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### "Not the Bloom but the Root:" Conversion and its Consequences in Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Discourse

Jonathan J. Bonk

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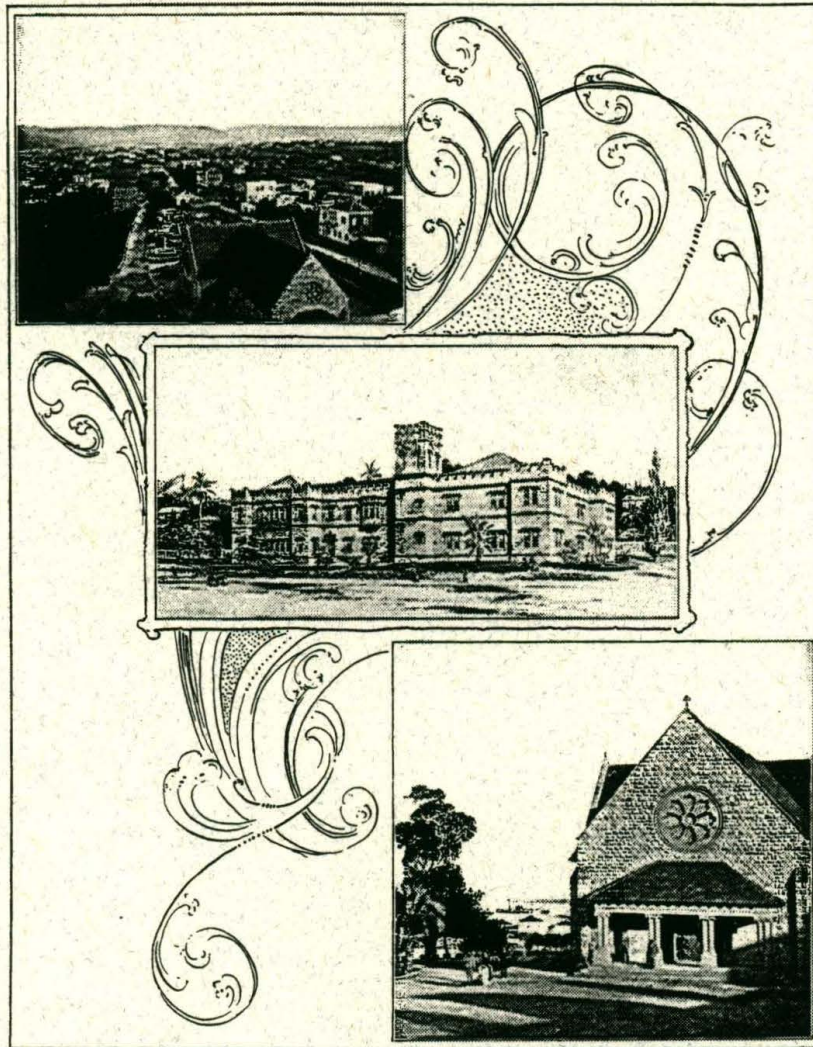
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“NOT THE BLOOM, BUT THE ROOT ...”  
CONVERSION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY PROTESTANT MISSIONARY DISCOURSE



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by  
Jonathan J. Bonk

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT  
Yale Divinity School Library  
2003

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2003

Cover illustration from James S. Dennis' *Centennial Survey of Foreign Missions* (1902) shows views of the Syrian Protestant College, Beirut.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Natalia Marandiuc in tracking down many of the materials utilized in this paper; Claire McCurdy for so kindly assisting me with the Dennis Papers at Union Theological Seminary; Paul Stuehrenberg and Martha Smalley for inviting me to give the Day Lecture; and George Edward Day and Olivia Hotchkiss Day, for making this library possible. Without the help of these people, I would not be here today. I do not blame them for my opinions or conjectures, but I thank them for making possible the examination of materials which, in more skillful hands, could well have been the basis for a truly enlightening lecture!      JJB

## Abbreviations

- ABCFM* American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.
- ACAB* Wilson, James Grant and John Fiske, editors. *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. Revised edition. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1999.
- BDCM* Anderson, Gerald H., editor. *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1997.
- CMSP* Dennis, James Shepard. *Christian Missions and Social Progress: A Sociological Study of Foreign Missions*, vol. 1-3. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1897-1906.
- CSFM* Dennis, James Shepard. *Centennial Survey of Foreign Missions: A Statistical Supplement to "Christian Missions and Social Progress"*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1902.
- Dennis Papers James Shepard Dennis Papers, compiled by Paul A. Byrnes, Spring 1977. Union Theological Seminary Archives, New York.
- Edinburgh 1910 - I World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World*. Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910.
- New York 1900* Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900, *Report of the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, Held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches*. London: Religious Tract Society, 1900.

*SACM*

*Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions: Containing a Directory of Mission Societies, a Classified Summary of Statistics, an Index of Mission Stations, and a Series of Specially Prepared Maps of Mission Fields.* Compiled by Sub-Committees of Commission I, "On Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World," As an Integral Part of its Report to the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, June 14-23, 1910. Edinburgh: World Missionary Conference, 1910.

*TFT*

Warren, William. *These for Those. Our Indebtedness to Foreign Missions; or, What We Get for What We Give.* Portland, Maine: Hout, Fogg and Breed, 1870.



**“Not the bloom, but the root ...”**  
**Conversion and its Consequences in**  
**Nineteenth-century Protestant Missionary Discourse**

*They who love the missionary work for its own sake may be grieved that the spiritual side is not made more prominent in these pages; but they must remember that they were written to record its incidental fruits. ...These incidental results of missions do not constitute their chief glory. That lies in bringing back a lost world to the knowledge of its Divine Redeemer....<sup>1</sup>*

Thomas Laurie (1821-1897)

*Christianity is not the bloom, but the root; culture is not the root, but the bloom, of Christianity.<sup>2</sup>*

Gustav Warneck (1834-1910)

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Laurie, *The Ely Volume, or, The Contributions of our Foreign Missions to Science and Human Well-Being* (Boston: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Congregational House, 1881), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Gustav Warneck, *Modern Missions and Culture: Their Mutual Relations*. Translated from the German by Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1883), p. 245. “We plant and promote civilization when we present the Gospel, and we make the nature-peoples human by making them Christians. Christianity is not the bloom but the root; culture is not the root but a bloom of Christianity.” Warneck is here arguing against an alternative view held by “even so sound a theologian as priest Gerland” that argued that “The nature-peoples must first be made human, then Christian. They are slowly trained to and through culture, whose highest bloom is Christianity.” (p. 242). Gustav Warneck (1834-1910 *BDCM*) was professor of mission at Halle from 1897-1908, the first chair of its kind in Germany. Although he never served as a missionary himself, he pioneered missiology as an academic discipline encompassing both Protestant and Catholic mission through his monthly journal *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift* (1874). His wide ranging publications cover the gamut of mission subjects, from history to theology and praxis.

*The days of supernatural signs have not passed away. God's Word does not return to Him void. Instead of the thorn comes up the fir-tree; instead of the brier comes up the myrtle tree; and this displacement, in the soil of society, of noxious and offensive growths of sin, by useful and fragrant trees of righteousness, is the unanswerable proof and sign of God's Husbandry – the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified. Such individual, social, spiritual transformation shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. The Church of Christ has only to go forth and preach everywhere. The Lord will work with and confirm the word with signs following. Amen.*<sup>3</sup>

Arthur T. Pierson (1837-1911)

*"It may not be in harmony with the current naturalistic theories of social evolution, yet it is the open secret of missionary experience that the humble work of missions is a factor in the social progress of the world which it would be intellectual dishonesty to ignore and philosophic treason to deny."*<sup>4</sup>

James S. Dennis (1842-1914)

## Prologue

To have been invited to give this year's Day Associates Lecture is high honor. Treading, as I do today, in the footsteps of Beatrice Bartlett, Abraham Malherbe, Lamin Sanneh, Jonathan Spence, Andrew Walls, and the like, I am both humbled and daunted by their precedence, well knowing that in comparison to their erudition and eloquence, what I now offer might not stand the test of a *lecture*, although it may rank

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<sup>3</sup> From Arthur T. Pierson's Introduction to John Liggins, *The Great Value and Success of Foreign Missions. Proved by Distinguished Witnesses: Being the Testimony of Diplomatic Ministers, Consuls, Naval Officers, and Scientific and Other Travelers in Heathen and Mohammedan Countries: together with that of English Viceroy, Governors, and Military Officers in India and in the British Colonies: also Leading Facts and Late Statistics of the Missions* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1888), p. v.

