

NINETEENTH-CENTURY LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Nonconformist Missionaries and Imperialism*

'For myself', wrote Joshua Marshman to John Ryland in 1807, 'I can answer with certainty (and I believe for every one of my Brethren) that I view the British Government in India, I mean British sway, as the greatest temporal benefit that could have been conferred on the inhabitants in general'.(1) Marshman was not misrepresenting his Serampore colleagues; William Ward was even more fulsome in his adulation of British rule in his *Account of the Writings, Religion, and Manners of the Hindoos* published in 1811 - 'Never were such miseries to be removed - never was such a mighty good put within the power of one nation - the raising of a population of sixty millions to a rational and happy existence, and through them the illumination and civilization of all Asia!' (2)

Present-day Baptists find such statements more than a little embarrassing. We prefer to remember the Serampore Trio as eminent representatives of the best tradition of nonconformist political radicalism, suspected by the East India Company of dangerous republican leanings. Our tendency to selective remembrance is not confined to India. We cheerfully ensconce William Knibb in our gallery of denominational heroes, yet do our best to forget Alfred Baynes representing the BMS at Bismarck's Berlin Conference in 1884-5 or George Grenfell proudly wearing the personal decorations of Leopold II, the prototype economic imperialist of the partition of Africa.(3) We thus join with Christians of other denominations in helping to establish an interpretation of the history of the missionary movement which posits a sad decline from the evangelical humanitarianism of the age of Wilberforce to the complicity in colonial oppression of the age of high imperialism. A movement which began on the side of liberation ended up on the side of oppression.

My choice of quotations at the outset of this paper will already have indicated that I propose to question this conventional wisdom on the relationship of the missionary movement to imperialism. I wish to suggest that late nineteenth-century nonconformist missionaries were *intrinsically* neither more prone to imperialism nor less inclined to humanitarianism than their early nineteenth-century forebears. Relatively few of the missionaries whom I shall be discussing were Baptists. Although it is possible to draw certain distinctions between the various nonconformist denominations in terms of their responses to imperialism in different periods, there was never an identifiable 'Baptist view' of the Empire; it would be hard to justify a narrowly denominational approach to this subject. Nonetheless I shall begin where any good Baptist would want to begin - with the story of the relationship of nonconformist missions in the West Indies to plantation slavery.

Early Christian missionaries in the West Indies accepted without question the principle of British colonial rule - which in Jamaica and Barbados had been in existence for 150 years. The issue was rather how they should relate to the distinctive nature of West Indian colonial society. As dissenters, influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the

egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, they found themselves at work in a system of slavery controlled by a planter class which had the support of the Anglican establishment in the West Indies and had a powerful West Indian lobby in Westminster.

The missionaries arrived in the islands armed with explicit instructions from their parent societies to avoid all political entanglements. The BMS warned John Rowe on his departure for Jamaica in December 1813 against allowing his feelings for the slaves to lead him into words and actions inconsistent with Christian duty, and reminded him of Paul's teaching that slaves should be obedient to their masters. He was also advised that 'it is not for you to interfere in political matters, but to exemplify that quiet and peaceable conduct, which you will inculcate on your hearers; and to endeavour by a respectful demeanor to recommend yourself and the gospel to the white inhabitants of the Island'. (4)

Three years later, the London Missionary Society (LMS) committee emphasised to John Smith in his instructions for the Demerara mission that the 'holy Gospel you preach will render the slaves who receive it the most diligent, faithful, patient, and useful servants' and would thus recommend his ministry even to previously hostile plantation owners. (5) As late as 1824, the BMS still held unswervingly to the principle that its missionaries in Jamaica must have 'nothing whatever to do' with civil or political affairs, and reminded the departing William Knibb that the 'gospel of Christ, you well know, so far from producing or countenancing a spirit of rebellion or insubordination, has a directly opposite tendency'. (6)

Early nonconformist missionaries in the West Indies were thus instructed not to speak out against slavery or the colonial authorities, and the evidence suggests that they dutifully refrained from doing so. (7) There is nothing to support the charge subsequently levelled against John Smith that he incited the Demerara slaves to insurrection, and in 1832 BMS missionaries in Jamaica defended themselves against similar accusations by protesting that they had always urged slaves to be obedient to their masters in accordance with New Testament teaching. (8) There is no doubt, however, that first-hand contact with the realities of plantation slavery created in many missionaries a deep moral abhorrence of slavery and a determination to defend the interests of the slaves in so far as the system allowed. Within seven months of his arrival in Demerara, John Smith was confiding to the privacy of his journal, 'O slavery! Thou offspring of the Devil, when wilt thou cease to exist?' Increasingly Smith found himself in conflict with the plantation authorities over such matters as physical maltreatment of the slaves or their being compelled to work on Sundays, and the very act of teaching the slaves to read was accurately regarded by the colonial authorities as having alarming potential for subversion. (9)

