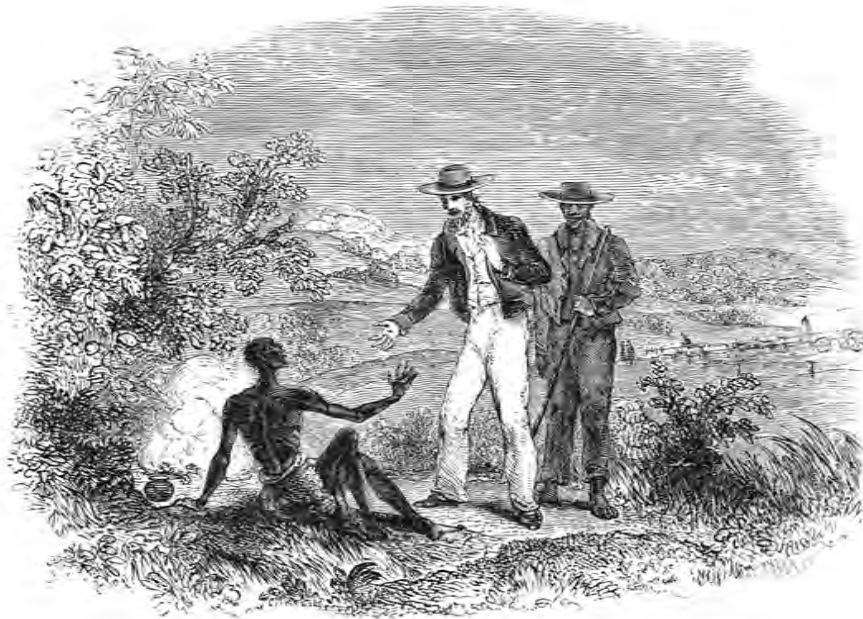
The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 took place during a period of uneasy transition between two phases of Western Christian discourse about the non-Western world. On one level, it marked the culmination of a century of Protestant enthusiasm for the regeneration of "heathen" societies to make them fit a Western blueprint of Christian civilization. The heady expectations that the world stood on the threshold of a religious and social transformation of millennial proportions, which were expressed both in advance of the conference and at Edinburgh itself, most notably by John R. Mott and Archbishop Randall Davidson, were in broad continuity with this tradition.⁹ The language of "heathenism" made frequent appearance in the drafts of some of the commission reports, as the predominantly liberal American members of Commission III, on Christian education,

Commission	"Culture"	"Cultures"	"Race"	"Races"
I	33	0	42	49
II	4	0	17	15
III	20	0	23	33
IV	13	0	11	20
V	24	0	12	28
VI	3	0	11	9
VII	6	0	30	19
VIII	0	0	7	11
<i>Total</i>	103	0	153	184

complained in relation to the British draft of their commission's report.¹⁰ Such terminology survived with some frequency in the final published version of the reports, mainly, though not exclusively, in relation to Africa, for it was among missionaries to African and other tribal peoples that the traditional juxtaposition of the heathen and the civilized retained its strongest hold.¹¹ The reports also had little good to say about the recent phenomenon of Ethiopian churches in South Africa, one of the earliest and most moderate expressions of a desire for a more culturally authentic form of Christianity in Africa.¹²

A New Language of Human Difference

Nevertheless, one does not have to dig deep into the records of the Edinburgh conference to uncover a strikingly different vein of discourse, one that intersected with and at times entirely obliterated the older bipolar vocabulary of heathenism and Christian civilization. We might describe this new discourse of difference as groping toward a modern understanding of the differentiation and relativity of discrete cultural systems, but in 1910 it only rarely used the term “culture” in the sense with which we are now so



The Abandoned Mother

familiar. The valuable online version of the commission reports published by the University of Michigan enables one to search the reports for particular terms. The accompanying table shows the results for searches for matches of the four terms “culture,” “cultures,” “race,” and “races.”¹³

The data suggest the following observations: First, the total absence of the use of the term “culture” in the plural accords with the claim of George Stocking that the plural and distinctively anthropological use of the idea of culture in the English-speaking social sciences emerged only after 1910, pioneered by the first generation of students of the American anthropologist Franz Boas.¹⁴ Not until the 1930s did the functionalist language of cultures as discrete integrated systems of human organization and mentality begin to displace the strictly empirical and more fragmented language of custom in the new colonial science of anthropology.