<sup>4</sup> James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress: a Sociological Study of Foreign Missions*. In Three Volumes. Volume I (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1897), p. x.

as an *essay* – defined by Johnson as “A loose sally of the mind; an irregular indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition.”<sup>5</sup>

Let me begin by doffing my hat to George Edward and Olivia Hotchkiss Day, without whose prescient and practical generosity we would not be here today.<sup>6</sup> Just where Mr. Day would fit on Nicholas Basbanes’ *bibliophiles – bibliomanes* continuum is a matter for speculation.<sup>7</sup> While evidently infected with the “gentle madness” marking all true book collectors, his appreciation for books seems to have been more utilitarian than obsessive. No mere hoarder of volumes for their own sakes, he and his heirs have indebted thousands of scholars and hundreds of thousands of grateful readers by founding what is today one of the premier mission research libraries in the world.

Day having been both a lover of books and a devotee of missions, it is appropriate that my remarks should focus on missionary literature, and in particular on a genre of nineteenth-century missionary apologia that applied to the missionary enterprise that most basic of tests, “by their fruits you shall know them.” I have for several years been interested in exploring missionary apologetic literature, and I am grateful to Paul

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), *A Dictionary of the English language: in Which the Words are Deduced from Their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers: to Which are Prefixed, a History of the Language, and an English Grammar*. In two volumes (London: Printed by W. Strachan, for J. & P. Knapton, T. and T. Longman, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, A. Millar, and R. and J. Dodsley, 1755).

<sup>6</sup> I need not belabor their role in the story of this great library, since that story has been well told by current librarian Paul Stuehrenberg, and by his predecessor, Stephen L. Peterson. See Paul F. Stuehrenberg, *A Library Worthy of the School: a History of the Yale Divinity School Library Collections*. Yale Divinity School Library Occasional Publication No. 1. Revised Edition (New Haven, Conn: Yale Divinity School Library, 1994); and Stephen L. Peterson, Paul F. Stuehrenberg, and Martha Lund Smalley, *The Day Missions Library: Centennial Volume*. Yale Divinity School Library Occasional Publication No. 2 (New Haven, Conn: Yale Divinity School Library, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books* (New York: Owl Books, 1999).

Stuehrenberg and Martha Smalley, whose invitation to give this year's Day Associates Lecture provided me with an added incentive to do so.

### Introduction

I begin – as have so many others – with the venerable William Carey, whose *Enquiry*<sup>8</sup> sparked the remarkable phenomenon known as “the William Carey Era” in Christian mission. The *Leicester Herald* for Saturday, May 12, 1792 drew attention to Carey's slim volume with this advertisement:

This day is published, Price 1S. 6d.  
An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians  
to use means for the  
Conversion of the Heathens  
in which the religious state of the world, the  
success of former undertakings and the  
practicability of further undertakings  
for that Purpose are considered  
By William Carey

Leicester: Printed and sold by A. Ireland,  
And the other booksellers: sold also by  
J. Johnson in St. Paul's Churchyard; Dilly  
In the Poultry; Knott, Lombard Street,  
London, and Smith, Sheffield.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertaking, are Considered*. Leicester: Printed and sold by Ann Ireland, and the other Booksellers in Leicester; J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church yard; T. Knott, Lombard Street; R. Dilly, in the Poultry, London; and Smith, at Sheffield. [Price One Shilling and Six-pence.] MDCCXCII.

<sup>9</sup> From Ernest A. Payne's *Introduction* to the 1961 new facsimile edition published in London by the Carey Kingsgate Press, p. v.

Rightly anticipating objections to the pre-emptive world-wide evangelical missionary thrust that he was proposing, Carey asked, rhetorically:

Can we as men, or as Christians, hear that a great part of our fellow creatures, whose souls are as immortal as ours, and who are as capable as ourselves, of adorning the gospel, and contributing by their preaching, writings, or practices to the glory of our Redeemer's name, and the good of his church, are enveloped in ignorance and barbarism? Can we hear that they are without the gospel, without government, without laws, and without arts, and sciences; and not exert ourselves to introduce amongst them the sentiments of men, and of Christians? Would not the spread of the gospel be the most effectual means of their civilization?<sup>10</sup>

Among those who responded negatively to Carey's queries was Canon Sidney Smith (1771-1845) who took the "nest of consecrated cobblers and their perilous heap of trash" severely to task in a series of articles appearing in the *Edinburgh Review* (which he co-founded and edited) in 1808. "It is scarcely possible to reduce the drunken declamations of Methodism to a point, to grasp the wriggling lubricity of these cunning animals, and to fix them in one position," he complained. Not only would their efforts to convert the heathen, especially Hindus, fail to elevate them to civilization, he predicted, but their meddling would have catastrophic effects on British interests abroad. Missionary efforts to convert "a few degraded wretches," Smith was convinced, "... would infallibly produce the massacre of every European in India; the loss of [British] settlements, and consequently of the chance of that slow, solid and temperate introduction of Christianity, which the superiority of European character may ultimately effect in the Eastern world."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Carey, *An Enquiry*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>11</sup> Sydney Smith, "Indian Missions," *Edinburgh Review* (April 1809), pp. 40, 42, 50. Smith had entered the debate over whether East India Company regulations limiting missionary activity on the Indian sub-continent should be relaxed in the February 1808 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, but in the end, neither his wit nor his wisdom prevailed. In 1813 – the year of the founding of the Methodist Missionary Society – the charter of the

Well before the end of the century, however, close observers of the mission enterprise – admittedly not disinterested – published a growing volume of documentation vindicating William Carey’s hypothesis that “the spread of the gospel [was] the most effectual means of [human] civilization.” It is to the work of four representative mission apologists that we now turn our attention.

### William Warren [1806-1879 ACAB]

First chronologically among the books being considered is William Warren’s *These for Those. Our Indebtedness to Foreign Missions: or, What we Get for What we Give*.<sup>12</sup> Warren was an ordained Congregational minister who served variously in Windham, Maine and Upton, Massachusetts from 1840 until 1856. In 1856 he served briefly as an agent for the American Colonization Society,<sup>13</sup> before being appointed by the American

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East India Company was revised by Parliament, granting legal recognition to missionary work in India.

<sup>12</sup> William Warren, *These for Those. Our Indebtedness to Foreign Missions; or, What We Get for What We Give* (Portland, Maine: Hout, Fogg and Breed, 1870)

<sup>13</sup> The American Colonization Society promulgated a solution to the problem of slavery – other than general abolition – that could unite both Northern and Southern moderates. Originating with slaveholders in reaction to an attempted slave insurrection, it organized in 1817 with the purpose of establishing a colony in Africa for “free people of color and those who afterwards might become free.” It was instrumental in establishing a colony of on the West coast of Africa that, in 1847, became recognized as the Republic of Liberia. For an early account of the Society, see William Goodell’s *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A History of the Great Struggle in Both Hemispheres with a view of the Slavery Question in the United States* (New York: William Goodell, 1853), pp. 341-352. Following the general emancipation in the wake of the Civil War (1861-1865), the Society assisted in populating and otherwise assisting the new newly founded republic. The Society also had a missionary impulse, for, in the words of Latourette, “The hope was cherished that through the colony the conversion and progress of the people of Africa would be furthered.” Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Vol. III. The Nineteenth Century Outside Europe: The Americas, the Pacific, Asia, and Africa* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 205.

Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions as district secretary for northern New England – a post he held until his death in January 1879.<sup>14</sup>

Warren launches his defense of the missionary enterprise by reminding his fellow Anglo-Saxon readers of “The Idolatry of our Ancestors.”<sup>15</sup> “The ancient Britons,” he notes, “...were a fierce race of savages...[converted] by missionaries sent to them early in the second century.” They would not survive long enough to reap the long-term benefits of their conversion, however, for with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, “...the taper light of education and of Christianity were extinguished, ...the work of Christian civilization stopped, [and] Britain was paganized once more.”<sup>16</sup>

The virtual obliteration from the island of both Britons and Christianity at the hands of Anglo-Saxon invaders required that England be re-evangelized, this time by missionaries from Ireland and Rome. And scarcely had people stood in greater need of conversion. “The Anglo-Saxons were a savage people, passionately fond of warfare,” Warren noted, with cruelty “their one characteristic. Their ruling passion was for revenge and blood.”<sup>17</sup> Faint vestiges of Britain’s pagan heritage remained embedded in the names for the days of the week, he reminded his readers. In “Wednesday” – once *Wodens-daeg* – resounded echoes of the mighty god Woden, sire of all gods, inspirer of courage and giver of success in battle; to the memory and honor of Woden’s consort, Frea – fecund goddess of love and sensual pleasure, from whose womb sprang all gods – was devoted the sixth day of the week, *Freas-daeg*, or Friday; Thor, bravest and most powerful of the sons of Woden and Frea, was likewise memorialized in *Thors-daeg*, or Thursday.<sup>18</sup> “At their feasts in honor of the gods, intoxicating liquors were

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<sup>14</sup> *ACAB*, Vol. VI.