The transformation of the missionary relationship to colonial slavery was the indirect result of the adoption by the British abolitionist movement in 1823 of a policy of 'gradualism' - a series of reforming measures were to be pressed upon the Tory government until in due course full emancipation became unavoidable. In response

to this unprecedented abolitionist pressure for major reforms of slave society, the British government instituted a pre-emptive programme of piecemeal amelioration, one feature of which was the encouragement of religious instruction for the slaves. Missionaries in the West Indies thus became unofficial agents of imperial policy and could now expect imperial protection. At the same time, however, planter attitudes were hardening in defence of the slave system, while the slaves themselves began to demonstrate an impatience for emancipation which issued in a series of rebellions or conspiracies to rebellion between 1823 and 1832.(10) The Demerara insurrection of 1823 - which led to the court-martial, imprisonment and death of John Smith - was the first of these. From now on planter opinion throughout the West Indies became almost uniformly hostile to nonconformist missions, seeing them as a front for abolitionist intentions. Missionaries began to encounter unprecedented difficulty in obtaining the necessary licences to preach.

The initial reaction of some missionaries to this deterioration in the political climate for their work was to lean over backwards to prove their loyalty to colonial society. This was notably true of the majority of the missionaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS). John Shipman, a WMMS missionary in Jamaica, urged the Society to dissociate itself completely from Smith and the LMS, and got up a statement in September 1824 which declared that, far from being instigators of subversion, the Wesleyan missionaries believed that emancipation would be a 'general calamity - injurious to the Slaves, unjust to the proprietors, ruinous to the Colonies, deleterious to Christianity, and tending to the effusion of human blood'.(11) The statement virtually identified its missionary signatories with the political interests of the plantation owners, and was promptly disowned by the WMMS general committee in London.(12) Under the pressure created by the growing strength of 'gradualism' in Britain, Shipman and his Wesleyan colleagues had transgressed the 'no politics' rule in a conservative direction. From late 1828 onwards, however, events combined to propel Methodist as well as Baptist missionaries towards a markedly different political alignment.

Although the legal position of the right of missionaries to preach in Jamaica was significantly strengthened by a test case in October 1828, the dominant feature of the years between 1828 and 1831 was the progression of many nonconformist missionaries towards a position which demanded immediate abolition on the grounds of religious liberty. Cases such as that of the Baptist slave, Sam Swiney, arrested in April 1830 for 'illegal' preaching, were crucial in hardening both missionary and domestic nonconformist opinion against the continuance of slavery.(13) The Jamaican slave rebellion of 1831-2 set the seal on this new evangelical radicalism, for the formerly sporadic persecution of Methodist and Baptist missionaries and converts now became systematic. By embarking on a campaign of harassment of nonconformist missions which were at heart soundly conservative, planter society in the West Indies had paradoxically taken the surest possible route towards slave emancipation.

The ensuing story of William Knibb's crusade in 1832-3 to rouse the BMS committee and subsequently (in association with Thomas Burchell and James Phillippo) the nonconformist public as a whole to

demand an immediate end to West Indian slavery is too well known to need repetition here. However, two points in the story deserve emphasis.

The first is that the maxim of the BMS committee that slavery was 'a political subject' which could not be attacked publicly by the Society's agents was a principle which seems to have been scrupulously observed by Knibb and Burchell on the field, until the Jamaican insurrection and consequent planters' attacks on the churches made it impossible for them to do so. (14) Burchell's congregation at Montego Bay assured the BMS in December 1832 that 'we have never heard him preach or teach any doctrine that could tend to excite negroes, or any other person or persons, to rebellion; on the contrary, he always endeavoured to impress on the minds of negroes the necessity of being obedient to their owners...'. (15)

The second point in the story worthy of particular emphasis in this context is the concluding section of Knibb's impassioned appeal before the BMS annual meeting on 21 June 1832:

... He could assure the meeting that slaves would never be allowed to worship God till slavery had been abolished. Even if it were at the risk of his connexion with the Society, he would avow this; and if the friends of missions would not hear him, he would turn and tell it to his God; nor would he ever desist till this greatest of curses were removed, and 'glory to God in the highest' inscribed on the British flag. (16)

Emancipation was to be, not a blow struck against the British Empire, but a signal achievement of the Empire on behalf of justice and liberty.

The West Indian example yields four conclusions of relevance to the theme of this paper. The first and most obvious is that the planters and their political allies increasingly perceived nonconformist missions to be a threat to their power and to the stability of colonial society. Missionary Christianity was not a welcome ally for colonial oppression but a disturbing challenge to it. Yet it must be emphasised, in the second place, that neither the missionary societies nor their individual agents set out with the intention of challenging the structures of colonial society. They firmly believed that the spread of Christianity would enhance the stability of West Indian society as of all societies. Radical political change of a manifestly unjust social system occupied no place in their missionary programme, although most were confident that the gospel would so ameliorate the conditions of the slaves that slavery would ultimately wither away.