Second, although the singular term “culture” appears rather more frequently in the commission reports than I had expected, closer analysis reveals that in many cases the term carried a traditional, pre-anthropological meaning. Very often in the Edinburgh reports, particularly in John R. Mott’s Commission I report “Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World,” it denoted Christian character, was simply a synonym for civilization, or referred to a superior quality of refinement of learning and manners.¹⁵ While the Commission I report did refer on seven occasions to the penetration of “Western culture” into India, the phrase carried a more limited meaning than it would now: Mott’s primary emphasis was on the influx of Western

ideas and civilization, although he did not see the process as an unmixed blessing.¹⁶

Nevertheless, it needs to be noted, in the third place, that there were occasional instances in the Edinburgh reports where the idea of culture *was* used in something approaching the modern sense to refer to the worldview underlying the body of custom of a particular people. In the Commission III report on Christian education, for example, ten of the twenty usages of the term “culture” were of this kind.¹⁷ The greatest concentration of such usage was in a section devoted to the development of a national spirit in China. It is significant that here the language of culture was intermingled with that of race: the Chinese, the report affirmed, “are a most conservative race” whose prejudices are connected with “a profound belief in their own culture and in the customs that depend on that culture.” Although currently ruled by the Manchus, “a northern race,” they had imparted their own culture to their political rulers, with the result that the Chinese have “reverenced the culture and the customs which have made them powerful and preserved them, and that their pride has been racial rather than national.”¹⁸ The task confronting educational missionaries, therefore, was “to seek to educate men who will explain Christianity in terms of Chinese thought, as St Paul expressed the everlasting truths of religion in terms comprehensible to Greek and Roman culture.”¹⁹ We shall return a little later to Charles Gore, the author of this report.

The fourth conclusion to draw from the table is the overwhelming preponderance of the language of race as the primary category that the reports employed in their accounts of human social diversity. To a greater extent than any of its predecessors, the Edinburgh conference was concerned to promote the scientific analysis of Asian and African societies in order to implement more effective strategies of evangelization. The conference encouraged missionaries to undertake the serious study of how indigenous custom and belief were interwoven in the diverse and colorful tapestries of corporate identity that formed the backcloth for responses to, and interpretations of, the Christian Gospel. Such varied tapestries of social and ethnic allegiance could not be described using the old terminology of heathenism. The vocabulary most readily available to the new, and what most of us would regard as progressive, missiological discourse at Edinburgh 1910 was the vocabulary of “nation” and, what makes us rather more uncomfortable, of “race.” Jeffrey Cox has recently suggested that “of anything that could be labelled ‘scientific racism’ there is no hint whatsoever” at Edinburgh.²⁰ This judgment is strictly correct insofar as ideas of ineradicable biological difference between races continued to find no place in Protestant missionary thinking, but it is in danger of deflecting our attention from the salience that ideas of race occupied in the arguments of those who wished to see the emergence of recognizably Asian forms of Protestant Christianity.

“Race” in Missionary Discourse

In the Edinburgh reports and addresses, racialized perceptions of human identity sat uneasily alongside the traditional evangelical emphases on the unity of human nature. They shaped the

perspectives of many missionary and some Asian contributors to the conference. The Japanese Protestant leader Harada Tasuku addressed the conference on the evening of June 19 on the theme "The Contribution of Non-Christian Races to the Body of Christ." Harada, who had studied both at the University of Chicago and at Yale Divinity School, where he gained his doctorate, had imbibed a liberal organic philosophy that affirmed the distinctive insights that the Indian, Japanese, and Chinese "races" could each contribute to the body of Christ. He even, in conclusion, extended the principle to Koreans, whose country was already a Japanese protectorate and would shortly become a full colony, and to Africans and Polynesians.²¹ Some mission leaders, however, expressed disappointment that the conference heard so little of distinctively Asian renderings of Christian truth. Robert E. Speer's reflections on the contributions made by the seventeen delegates from East and South Asia provide a telling example:

By what they were and what they said they illustrated the fallacy of the idea that the Oriental consciousness is radically different from the Occidental consciousness; and also the distance of the day when we may hope to receive from Asia any substantial modification of our interpretation of Christianity. It is probably inevitable

and desirable that the new Churches should be closely similar to the older Churches which established them, but the prospect seems more distant than we have desired of the contribution by the great Asiatic races to our apprehension of that revelation of God in Christ which is richer than any one people's confessions or any one race's experience. For the present, if there are any grounds for anxiety, it is not because the native Churches are making innovations, for all of their innovations of doctrine or of polity are reproductions of incidents in the Church history of the West, but because they have as yet contributed nothing new to our understanding of the truth of God in Christ.²²

Speer was representative of the conference leaders in his apparently progressive enthusiasm to see the Western churches receive from "the great Asiatic races" a "substantial modification of our interpretation of Christianity." He had contributed an article to the conference *Monthly News Sheet* in March 1910 in which he argued that "humanity is so great and splendid a thing that its fullness can only be framed out of a world wealth of racial elements, bringing under the glorifying power of the gospel into the abiding City of God all those riches which no one race is great enough either to conceive or to attain."²³ Like others, he expressed profound disappointment that he could discover no distinctively Asian contributions to theology or church polity

in the Asian addresses given in the Edinburgh conference (they were there, of course, for those who had ears to hear). The English Presbyterian China missionary John Campbell Gibson delivered an equally pessimistic verdict on the questionnaire replies submitted by Asian Christian leaders to his Commission II, "The Church in the Mission Field," complaining of an all-pervasive "lack of independent thought among native Christians."²⁴ The Commission II report diagnosed the essence of the problem of both theological and financial dependency in mission-church relations as being the result of a disparity between the supposedly "vigorous and progressive" races of the West and the "contemplative and mystical" spirituality of the Oriental races.²⁵ Gibson appealed to ethnically undifferentiated caricatures of Oriental mysticism and indolence to explain why European dominance was paradoxically both the root of the problem and yet also indispensable to the solution. At the same time, the Commission II report attributed the contrast between Chinese and Indian rates of progress toward a three-self church to the differential in their racial characteristics, arguing that the firm hand of missionary control was most needed when dealing with the most "primitive" races.²⁶ The report thus drew a clear distinction between the varying racial qualities of Chinese, Indians, and tribal peoples, but ultimately it gave most weight to crude notions of the essentialized Oriental as a single

racial type. At Edinburgh, as more generally in the missionary movement during this period, the category of race was invoked inconsistently and loosely.²⁷

Charles Gore's Interracial Catholicity

The most fully developed statement of racial theory at the Edinburgh conference came from the Anglo-Catholic leader Charles Gore, bishop of Birmingham, in his role as chairman of Commission III, on Christian education. The Commission III report not only included the section already quoted in which Gore referred to Chinese, Greek, or Roman culture in recognizably modern terms; it also argued that the education of indigenous leaders would provide the answer to the problem currently confronting the Asian churches of how to prevent Christianity's appearing as an "exotic" European implant while still maintaining the demands (so important to Gore) of catholicity:

The ideal method of propagating Christianity is that the Gospel should be received by each race through the ministry of evangelists from nations already Christian, but that the Church should pass as rapidly as possible under the control of native pastors and teachers, so that while all Churches hold the same faith, use the

same Scriptures, celebrate the same sacraments, and inhere in the same universal religion, each local Church should from the first have the opportunity of developing a local character and colour. It is also the ideal method that the Christian converts should, with their children, continue to share the education and social life of their own race and nation. In this way can “the glory and honour of all nations”—that is, their own distinctive genius and its products—best be brought within the circle of the Holy City.²⁸

Gore was citing the eschatological vision of Revelation 21, where the Gentile kings of the earth bring the glory and honor of their respective nations as gifts into the holy city of the new Jerusalem. According to Gore, therefore, the appropriate standard by which to measure the success of Christian missions in Asia (Africa, as so often, quietly dropped out of the picture) was whether they could be shown to have contributed to the “development of an oriental type of Christianity, or as many oriental types as the varieties of national life and spirit shall demand.”²⁹ In presenting the commission’s report to the conference, Gore reiterated the point, and this time he *did* extend the principle to the African “race”:

We look around, we see the profound and wonderful qualities of the Indian, and the Chinese, and the Japanese and the Africans, and we are sure that when the whole witness of Christianity is borne, when Christ is fulfilled in all men, each of these races and nations must have brought out into the world a Christianity with its own indigenous colour and character, and that the rising up of any really national Church will be to us, who remain, who were there before, life from the dead. We regard this question as central. We start from this. Are we, by means of education, training truly national Churches to stand each on its own basis, and bring out that aspect of Christian truth and grace which it is the special province of each separate race to bring out?³⁰

Gore had no missionary experience, and it would be tempting to conclude that his contributions to the World Missionary Conference on the theme of race and nationhood were an eccentricity of Anglo-Catholic theory, which had no lasting

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practical impact on the Protestant missionary movement. There is evidence, however, that this was not the case. The encyclical letter issued by the Lambeth Conference of 1920, when it considered missionary problems, returned to the theme of global catholicity, using language that is so similar to Gore’s words at Edinburgh that one can safely deduce his hand in the drafting: “Foreign missionaries should set before themselves one ideal, and one only: to plant the Catholic Church in every land. They must remember that the Catholic Church needs the fullness of the nations. They must long to see national life putting on Christ, and national thought interpreting His truth. . . . The foreign missionary . . . must leave to the converts the task of finding out their own national response to the revelation of God in Christ, and their national way of walking in the fellowship of the Saints by

the help of the One Spirit. Thus will the glory of the nations be brought into the Holy City.”³¹

The Lambeth encyclical must have attracted the serious attention of leaders of the Anglican missionary societies but in itself was unlikely to wield much influence on the Protestant missionary movement as a whole. However, in 1928 the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council (IMC) took up the subject on several occasions, at least some of which directly reflect Gore’s distinctive enunciation of the theme of interracial catholicity. The Jerusalem report “The Relations Between the Younger and Older Churches” cited the Lambeth encyclical at length in its section on ideals and policies for the development of the younger churches.³² The report also opened its definition of Christian indigeneity in terms that corresponded closely to Gore’s statements at Edinburgh in 1910:

A Church, deeply rooted in God through Jesus Christ, an integral part of the Church Universal, may be said to be living and indigenous:

1. When its interpretation of Christ and its expression in worship and service, in customs and art and architecture incorporate the worthy characteristics of the people, while conserving at the same time the heritage of the Church in all lands and in all ages.³³

While these particular IMC pronouncements from 1928 do not refer explicitly to the concept of race, the Jerusalem meeting selected “The Christian Mission in the Light of Race Conflict” as one of its seven principal themes. The meeting issued an official statement in the name of the Council, which once again reproduced Gore’s Johannine phraseology as a theological framework capable of containing the idea of race within a wider unity:

Our Lord’s thought and action, the teaching of His apostles, and the fact that the Church, as the Body of Christ, is a community transcending race, show that the different peoples are created by God to bring each its peculiar gift to His City, so that all may enhance its glory by the rich diversities of their varying contributions. The spirit which is eager to “bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfil the law of Christ” should permeate all inter-racial relationships. Any discrimination against human beings on the ground of race or colour, any selfish exploitation and any oppression of man by man is, therefore, a denial of the teaching of Jesus.³⁴

By 1928 the category of race had acquired harsher and more problematic accents, which it had not possessed in 1910, as J. H. Oldham’s classic work *Christianity and the Race Problem*, published in 1924, amply testified.³⁵ The conflict of races was now an anxious preoccupation of social policy both in North America and in colonial contexts such as East Africa, but such problems had not diminished the appeal of the vision first adumbrated by Gore at Edinburgh. The message from the Jerusalem meeting was that, with astute guidance from missionary hands, distinctive racial characteristics were still to be nurtured as the basis of indigeneity and hence also of a true catholicity within the church universal.