<sup>15</sup>This is the chapter heading. William Warren, *These for Those. Our Indebtedness to Foreign Missions; or, What We Get for What We Give* (Portland, Maine: Hout, Fogg and Breed), p.17.

<sup>16</sup> Warren, *TFT*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, *TFT*, p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Warren, *TFT*, pp. 33-37.

drank, and their gods were toasted,” Warren observed, “for they were bacchanalian in character. Scenes of fearful crime [including human sacrifices] accompanied them.”<sup>19</sup>

Warren questioned whether the Anglo-Saxon race could have survived its profound degradation without the “diffusion” of Christianity among them. “Many a people as powerful as our ancestors, are now no more,” he noted. “No trace of them can be found upon the earth. They have been extinguished. It might have been thus with the Anglo-Saxon race. They that take the sword shall perish by the sword.”<sup>20</sup> Even had the race survived to carry on “its career of conquest and of barbarism,” its ultimate doom would have been no less certain, Warren argued, since “idolatry never heals itself. Heathenism has no element or principle of self-recuperation. It goes on from worse to worse.”<sup>21</sup> Christianity alone regenerates humankind, but since it never “springs up spontaneously,”<sup>22</sup> it must be “propagated and diffused among the people, in order to save the world.”<sup>23</sup>

This was Warren’s apologia for Christian missions: cultural vitality and racial survival alike hinged upon Christian – preferably Protestant – conversion. But since Christian faith was not intuited but learned, and since his readers were the beneficiaries of missionaries who at great personal risk had brought the gospel to their ancestors, it followed that these redeemed societies should likewise send missionaries into all the world to proclaim the gospel.

### **Thomas Laurie [1821-1897 *BDCM*]**

We turn next to Thomas Laurie, Scotland-born but American-trained Congregational (ABCFM) missionary to southeastern Turkey’s Nestorians, but better known for his

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<sup>19</sup> Warren, *TFT*, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Warren, *TFT*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>21</sup> Warren, *TFT*, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Warren, *TFT*, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> Warren, *TFT*, p. 20.



book, *The Ely Volume, or, The Contributions of our Foreign Missions to Science and Human Well-Being*.<sup>24</sup> Some 532 pages in length, including appendices and index, the book is comprised of twenty-two chapters, encompassing all spheres of human thought and endeavor: geography, geology, meteorology, natural science, archaeology, philology, ethnography, literature, music, theology, education, medicine, commerce, and philanthropy.<sup>25</sup> Thirty-two pages are devoted to the missionary role in “national regeneration,” providing “an account of some of the instances in which...missionaries have regenerated communities and lifted them from the mire of the pit.”<sup>26</sup>

A sampling of African and Asian peoples thus regenerated are included in Laurie’s survey, with the most astounding success story, by his own account, coming from the Sandwich Islands. “At the Sandwich Islands the property of an entire community was less than that of our average citizen,” he began. “Books they had none. The knowledge of their wisest men was exceeded by that of our little children. They spent their time in sleeping and swimming, clapping their hands and tattooing their skins, roasting bread-

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Laurie, *The Ely Volume, or, The Contributions of our Foreign Missions to Science and Human Well-Being* (Boston: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Congregational House, 1881). The book’s peculiar title derives from the wishes of the book’s patron, “The Hon. Alfred B. Ely, Newton, Mass., who made provision for the publication of this volume” in memory of his father, the Rev. Alfred Ely, D.D., Monson, Mass. In the Introduction to his book, Laurie explains that the book’s patron, “the late Hon. Alfred B. Ely inherited his father’s love for the missionary work. He felt that the amount of scientific information given by it to the world during the past fifty years was greatly underestimated, and, therefore, made provision for the preparation and publication of this volume, to show what the missionaries of the American Board had done, especially for geography, philology, and archæology, not overlooking any contribution they had made to the advancement of human well-being” (p. vii).

<sup>25</sup> Peculiarly, given the title and argument of the book, Laurie includes a chapter on “Wines of the Bible” (pp. 430-441), in which the author responds to “Some good men, [who] intensely moved by the evils of intemperance, and distressed by the impiety of those who wrest certain Scriptures to their own destruction, have been led to affirm that two kinds of wine were spoken of in Scripture: one good and commendable, the other poisonous and pernicious; and have made the process of fermentation the dividing line between the two” (p. 430).

<sup>26</sup> Laurie, *The Ely Volume*, p. 442.

fruit, climbing for cocoanuts, and catching fish. The women, with long patience, beat out the cloth from the bark of trees, played in the surf, and painted with turmeric.”

But with the conversion of the islands to Christianity, bloody wars, nudity, and tyranny had been transcended by gentleness, clothes, and a constitution declaring that “no law shall be enacted at variance with the Word of the Lord Jehovah, or with the general spirit of his Word.” In 1870, a correspondent from the *Boston Journal*, reporting from Honolulu, had observed: “Fifty years ago [Sandwich Islanders] were a horde of naked savages, offering human sacrifices and sunk in the grossest sensuality. Today they hold a place among Christian nations. A constitutional government administers equitable laws. They have the appliances of advanced civilization. Churches dot the islands, and the proportion of readers is larger than in Boston.”<sup>27</sup>

While not all of the virtues accruing to Christian conversion were quantifiable, the transformation of Sandwich Islanders from indolence to industry had proven to be deeply gratifying from a pecuniary point of view. “We have the startling fact,” noted Laurie, “that a group of islands of no commercial importance whatever when the Gospel was carried there ...now pay in one year at a single American port more money by \$367,343 than the entire cost of their Christianization during these sixty years.”<sup>28</sup>

Laurie here echoes earlier conclusions drawn from the careful calculations of a Yale graduate (M.D. 1824), Rev. T. S. Williamson (1800-1879 *BDCM*), who had served as a missionary with the ABCFM until 1872, and thereafter with the Presbyterian mission board, among the Dakota Indians in what is now Minnesota. Quoted extensively by William Warren in *These for Those*<sup>29</sup> a full decade earlier, Rev. Williamson had calculated that it “cost more to fight than to feed those [Sioux] Indians.”<sup>30</sup> Lamenting “the millions that it costs to subdue and govern the Indians,” and pointing out that American “consumers” (*sic!*) ultimately foot the bill for the “insensible but omnipresent taxation” requisite to underwriting the country’s Indian affairs, Warren

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<sup>27</sup> Laurie, *The Ely Volume*, p. 443.

<sup>28</sup> Laurie, *The Ely Volume*, p. 425.

<sup>29</sup> Warren, *TFT*, pp. 219-231.

<sup>30</sup> Warren, *TFT*, p. 225.

had invoked Williamson's ledger: he calculated that it cost government agencies on the Missouri "one hundred and twenty dollars a year to feed, clothe, and thus restrain each [of some 15,000 heathen Sioux or Dakotas]."31

In contrast, twenty years of missionary work among the Sioux and Wahpeton elsewhere resulted not only in substantial fifteen-fold per capita savings to the government, but in the saving of settlers' lives as well. For during "the Indian war of 1862 .... the Christian Indians, without exception ... befriended the whites; and through their assistance, the missionaries and employees of Government, who otherwise would probably have been murdered, made their escape.... In the spring of 1863 those Dakota men who had been most active in befriending us in the war, interposed as a shield between the frontiers of Minnesota and Iowa, and the hostile Dakotas who had made war and committed the massacres.... From the spring of 1863 ... to the present time, very few of the hostile Sioux have ever reached the settlements of Minnesota and Iowa. Less than a dozen persons in these two States have been murdered by them."32

Laurie was not blind to the hypocrisy of the United States in its chronic failure to live up to its own treaties and constitution. "The history of combined Turkish and Kurdish oppression, as recorded by our missionaries, is full of sadness," he agreed, "but it rouses the indignation of every good man to read the missionary record of American oppression on our own territory.... Americans [with honorable exceptions] have contradicted every precept of the Gospel in their treatment of our Indian tribes.... in the face of energetic protests of good men, who did their utmost to resist, though they could not prevent them.... the crimes have not yet all become things of the past, as the wrongs endured by the Poncas at this moment testify; but the expulsion of the Cherokees is selected as a specimen of all these wrongs, both because it is so marked, and because both the missionaries and officers of the American Board had so much to do with efforts to avert it."33 Tracing the sorry tale of U.S. betrayal of the Cherokees,

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<sup>31</sup> Warren, *TFT*, pp. 219-227.