Edwin Smith, Henri Junod on “Lower Races”

As an Anglo-Catholic with an ingrained suspicion of Protestant tendencies toward sectarianism, Charles Gore possessed a stronger incentive than did most evangelicals to find a secure theological foundation for interracial catholicity. However, he is not the only example from the post-Edinburgh period of the way in which the new salience of the category of race supplied

Christian thinkers with the conceptual apparatus for an acceptance of a much greater degree of plurality within the emerging world church than had been conceivable in the mid-nineteenth century. There is plentiful evidence that those now revered as the founding fathers of missionary anthropology initially found in the language of race the tools they needed to develop an understanding of cultural differentiation. Edwin W. Smith, a British Methodist missionary in what is now Zambia, was among the most influential of such scholar-missionaries. Smith's early anthropological writings were clearly influenced by evolutionary racial assumptions about Bantu peoples, though it is important to note that he later came to express regret for the title chosen by his publisher for his second book, *The Religion of Lower Races, as Illustrated by the African Bantu* (1923).³⁶

Another notable missionary anthropologist, less well known in the English-speaking world, was Henri Junod, a delegate at the World Missionary Conference. Junod was a Reformed missionary from the Swiss Mission Romande in Mozambique. By 1910 his transition from missionary entomologist (he was a butterfly collector) to missionary ethnologist was almost complete. His major study, in French, of the Baronga clan of the Thonga people, *Les Ba-Ronga*, had been published in 1898, and he was

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now hard at work on preparing a two-volume English-language edition.³⁷ His endeavors came to the notice of Commission IV, "The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions," and were mentioned in the commission's report as an example of the serious scientific study of systems of non-Christian belief that they wished to commend to the missionary movement as a whole.³⁸ As a result of his participation at Edinburgh, Junod also secured J. H. Oldham's crucial backing for the publication of his English-language work.³⁹

Junod's *The Life of a South African Tribe* appeared in two volumes in 1912–13. It was for the most part a strictly scientific anthropological study; as such, it later attracted high praise from several of the architects of modern anthropology, including Bronislaw Malinowski, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Max Gluckman, and Isaac Schapera.⁴⁰ Junod confined to certain paragraphs, located mainly at the conclusion of the second volume, his more prescriptive and missionary-oriented comments on which aspects of modern civilization ought to be encouraged among the Thonga, and which might on the contrary prove fatal to them, as members of a "weaker race."⁴¹ What is striking about Junod's conclusion is the extent to which he makes generalized deductions from his ethnographic case study of the Thonga and applies them in social Darwinist fashion to the "South African tribe" as a broader racial entity comprising all the Bantu-speaking peoples of South Africa. The "South African tribe" was, in Junod's judgment, a weaker race whose very survival was in jeopardy under the corrosive impact of the vices of white "civilization"⁴² and the expansion of the racially superior Afrikaner (Afrikaner) population, "formed by the amalgamation of some of the best stocks of the Aryan race." It was therefore the sacred duty of

all friends of the South African tribe to work for its "salvation." According to "a great law of the moral world," pronounced Junod, "if a superior race does not work for the moral betterment of the inferior, the inferior causes the superior to degenerate."⁴³ The only salvation for the Bantu therefore lay in the regeneration that Christianity would bring and in the enlightenment of the mind through Western education.⁴⁴ It is not surprising that some of the advocates of segregation in South Africa in the 1920s found intellectual support in Junod's writings for their policies of separate development.⁴⁵

The Contradictory Uses of Racial Theory

Postwar liberal philosophies of humanity, fashioned in the shadow of sinister Nazi theories of racial supremacy and fortified by the campaigns for civil rights in the United States and against apartheid in South Africa, have largely repudiated the concept of race and in its place erected a functionalist understanding of culture. We regard it as axiomatic that the apostles of race are the bad guys and the defenders of culture the good guys. That is why we have been so reluctant to acknowledge that in the early twentieth century the apostles of race included good guys as well as bad ones, and that both were the forebears of the current defenders of cultural diversity. We can of course distinguish the two concepts: ideas of race have no empirical foundation in biology or genetics, whereas ideas of culture are able to amass an impressive array of social-scientific evidence in their support. The vocabulary of race attributes to large ethnic blocs of humanity certain unchanging essential qualities and, on that spurious foundation, then arranges those blocs in a hierarchy of achievement. The language of culture, in contrast, is capable of yielding (though it does not necessarily do so) a much more fluid interpretation that gives proper recognition to the fact that cultural identities are always constructions, theoretical approximations to an infinitely diverse and constantly changing reality.