<sup>32</sup> Warren, *TFT*, pp. 226-227.

<sup>33</sup> Laurie, *The Ely Volume*, p. 361.

Laurie is scathing in his denunciation. This “frightful compound of perfidy and wrong; a breach of faith unparalleled in history...”, he warned, cannot go unpunished in a moral universe. Given the divine verity that greater light meant greater guilt, God’s vengeance was sure. “Had Thomas Jefferson lived to see this new triumph of might over right,” Laurie concluded, “he had found additional cause for saying, ‘I tremble for my country when I remember that God is just.’”<sup>34</sup>

### **John Liggins [1829-1912 – *BDCM*]**

Rev. John Liggins, an Episcopalian, was the first Protestant missionary to Japan, and it is to his book that we now turn. Emigrating as a twelve-year-old with his family from Warwickshire, England to Philadelphia in 1841, following graduation from Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria in 1855, he was immediately assigned to China as an Episcopal missionary. Injured by a mob two years later, and sent to Nagasaki, Japan to recuperate, he was there when Japan opened up its borders to missionaries in 1859, becoming the first Protestant missionary to be appointed to Japan. Bedeviled by ill health, he returned to the United States in 1860, where he actively promoted foreign missions for the rest of his life through his speaking and writing.

Probably best known among his several publications is the book, *The Great Value and Success of Foreign Missions. Proved by Distinguished Witnesses: Being the Testimony of Diplomatic Ministers, Consuls, Naval Officers, and Scientific and Other Travelers in Heathen and Mohammedan Countries; together with that of English Viceroy, Governors, and Military Officers in India and in the British Colonies: Also Leading*

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<sup>34</sup> Laurie, *The Ely Volume*, pp. 362, 371. Laurie’s indignation was evidently not shared by all Christian devotees. Colonel John Chivington, former Methodist missionary and still an elder in his church, personally directed the Sand Creek (Colorado) massacre of some 600 Cheyenne women and children in November of 1864. His announced policy was to “kill and scalp all, little and big,” for, as he was fond of saying, “Nits make lice.” There was not a single survivor. David E. Stannard tells the gruesome details in his book, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 129-134. In the same vein, see Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The Americas through Indian Eyes Since 1492* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992).

*Facts and Late Statistics of the Missions.* The title comprising so thorough a synopsis, the reader might well wonder whether the book itself is necessary. “This most timely book,” wrote Arthur T. Pierson in his introduction, “fits the need of the day, as a ball fits socket, or tenon fits mortise.... [and] the high character and grand influence of Christian missions are established beyond a doubt.”<sup>35</sup>

Hounded by the censure of distinguished and highly publicized critics, missionaries and their advocates found in Liggins a trove of evidence sufficient to reassure believers, regenerate agnostics, and neutralize skeptics. Was there an explorer doubtful of the intentions, methods or outcomes of missionary endeavor? The approbation of numerous, even more distinguished explorers was mustered. Had travelers been critical of the effects of Christian conversion on native life and society? Their voices were drowned in the laudations of peripatetics more famous still. Had highly placed intellectuals scoffed at missions? The opinions of the still better informed and highly placed were invoked.

In a twenty-seven-chapter, region-by-region tour of the world, the reader hears from explorers, travelers, admirals, generals, consuls, clergymen, physicians, scientists, and government officials, each attesting to the extraordinary efficacy of missionary work generally and Christian conversion in particular. Dyak headhunters had become church members in Borneo; dawn was now visible across much of the Dark Continent; the growth of the church, with its concomitant transformation of tribal societies, was astounding; missionary churches, schools and hospitals springing up here and there across China were doing immense good; even Fiji, “formerly the darkest place on earth...[had] been so transformed by the Divine blessing upon missionary labors, that

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<sup>35</sup> John Liggins, *The Great Value and Success of Foreign Missions. Proved by Distinguished Witnesses: Being the Testimony of Diplomatic Ministers, Consuls, Naval Officers, and Scientific and Other Travelers in Heathen and Mohammedan Countries; together with that of English Viceroy, Governors, and Military Officers in India and in the British Colonies: Also Leading Facts and Late Statistics of the Missions* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1889), pp. iii, iv.

[it was now] one of the most Christian of countries.”<sup>36</sup> In India, the misdeeds of the East India Company had been exposed and to some extent rectified, and the “monstrous evils” of suttee, infanticide, human sacrifice, leper immolation, and self-flagellation had been outlawed; all of this, thanks largely to missionary efforts.<sup>37</sup>

“I assure you,” Sir Bartle Frere told a London audience in 1872, “that, whatever you may be told to the contrary, the teaching of Christianity among 160 millions of civilized, industrious Hindoos and Mohammedans in India is effecting changes, moral, social, and political, which for extent and rapidity of effect are far more extraordinary than anything you or your fathers have witnessed in modern Europe.”<sup>38</sup>

Wherever one turned in the world, Christian conversion led to palpable good. In Japan, “gently, but resistlessly, Christianity [was] leavening the nation.”<sup>39</sup> By the agency of the gospel, the populace of Madagascar was being “raised and purified,” and “the

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<sup>36</sup> Liggins, pp. 70-71.

<sup>37</sup> Liggins, pp. 79-111.

<sup>38</sup> Liggins, p. 93. The quotation is from a lecture on “Christianity suited to all forms of Civilization” delivered at a Christian Evidence Society meeting in London, July 9, 1872. Sir Bartle Edward Frere (1815-1884), former Governor of Bombay, qualified his remarks by saying: “I speak simply as to matters of experience and observation, and not of opinion; just as a Roman prefect might have reported to Trajan or the Antonines....” It was the Rt. Honorable Sir Bartle Edward Frere – member of the Indian Council and President of the Royal Geographical Society – who would later make the case for missionaries in East Africa to the Archbishop of Canterbury in a series of letters published as *Eastern Africa as a Field for Missionary Labour. Four Letters to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: John Murray, 1874). Frere (1815–84) was a famous British colonial administrator, and nephew of John Hookham Frere. He served (1850–59) as chief commissioner of Sind, distinguishing himself during the Indian Mutiny, and was (1862–67) governor of Bombay. In 1872 he negotiated a treaty with the sultan of Zanzibar for the suppression of the slave trade. Appointed (1877) governor of Cape Colony and high commissioner of British South Africa, Frere had to cope with Boer discontent in the newly annexed Transvaal and with Zulu unrest. Intent on breaking the military power of the Zulus, he precipitated (1878) the Zulu War. His action was disapproved in London, and although he was popular in the Cape he was recalled to England in 1880. He was created Baron Frere in 1876.

<sup>39</sup> Liggins, p. 114.

abolition of cruel customs and laws belonging to the heathen state [had] been largely effected by the kindly and merciful spirit of Christianity.”<sup>40</sup> Conversions to Christianity in Java, New Guinea, New Zealand, Persia, Polynesia, Siam, Siberia, the Ottoman Empire, and among North American Indians produced similar results, setting persons and societies on a trajectory not unlike that of the ancient Anglo-Saxons, whose social institutions, economic vitality, and military power served as harbingers of what Christianized societies could anticipate as a result of their conversion.

“The large amount of testimony given in this book,” Liggins concludes, “is mainly from non-missionary sources, and it would seem as if every candid reader of it must agree that Archdeacon Farrar was right when he said that ‘to talk of the failure of Foreign Missions is to talk at once like an ignorant and like a faithless man.’”<sup>41</sup>

### **James Dennis [1842-1914 *BDCM*]**

We turn, finally, to James Dennis, for it is in his prodigious output that this genre of missionary apology reaches its apogee.

Dennis was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. Following graduation from Princeton Theological Seminary and ordination by the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., between 1868 and 1871 Dennis served with the ABCFM in Syria. Following a brief furlough and marriage to Mary Elizabeth Pinneo, he returned to Syria under the auspices of the PCUSA to serve as principal and professor of theology at Beirut Theological Seminary. Returning to the United States in 1891, Dennis began to indulge his passion for world missionary statistics, lecturing and publishing widely on missiological themes.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Liggins, pp. 129, 130.

<sup>41</sup> Liggins, p. 232.

<sup>42</sup> “The very smell of a statistic,” Andrew Walls writes, “can send Dennis into an orgy of calculation.” See *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 52.

Dennis inaugurated the newly established Students' Lectureship on Missions at Princeton Theological Seminary by giving six lectures in the spring of 1893, published in the fall of that year in a 368-page volume, *Foreign Missions after a Century*.<sup>43</sup>

Still in its infancy as a discipline, sociology was regarded as being largely the domain of skeptics and atheists. In assaying to apply the methods of science to an understanding of the development, structure, and functioning of human society, however, sociology was viewed by Dennis as a natural complement to missionary endeavor. A joint invitation by Princeton's Sociological Institute and Missionary Society brought Dennis back to Princeton in 1896 to lecture on "The Sociological Aspects of Foreign Missions."<sup>44</sup> His intention, he said, was to demonstrate that while "Christianity as yet touches the age-encrusted and unyielding surfaces of heathen society only in spots . . . . It is sufficiently apparent . . . that a new force of transcendent energy has entered the gateway of the nations and has planted itself with a quiet persistency and staying power in the very centres of the social life of the people."<sup>45</sup> "It may not be in harmony with the current naturalistic theories of social evolution," he admitted, "yet it is the open secret of missionary experience that the humble work of missions is a factor in the social progress of the world which it would be intellectual dishonesty to ignore and philosophic treason to deny."<sup>46</sup>

Among those in attendance was Malbone Graham, who preserved his recollection of the lectures in an unpublished manuscript entitled "Origin of a Great Missionary Book."<sup>47</sup> The "book" – four large volumes published between 1897 and 1906,

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<sup>43</sup> James S. Dennis, *Foreign Missions A Century* (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1893).

<sup>44</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 1, p. vii.

<sup>45</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 1, p. ix.

<sup>46</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 1, x. Dennis made a distinction between Christian sociology and Christian socialism, making clear that his book was an illustration of the former, not the latter. See his chapter, "The Sociological Scope of Christian Missions," Vol. I, pp. 21-59.

<sup>47</sup> The manuscript, by Malbone Watson Graham of Berkeley, California, had been evidently sent to Delavan L. Pierson, editor of *The Missionary Review of the World*. The manuscript, accompanied by a letter from Pierson, dated April 18, 1916, was sent to Charles H. Fahs of New York (who, with Harlan Beach, would co-edit the 1925 *World*



comprising a total of 2034 pages replete with illustrations, 307 in all, illustrating the tangible challenges, means and results of missionary endeavor<sup>48</sup> – was by any measure an outstanding accomplishment, easily rivaling the prodigies of our own twentieth-century, computer-assisted missiometrician, David Barrett.<sup>49</sup>

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*Missionary Atlas*), indicating that while the *MRW* could not make use of it, perhaps it might be of interest to James Dennis himself. The MSS and the letter are found in folder 55, Box I, of the James Dennis Papers in the Union Theological Seminary (New York) archives.

<sup>48</sup> James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress: A Sociological Study of Foreign Missions*. 3 Volumes (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1897, 1899, 1906); *Centennial Survey of Foreign Missions: A Statistical Supplement to "Christian Missions and Social Progress," being a Conspectus of the Achievements and Results of Evangelical Missions in all Lands at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902). So popular were his 1896 (February 9-14) Princeton lectures that Dennis delivered them as The Morgan Lectureship at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York a week later (February 19-27), as Lane Theological Seminary's "Lectures on Missions" in Cincinnati two weeks later (March 4-10), and as "The Elliott Lectureship" at Western Theological Seminary in Cincinnati a week after that (March 12-18)! Although I was not able to locate Dennis's letters requesting photographs from missionaries all over the world, the James Shepard Dennis Papers in the archives of the Union Theological Seminary in New York do contain 51 personal letters from all over the world, all dated in 1905, from his respondents. In all instances, they are responding to his request for photographs to include in the third volume of *Christian Missions and Social Progress*. This gives some intimation of the prodigious correspondence that Dennis must have carried on with missionary correspondents around the world. I am assuming that most of his papers are held in the Speer Library at Princeton Theological Seminary.

<sup>49</sup> David B. Barrett is editor of the 1010-page *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, A.D. 1900-2000* (Nairobi, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). The second edition of his encyclopedia, co-edited by George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, was published in 2001. Two volumes were published by Oxford University Press, while a third companion volume, *World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200: Interpreting the Annual Christian Megacensus*, was published by William Carey Library. The total number of pages in the three volumes is 2633.

The table of contents alone – totaling some 40 pages – makes illuminating if daunting reading. Dennis makes no apology for this, although he does anticipate reader fatigue. “If any reader is inclined to think that the author has trespassed upon his patience,” he writes in his Preface to the third volume, “... it would be well for him to recall that very large and significant claims on behalf of missions which have been advanced in the previous lectures ought to be made good by ample and sufficing evidence.”<sup>50</sup>

One reviewer, acknowledging the commonly held view that “Christian missions in foreign lands and sociological theories have nothing in common,” echoed Dennis’s argument that in the “Christian scheme” not only does society play a direct role in the extent to which an individual might actualize his full divinely given human potential, but that remarkable individuals exert a significant influence on the health and transformation of society. This being the case, the reviewer went on, Christian missions and sociology shared considerable common ground.<sup>51</sup> As Benjamin Kidd acknowledged, religion – especially the Christian religion – was an elemental force in human social evolution. “In the eyes of the evolutionist,” he explained, “...the Christian religion has tended to raise the peoples affected by it to the commanding place they have come to occupy in the world.”<sup>52</sup>

“Christian missions are a social force,” Dennis argued, “because if they change the religious and moral character of the man, they put him immediately into a new attitude toward the domestic, civil, economic, and ethical aspects of society. They introduce also new institutions into social life; not only new ecclesiastical organizations, but new educational and philanthropic movements. Plant germs of new political and industrial ideals, open a new realm of intellectual and religious thought, stir a new conception of liberty and a nobler, purer social life.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 3, p. v.

<sup>51</sup> J. C. Calhoun Newton, “The Contribution of Christian Missions to Sociology,” *The Methodist Review: A Bimonthly Journal Devoted to Religion and Philosophy, Science and Literature* (May-June, 1898), pp. 239-245.

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895), pp. 165-166.

<sup>53</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 1, p. 43.

Dennis devotes more than half of the first volume to his second lecture, “The Social Evils of the Non-Christian World.”<sup>54</sup> The table of contents for Lecture II constitutes a dense, five-page, tiered synopsis of social evils. Individuals in the non-Christian world were particularly prone to intemperance, drug addiction, gambling, immorality, self-torture, suicide, idleness, improvidence, excessive pride, and dishonesty; evils affecting families included the degradation of women, polygamy and concubinage, adultery and divorce, child marriage and widowhood, defective family training, and infanticide; tribal groups to various degrees suffered from the traffic in human flesh, slavery, cannibalism, human sacrifice, cruel ordeals, punishments and torture, brutality in war, blood feuds, and lawlessness; social relationships among non-Christians were distorted by ignorance, quackery, witchcraft, neglect of the poor and sick, cruel customs, insanitary conditions, lack of public spirit, mutual suspicion, poverty, tyrannical customs, and caste; nationally, the shortcomings included civil tyranny, oppressive taxation, subversion of legal rights, corruption and bribery, massacre and pillage; commercially, a lack of business confidence, together with deceit, fraud, financial irregularities, and primitive methodologies frustrated advance; and as for religion, the well-spring of everything else, the non-Christian world suffered from degrading conceptions of nature, idolatry, superstition, religious tyranny and persecution, and scandalously immoral leaders. Attempts at reform had proven to be consistently ineffectual and would continue to fail (Lecture III). The nations required a supernatural remedy, and Christianity – as a moral force that provided a philosophy of progress, a solution for sin, a true estimation of humankind, and a stimulus to philanthropy – was the only social hope of the nations (Lecture IV).<sup>55</sup> “Christian missions enter this socially disorganized environment with its varying aspects of degeneracy,” Dennis observed, “from the higher civilization of the Orient to that of barbarous races, and in most cases without the aid of legal enactments, engage in a moral struggle with old traditions and immemorial customs which have long held sway in society. They deal with a religious consciousness almost painfully immature in spiritual things, so that the splendid task of Christian missions is to take by the hand this childhood of heart and mind, put it to school, and lead it by the shortest path into the largeness of vision and

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<sup>54</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 1, pp. 71-352.

<sup>55</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 1, pp. 10-16.

ripeness of culture which have come to us all too slowly and painfully.... And yet, slowly and surely change comes. It comes through the secret and majestic power of moral guidance and social transformation which seems to inhere in that gospel which Christian missions teach.”<sup>56</sup>

It is in Dennis’s contribution to one of the greatest of all missionary gatherings, the New York 1900 Ecumenical Missionary Conference,<sup>57</sup> that we find the most succinct summary of his apologia. The list of delegates to the New York Ecumenical Missionary Conference of 1900 suggests that Christian missions had reached a level of public acceptance never before, or since, achieved. Representing approximately 15,000 Protestant missionaries serving with 400 societies all over the world, some 2500 delegates – including internationally acclaimed Christian leaders and missionary heroes – mingled with dignitaries, politicians, and national celebrities. On opening night (Saturday, April 21, 1900), a wave of emotion swept through the 2500 attendees as, directed by Ira D. Sankey himself, they rose to sing “Jesus Shall Reign.”<sup>58</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, John G. Paton, Bishop Thoburn, Hudson Taylor, and Robert Laws were among the luminaries seated in the front row on the platform. In his capacity as honorary chairman, former President of the United States Benjamin Harrison gave the opening address.