Nevertheless, we cannot escape the conclusion that questionable assumptions of racial essentialism and differentiation were foundational to the very aspects of early twentieth-century missiological theory that present-day Christians are inclined to view with greatest sympathy. Racial theory was a plastic tool with the potential to be used for a variety of contradictory ideological purposes, as recent work by Werner Ustorf and Colin Kidd has made clear.⁴⁶ The same pseudoscientific theories of race that, with some justification, historians have blamed for weakening the mid-nineteenth-century missionary commitment to the creation of self-governing indigenous churches supplied the intellectual apparatus that enabled missions in the early twentieth century to develop theories of cultural plurality and hence of "accommodation" or "indigenization." These theories were the necessary precondition for the development of Asian and, later, African theologies. They subverted, and eventually eliminated, the gross juxtapositions of "heathen" and "civilized" that had characterized mission discourse of the mid-nineteenth century. Yet they equally had a more sinister potential—the capacity to erode the unflinching commitment to the fundamental unity of humanity, which is the most attractive aspect of mid-nineteenth-century missionary thought. Modern concepts of plural cultures have emerged from the soil of concepts of plural races. It is now thankfully a truism of theological writing on world Christianity that all cultures have their contribution to make to the rich diversity of a redeemed humanity. As a recent book by Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity*, concludes, inspired by the same text in the book of Revelation as was Charles Gore a

century ago, "The kings—or, we might expand, the cultures of the world—with their glory will enter the heavenly city."⁴⁷ As Christians eagerly embrace the vision of a culturally plural family

of God, they need to be vigilant that they do not fall unwitting prey to the racial essentialism that infused such language when it was first articulated.

Notes

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- On this theme see Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792–1850: The 'Heathen' at Home and Overseas* (Basingstoke, Eng.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 90–91.
- Robert Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1842), pp. 132–36. The etching on p. 5 of this article, "The Abandoned Mother," is from Moffat, facing p. 135.
- George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 62–70; Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007); Jane Samson, "Ethnology and Theology: Nineteenth-Century Mission Dilemmas in the South Pacific," in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), pp. 99–122.
- George Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1987), p. 44.
- Catherine Hall, "'From Greenland's icy mountains . . . to Africa's golden sand': Ethnicity, Race, and Nation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England," *Gender and History* 5 (1993): 212–30. See Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843), and "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," *Fraser's Magazine* 40 (February 1849): 527–38; Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Influence of Race over the Destinies of Nations*, 2d ed. (London: Henry Renshaw, 1862).
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- See Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference: Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 1–3.
- Ibid.*, p. 171.
- World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Reports of Commissions I–VIII* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier; New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d. [1910]), hereafter cited as *Report of Commission I*, etc. See, e.g., *Report of Commission I*, pp. 24, 39, 214, 228, 229, 243, 244; *Report of Commission III*, pp. 173, 176, 179, 180, 182, 184, 210, 212.
- Report of Commission I*, p. 233; *Report of Commission VII*, pp. 82–83.
- See <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=genpub;idno=1936337>. I have excluded instances in appendixes reproducing other documents (e.g., the resolutions of the China Centenary Conference in Shanghai in 1907) but have included those found in the text of contributions to the World Missionary Conference debates. I have also excluded index entries and the missionary bibliography at the end of the report of Commission VI.
- George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 203; see also Charles R. Taber, *The World Is Too Much with Us: "Culture" in Modern Protestant Missions* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ. Press, 1991), p. 49.
- Report of Commission I*, pp. 52, 53, 59, 81, 105, 147, 182, 272, 292, 300, 301, 319, 370; see also *Report of Commission II*, pp. 109, 192, 236, 270.
- Report of Commission I*, pp. 140–41, 153.
- Report of Commission III*, pp. 84 (5 instances), 85 (2 instances), 155, 253, and 385; for the other, more traditional sense of the term in this report, see pp. 45, 52, 82, 148, 160, 202, 254, 255, 324, 385, and 440.
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