He was followed by the President of the United States, William McKinley, who – greeted with an outburst of cheering as he made his way to the podium on the arm of Morris K. Jessup, chair of the New York Chamber of Commerce – welcomed the delegates on behalf of his nation. Pointing to the convergence of Christian conversion and the ideals of Western civilization, McKinley said:

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<sup>56</sup> Dennis, *CMSP*, Vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>57</sup> *Ecumenical Missionary Conference New York, 1900. Report of the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches, April 21 to May 1.* 2 Volumes (London: Religious Tract Society; and New York: American Tract Society. 1900).

<sup>58</sup> See Thomas Askew, “The New York 1900 Ecumenical Missionary Conference: A Centennial Reflection,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 24, No 4 (October 2000), pp. 146-154.

I am glad of the opportunity to offer without stint my tribute of praise and respect to the missionary effort which has wrought such wonderful triumphs for civilization. The story of Christian missions is one of thrilling interest and marvelous results... Wielding the sword of the Spirit, they have conquered ignorance and prejudice. They have been among the pioneers of civilization... Who can estimate their value to the progress of nations? Their contribution to the onward and upward march of humanity is beyond all calculation. They have inculcated industry and taught the various trades. They have promoted concord and amity, and brought nations and races closer together. They have made men better. They have increased the regard for home; have strengthened the sacred ties of family; have made the community well ordered, and their work has been a potent influence in the development of law and the establishing of government.<sup>59</sup>

Dennis played a key role, serving as Chairman of the Committee on Statistics “appointed to present a paper” at the conference.<sup>60</sup> Having already published two volumes of his three-volume *Christian Mission and Social Progress*, Dennis had amassed data for a volume that was to serve as a statistical complement.<sup>61</sup> The distillation of this 400 + pages volume was printed and distributed to conference

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<sup>59</sup> *New York 1900*, Vol. 1, pp. 38-40.

<sup>60</sup> James S. Dennis, *Centennial Statistics: Paper Prepared for the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions. New York City, April 21-May 1, 1900* (New York: Committee on Statistics, 1900), p. vii.

<sup>61</sup> This data was published in 1902 in his book, *Centennial Survey of Foreign Missions. A Statistical Supplement to “Christian Missions and Social Progress,” being a Conspectus of the Achievements and Results of Evangelical Missions in all Lands at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902). The volume, including table of contents and tables of abbreviation and maps, runs to 430 pages.

attendees, subsequently appearing as an appendix in the official two-volume report of the conference.<sup>62</sup>

The nine categories beneath which the data were arranged provide insight into what missionaries regarded as the natural concomitants of Christian conversion. Foremost and lengthiest of the categories was “Evangelistic,” providing detailed statistics on the “income, staff, and evangelistic returns of missionary societies.”<sup>63</sup> This was followed with statistical information on educational, literary, medical, philanthropic and reformatory, and cultural expressions of missionary endeavor and accomplishment.

Education statistics (section II of the summary) included information on 93 universities and colleges, 358 theological and training schools, 858 boarding and high schools and seminaries, 167 industrial training institutions, 63 medical schools, 127 kindergartens, and 18,742 elementary or village day schools. Over one million students were enrolled – nearly one third of these women – in 20,407 institutions.<sup>64</sup>

Section III of the summary, under the heading “Literary,” provided statistics on 427 Bible translations and more than ten million pieces of general literature published by 148 mission publishing houses on every continent; some 366 periodicals with a combined circulation of nearly 300,000 reinforced missionary evangelistic and educational efforts.<sup>65</sup>

Medical statistics (section IV of the summary) tabulated 355 hospitals – including 10 in Palestine, 40 in Africa, 106 in India, and 124 in China – and 753 dispensaries, having treated some 2.5 million patients the previous year.<sup>66</sup> The Philanthropic and

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<sup>62</sup>James S. Dennis, “Statistical Summary of Foreign Missions Throughout the World,” in *Ecumenical Missionary Conference New York, 1900*, Vol. II, pp. 419-434. In compiling the statistics, Dennis benefitted from an incredible 90% response to his questionnaire, with most of the missing 10% accounted for by the Boer War in South Africa.

<sup>63</sup> *New York 1900*, Vol. II, p. 424. Interestingly, the U.S. dollar – British pound sterling exchange rate was calculated at \$4.90 to the pound.

<sup>64</sup> *New York 1900*, Vol. II, pp. 428-429.

<sup>65</sup> *New York 1900*, Vol. II, pp. 430-431.

<sup>66</sup> *New York 1900*, Vol. II, p. 432.

Reformatory section of the report provided “statistics of institutions and societies for relief and rescue” including 213 orphanages, 90 leper hospitals and asylums, and 30 schools and homes for the blind and the deaf. This section also included mention of the work of some 280 temperance societies, “rescue work” through the aegis of 154 homes for converts, widows, homeless women, and rescued slaves, and 126 societies established “for the promotion of purity, prison reform, abolishment of foot-binding, and work for soldiers, sailors, and prisoners.”<sup>67</sup>

The sixth section of the summary, labeled “Cultural,” included “the reproduction abroad of many well-known agencies at home.”<sup>68</sup> Dennis’s summary concluded with statistics on fifty-four “native organizations for extension of knowledge and the furtherance of national, social, moral, and religious reform” (Section VII), eighty-seven “missionary training institutions and agencies in Christian lands” (Section VIII), and sixty-seven “mission steamers and ships used in evangelistic, medical, and other departments of mission service in the foreign field.” (Section IX)<sup>69</sup>

### **Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference**

At the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference ten years later, the venerable Dennis rendered service as one of eighteen vice-chairmen of the commission (chaired by John R. Mott) responsible for producing the *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions*.<sup>70</sup> The categories are familiar, and information is impressive for both its

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<sup>67</sup>*New York 1900*, Vol. II, p. 433.

<sup>68</sup> *New York 1900*, Vol. II, p. 434. Included in this list of well-known agencies are: the United Society of Christian Endeavor, the Methodist Church (North), the Methodist Church (South), the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, the Order of the Daughters of the King, YMCA, YWCA, World’s Student Christian Federation, Student Volunteer Movement in Mission Lands, Children’s Scripture Unions, Boys Brigades, Gleaners Unions, and Sowers’ Bands.

<sup>69</sup> *New York 1900*, Vol. II, p. 434.

<sup>70</sup> *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions. Containing a Directory of Mission Societies, A Classified Summary of Statistics, an Index of Mission Stations, and a Series of Specially Prepared Maps of Mission Fields*. Compiled by Sub-Committees of Commission I, “On

quantity and its organization. Twenty maps, in color, locate all known mission stations –19 maps for Protestant missions, and 1 map for Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic missions.<sup>71</sup> The Committee estimated the “total fruitage of modern Christian missions [Protestant, Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox] of the past century, represented by living converts Christianized from non-Christian peoples, as approaching 21,000,000.”<sup>72</sup> Educational summary tables tallied 81 universities, 489 theological schools, 1594 boarding schools, 284 industrial training schools, 28,901 elementary schools, and 113 kindergartens.<sup>73</sup> 550 hospitals, 1024 dispensaries, and 111 medical schools represented missionary medical activities, to which benevolences could be added 265 orphanages, 88 leper hospitals, 25 institutions for the blind, and 21 rescue homes.<sup>74</sup>

The Edinburgh Commission on Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World, chaired by John R. Mott and including [among others] James Dennis, Harlan Beach, Samuel Zwemer, and Eugene Stock, emphasized “the opportunity and the urgency of carrying the gospel to all the non-Christian world,” the title of the first chapter in their report.<sup>75</sup> “One of the most significant and hopeful facts with reference to world evangelisation,” the Commission noted, “is that the vast majority of the people of the non-Christian nations and races are under the sway, either of Christian governments or of those not antagonistic to Christian missions.”<sup>76</sup>

Missionaries were not the exclusive beneficiaries of improved government, transportation, and communication systems, however. Islam may have been

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Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World,” As an Integral Part of its Report to the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, June 14-23, 1910 (Edinburgh: World Missionary Conference, 1910).

<sup>71</sup> These maps were the work of Professor Harlan P. Beach of Yale University.

<sup>72</sup> *SACM*, p. 61.

<sup>73</sup> *SACM*, p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> *SACM*, p. 64.

<sup>75</sup> World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), pp. 5-49.

<sup>76</sup> *Edinburgh 1910 - I*, p. 6.



“Christianity’s most formidable enemy,”<sup>77</sup> but a more sinister threat was posed by “the deadly gift” of Western civilization itself, with its “habits of luxury and self-indulgence,”<sup>78</sup> and its myriad corrupting influences. It was important that missionary activity pre-empt the building of African and Asian railways, for example, since “the advent of railways [would] bring a large influx of ungodly men, who [would] make the task of evangelisation much more difficult. [For it had] always been true that while men slept the enemy came and sowed tares.”<sup>79</sup> “There are but a few primitive races or peoples left in the world, and the opportunity afforded the Christian Church to reach them under most favorable conditions can last but a brief season,” the Commission warned. “The present opportunity will pass away. Every year will bring new and powerful counter attractions within easy reach of the natives. The wise and experienced missionary workers show convincingly that it is much easier to bring the Gospel to bear on the heathen in his natural state than it is upon the man who has become familiar with the worst side of so-called civilisation.”<sup>80</sup>

Missionaries, while not uncritical of Western civilization, were nevertheless animated by the belief that its core principles were traceable directly to Christianity. In a required textbook written by their Professor, students at the Disciples of Christ Bible College of Missouri read that “It is in its social message that Christianity outruns the other missionary religions in its permanent power to uplift.... It becomes a civilizer through

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<sup>77</sup>*Edinburgh 1910 - I*, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup>*Edinburgh 1910 - I*, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup>*Edinburgh 1910 - I*, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup>*Edinburgh 1910 - I*, pp. 22-24. The themes and concerns identified in the Edinburgh 1910 conference continued to be promoted through the aegis of its Continuation Committee and its scholarly quarterly, the *International Review of Missions*. The disbanding of the Continuation Committee at the conclusion of the Great War did not mean that mission organizations had abandoned their interests in global mission. With the formal establishment in 1921 of the permanent, international, co-operative agency known as the International Missionary Council, the nation building and development agendas of Christian mission continued to absorb the attention of conciliar Protestants as evidenced in the three great ecumenical assemblies convened in Jerusalem (1928), Oxford (1937), and Tambaram (1938-39). All three conferences dealt hopefully and extensively with nation building.

its implanting of humane social principles and social ideals in the hearts of its converts, and they leaven the whole of the life about them.... It is ... our implanting of the life of Christ, with all it means to our civilization in higher ideals, purer thinking, better homes, greater equality, more value on life as such, a higher standard of living, and more of the spirit of service, that brings the world to him.”<sup>81</sup> Among the plates included in the book is one featuring a group of students posing in front of a large American flag. The caption beneath it reads: “Advanced Class in Urumia College, Persia. Moslems, Jews, and Christians are here drawn together, and ancient hates are lost under missionary instruction.”<sup>82</sup>

### The Great War 1914 – 1918

The assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand by teenage members of Black Hand plunged Christian Europe and its colonies into the bloodiest and quite possibly most meaningless conflagration in human history. It also marked the end of innocence for missionary apologists, who, until then, had held up their own societies as evidence of the vitality and virtue of Christian influence.

In his admirable book on the subject, Hew Strachan points out that this European war became known as the First World War because people from all over the world came to fight in the civilized nations’ cause. Britain mobilized more than three million troops from her colonies (two million of these from Africa), while France mobilized half-a-million from hers. The war’s ultimately pointless savagery sent a shudder through the *terra firma* on which confidence in the moral, social and political superiority of Western Christendom was based.<sup>83</sup> Missionaries who had confidently proclaimed

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<sup>81</sup> Alva W. Taylor, *The Social Work of Christian Missions* (Cincinnati: The Foreign Christian Missionary Society, 1914), p. 15. Taylor was Professor of Social Service and Christian Mission in the Bible College of Missouri (Disciples of Christ). His textbook, published in 1911, was enjoying its third printing by 1914.

<sup>82</sup> Taylor, *The Social Work of Christian Missions*, bottom plate facing p. 172.

<sup>83</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, Volume I, *To Arms* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002). (reviewed by Niall Ferguson in the February 13, 2003, issue of the *New York Review of Books*), pp. 21-23). See also Donovan Webster, *Aftermath: The Remnants of War* (New York: Random House, 1996).

European civilization to be the natural and inevitable result of a society permeated by Christian values were likewise shaken to their ideological foundations by the war and its aftermath.<sup>84</sup> Commenting on the decline of Chinese interest in mission school education, the Hocking Commission observed that while “by 1920 it had become ‘almost the fashion to become a Christian’; since 1922 the tide [had] turned,” due, understandably, to “...the disillusionment of the World War and the widespread impression it left that the West did not really believe the Christianity it taught.”<sup>85</sup>

After the Great War, missionary advocacy of *civilization* through *Christian* conversion was gradually displaced by secular programs of *development* through *Western* education, finance, and political rearrangement. The *modus operandi* of missions continued to function much as before, since it was embedded in the very warp and woof of Christian missionary identity. But the confident, sometimes breathless, and often patronizing tone of nineteenth-century missionary apologists migrated into the language and agendas of contemporary non-religious organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

## Conclusion

The sweeping range of nineteenth-century missionary activities, while staggering, is hardly surprising. Progeny of evangelical nonconformists better remembered for their social work than for their theology,<sup>86</sup> missionaries were acutely aware that “faith

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<sup>84</sup> William Pfaff, *The Wrath of Nations: Civilization and the Furies of Nationalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). “The Great War was the most important event of the twentieth century. It was a decisive historical event, a marker” (pp. 232-233).

<sup>85</sup> William Ernest Hocking, *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1932), pp. 154-155.

<sup>86</sup> See Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work* (Letchworth: Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1962); John Briggs and Ian Sellers, eds., *Victorian Nonconformity* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973); and Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977).

without works is dead” (James 2:26), and that faith was much more than simply mental assent to a series of theologically correct propositions about God and related matters. Love of God without love of neighbor was heresy. And the way to love neighbor was to do for your neighbor what you would want your neighbor to do for you. What this meant was, understandably, defined in largely Western terms. The lost needed evangelizing; the ignorant needed educating; the illiterate needed illuminating; the destitute needed nurturing; society needed transforming.

### **Christendom and Christian Mission**

It has not been the intention of this paper to trace the metamorphosis of the word “conversion” from patristic to later Christian understandings, but it is helpful to recall that the social contexts in which Christians employed the term profoundly impacted their understanding of its formal, functional, and motivational dimensions. From its Jewish and Gentile genesis as related in Acts of the Apostles, the church engaged in spontaneous and aggressive proclamation, with a view to converting men and women to belief in its risen Lord, and to a new way of life described by St. Luke in Acts 2:42-47. In its earliest days as a Jerusalem-based Jewish sect, the church offered converts teaching, fellowship, prayer, miracles, and a common life, and – in the words of St. Luke – “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Yale’s Ramsay MacMullen estimates that from the end of the first century the church grew by half a million in each generation so that by the time of Constantine’s conversion in 312 AD, Christians constituted a demographically significant proportion of the imperial population.<sup>87</sup> In the words of MacMullen, “No other new cult anywhere nearly approached the same success. It can only be called extraordinary.... [The Christian credo] was presented in sharply yes-or-no, black-and-white, friend-or-foe terms; and those were unique.... Belief in no other God but Yahweh entailed an obligation to speak in his praise and win over other worshipers to his service....

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<sup>87</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 86, 109-110.

Urgency, evangelism, and the demand that the new believer deny the title of god to all but one, made up the force that alternative beliefs could not match.”<sup>88</sup>

Significantly, this growth occurred in the face of often formidable disincentives. Alan Kreider – mindful of the sporadic, sometimes lethal persecution that awaited converts to the Christian faith – observes that “if one wanted a soft life, or to get ahead in respectable circles, one did not become a Christian.”<sup>89</sup> Conversion to Christianity was the sure road to marginality.<sup>90</sup>

With the conversion of Constantine, Christianity quickly mutated into Christendom – the grandsire of what is today known as “The West” – a civilization in which Christian religious dominance was guaranteed by both social and legal compulsions.<sup>91</sup> Between the Edict of Milan in AD 313 and Justinian’s edict of AD 529, Christianity’s status in the Empire evolved from being one among several equally legitimate religious options, to being the only legal public cult in AD 392. Pagan worship was increasingly marginalized, stigmatized, and finally illegitimized. Having moved from the margins of society to its center, the “other way” became the *only* way.<sup>92</sup>

It is to Christendom that the missionary movement from the West must trace the still prevalent assumption that Christian mission is “out there somewhere” – anywhere but

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<sup>88</sup> MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, p. 110.

<sup>89</sup> Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Eduardo Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, trans. R. R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 81.

<sup>91</sup> Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 8, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Alan Kreider, ed., *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh and New York: T & T Clark, 2001), pp. 22-24. See also Robert Lewis Wilkin, *Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Wilkin observes that the early Christian Fathers lived in a pagan world in which they represented a marginalized minority of the population around the Mediterranean. After Constantine, however, they made their pronouncements as secure spokesmen for a state-supported religion.

in Europe or in its cultural-political progeny, the United States and Canada.<sup>93</sup> This notion – despite deeply regrettable and frequently noted flaws, lapses, and sometimes outright evils evident in Western lands – is implicit and explicit both in the apologetic literature surveyed in this paper, and in the *modus operandi* of contemporary Western-based missions. Without Christianity, the social, cultural, political, and economic institutions of their societies could not be accounted for.

That economic, political, and military domination should generate self-confidence, assertiveness, and illusions of superior virtue on the part of those who most directly benefit from it is a truism. As Galbraith wryly observed, “nothing so gives the illusion of intelligence as association with large sums of money.”<sup>94</sup> Nor are similar sentiments uncommonly associated with overwhelming economic and military power. When James Dennis wrote his books, Europe dominated all of Africa, the entire Middle East except for Turkey, and most of the Asian subcontinent. The 35 percent of the earth’s surface controlled by Europeans when Carey sailed for Serampore had grown to 84 percent by 1914. The British Empire, encompassing 20 million subjects spread over 1.5 million square miles in 1800, engulfed 390 million people inhabiting 11 million square miles one century later.<sup>95</sup> In missionary thinking, this domination was both inevitable and providential.

### **Christian Conversion, Social Regeneration, and the Still-Missionary West**

Enjoying the considerable advantage of those who debate the deceased, a later critical generation might convincingly distance itself from the views and practices of its forebears. If the agendas and outspoken confidence of nineteenth-century missionaries

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<sup>93</sup> Kreider, ed., *The Origins of Christendom in the West*, p. x.

<sup>94</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, “The 1929 Parallel,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 259, No. 1 (January, 1987), p. 62.

<sup>95</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 51. Huntington cites D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 3, and F. J. C. Hearnshaw, *Sea Power and Empire* (London: George Harrap and Co., 1940), p. 179.

grate on the sensibilities of the twenty-first century ear, there is much to suggest that our newfound modesty may be largely cosmetic, a façade fashioned from sheer forgetfulness, selective memory, and self-delusion – the materials preferred by those charged with fabricating the flattering wardrobes of national mythologies.

Many of the impulses that motivated nineteenth-century missionaries continue to animate secularized Western societies. The West, it seems, is intrinsically missionary, absolutizing its way of life and institutions to drive globalization and proclaim the good news of a Western way of life to the uttermost parts of the earth – especially those parts with commodities and markets requisite to the steadily escalating, consumption-driven entitlements of its aging populations. The conflict between Islamic fundamentalism and the West, Samuel Huntington rightly observes, is rooted in irreconcilable values at the very heart of two civilizations. “The problem for Islam,” he says, “is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world.”<sup>96</sup>

Can it be that the *civilizing mission* of the nineteenth century has metamorphosed into the *development agendas* of our day, with quantifiable data enabling statisticians to arrange all countries and people somewhere on the continuum between *underdeveloped* and *developed*? Development, as popularly understood in the contemporary West, has nothing to do with *religion* but much to do with *democracy* and the *free market* – the terms invoked so fondly by Americans advocating their peculiar plutocracy and its global hegemonic impulses. The development agendas, trajectories and *modus operandi* of the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations bear uncanny resemblance to the civilizing mission of a bygone era. World Bank indicators of “World Development” include the familiar fields relating to education, health, and

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<sup>96</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, pp. 217-218.

poverty.<sup>97</sup> Nineteenth-century descriptive parlance – “groping through long ages in the darkness,” “native minds steeped in superstition,” and “degrading customs” – has been displaced by functional if not lexical equivalents such as “underdevelopment,” “dehumanization,” and “sub-human conditions” – all variations on the same theme.<sup>98</sup>

Missing, however, is any sense that religion – Christian or otherwise – might have a direct bearing on either the viability or ultimate outcomes of development efforts. The missionary’s insistence on religion as the foundation of human development in all of its social and material manifestations is no longer admissible, and the missionary voice today is scarcely audible.

But if nineteenth-century missionaries – along with such luminaries as Benjamin Kidd, Arnold Toynbee, or Christopher Dawson – were right; if religion *is* the central defining characteristic of any civilization; and if *Christianity* is the defining DNA of all that we know as Western; if, in Warneck’s words, “culture is not the *root* but the *bloom*, of Christianity,”<sup>99</sup> then “development” efforts – insofar as they intend to replicate elsewhere “the good life” of the West – will not get very far. A train without an engine either stands still, or, if it is on an incline, it goes forward or backward until stopped by

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<sup>97</sup> See World Bank, *2000 World Development Indicators* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Development Data Center, 2000).

<sup>98</sup> If there is a difference between missionary thinking 100 years ago and contemporary discourse concerning the “other,” it is in the remarkable extent to which the West reveals its implicit assumptions about its own superiority by taking the blame for everything that happens in the world, whether it be starvation, genocide, or underdevelopment. If missionaries of a bygone era operated on the assumption that people of the world were steeped in darkness but that missionaries held the key to helping them turn on the lights, their secular counterparts today as often as not take the blame for the sad condition of people who still sit in the darkness of underdevelopment, but with at least the faint illumination afforded them by the flickering images of ABC or NBC. If we do not have the answer to the world’s problems, at least we can take the blame for them.

<sup>99</sup> Warneck, *Modern Missions and Culture*, p. 245.



its own intrinsic inertia.<sup>100</sup> And this may be a good thing, given the doubtful possibility of generating globally the prodigious levels of consumption that must be indulged in order to merit the official stamp, “developed.” The fact that a majority of the world’s vital Christian populations today remain “underdeveloped” suggests that the world Church, detached from its Western roots, may more closely resemble the “underdeveloped” but spiritually dynamic churches of the first century than the “developed” but now becalmed Western churches of the twenty first.

Andrew Walls’ observation that the expansion of Christianity tends to be serial rather than progressive, and that the old heartlands of Christianity are the new mission fields of the twenty-first century is borne out in the recently drafted text of the Preamble of the European Convention’s Treaty establishing the Constitution which, in its studied attempt to avoid explicit mention of its Christian cultural heritage, has elicited shock and outrage on the part of Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Nowhere explicitly alluded to, in place of the Great Code one finds simply a bland reference to “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe.”<sup>101</sup>

Critics of Christian missionary activity are disingenuous and at times highly patronizing in their seeming presumption that persons other than themselves should not be permitted to make significant religious choices, presumably on the grounds that when confronted with religious alternatives, people who are not like us must inevitably choose to their own disadvantage! The historically unprecedented scale of Christian conversion throughout the past two centuries has not been coerced, but voluntary. The great movements into Christian faith have not been the byproduct of bombs, threats, sanctions, or political arm-twisting, but the voluntary responses of men and women and

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<sup>100</sup> Anthropologist Thomas W. Dichter, in his book *Despite Good Intentions: Why Development Assistance to the Third World Has Failed* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), makes the case that macro development efforts over the past fifty years have failed, and that the poor would possibly be better off had there been no development at all.

<sup>101</sup> The full text of the Draft may be found on the web at: <http://european-convention.eu.int>.

families and communities for whom the Christian message is an attractive and compelling alternative to the status quo. Indeed, many have responded at great inconvenience, and even peril, to themselves and to their families. The simple fact is that Christianity today is no longer a religion to which the West can even pretend to hold proprietary rights; it is a *world* religion.<sup>102</sup>

In *The Gifts of the Jews*,<sup>103</sup> Thomas Cahill argued that the greatest gifts of the Jews were their linear theory of history (vs. the cyclical theory of other ancients), with its implication that life can get better and avoid decline, and the idea of the equality and dignity of each individual that culminated in the declaration that "all men are created equal." To the extent that much, perhaps most, of humankind now agrees that this is so, Christian missionaries must be credited with sharing this gift with most of the rest of the world. And I, for one, welcome the opportunity provided by George Edward and Olivia Hotchkiss Day to pay them and their tribe tribute.

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<sup>102</sup> See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*, Hinges of History, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