The course of events in the West Indies between 1823 and 1833 rendered this posture of missionary non-interference in colonial politics increasingly difficult to maintain. The third conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that the realities of experience on the field broke up the consensus of idealized missionary theory and forced missionaries to adopt a variety of more or less explicitly political stances. The attitudes of individual missionaries were shaped by the immediate context in which they worked but also reflected their respective

religious backgrounds. Methodists, with their instinctive sympathy for the established church, were more likely to gravitate in a pro-colonist direction, unless personally affected by persecution. Baptists, and to a lesser extent Congregationalists, who were in the vanguard of the struggle for full religious liberty for nonconformists in Britain, moved more rapidly to the conclusion that there could be no freedom for the Gospel in the West Indies until the slaves were given their political freedom.

The final conclusion to emerge from this case study is the consistent importance of nonconformist concern for the advance of the gospel in determining the political responses of individual missionaries and their parent societies. This concern was ever present but could result in widely differing policies according to the circumstances of the place and hour. Without their official insistence on mute subservience to the structures of colonial society the missionary societies would not have gained entry to the plantation colonies in the first place. Those Wesleyan missionaries who publicly repudiated abolitionist ideas in the mid-1820s did so for fear that any more liberal attitude would have brought their work to an end.(17) It was only when plantation slavery had proved itself to be an insuperable obstacle to missionary progress that nonconformist opinion as a whole adopted an unequivocal theoretical position that slavery *per se* was a crime before God which could no longer be tolerated.(18) Concern for evangelistic freedom was the final stimulus which propelled nonconformist missions into an open but reluctant confrontation with the West Indian colonial authorities. However, the professed desire of William Knibb to see "Glory to God in the highest" inscribed on the British flag' was symptomatic of a frame of mind which could lead later missionaries under different conditions to ardent imperialism. Knibb, in fact, possessed that powerful mixture of moral absolutism, self-confidence and political indiscretion which characterized the Christian imperialists of the late Victorian age.

I wish to turn, secondly, to a missionary situation where, in contrast to the West Indies, British sovereignty was comparatively recent, the geographical frontier of colonial rule was extremely unstable, and the position of European settlers most precarious - to the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony in the 1830s. The frontier, fixed somewhat arbitrarily at the Fish River, had been the scene of perpetual conflict over land and cattle between Boer farmers and the various Xhosa groups to the east. After a particularly serious attack by the Xhosa in 1819, the British government attempted to stabilise the frontier by sponsoring the settlement of 4,000 British settlers in the territory immediately to the west of the Fish River, which became known as the Albany district, centred on Grahamstown. Among them was a party of Wesleyan Methodists, most of them from Great Queen Street Chapel in London. They were accompanied by the Rev. William Shaw, who was to combine pastoral ministry to the settlers with his role as a missionary of the WMMS to the Xhosa beyond the frontier. Under Shaw's leadership Wesleyanism became in the course of the 1820s the dominant religious influence in the Albany settlement, and the Wesleyan missionaries became closely identified with the interests of the settler community.(19) Nonetheless, Shaw possessed a strong missionary vision of a chain of Methodist stations beyond the frontier

stretching north-eastwards as far as Pondoland. By 1834 the Wesleyans had six stations among the Xhosa; the LMS, who had been at the Cape since 1798, had only one.(20) Under the leadership of Dr John Philip, the LMS had already assumed the mantle of defender of the Khoisan (or Hottentot) population within the colony, and was now turning its attention to the Xhosa. Philip made two journeys beyond the frontier in 1830 and 1832-3 which convinced him that the Xhosa were in dire peril from the cattle raiding of the Boer commandos.(21) Of regular missionary work among the Xhosa, and of the British settlers of the eastern Cape, Philip knew relatively little. The Wesleyan missionaries, on the other hand, had considerable experience of Xhosa resistance to the Gospel and a decidedly pro-settler political orientation. The stage was set for one of the most bitter disputes to mar the unity of the early nineteenth-century missionary movement.

In December 1834 the fragile peace of the eastern frontier was again shattered when the Xhosa chief Maqoma invaded the colony with 12,000 men. The initial reaction of John Philip and the Wesleyan missionaries to this Sixth Frontier War was remarkably similar: both attributed the war primarily to the vagaries of the colony's frontier policy rather than fixing exclusive blame on either the Xhosa or the settlers. However, attitudes polarised as the war proceeded.(22) Philip reacted to the savage reprisals inflicted on the Xhosa by increasingly portraying the Xhosa as more sinned-against than sinning; they had been provoked by attacks on their cattle and expropriation of their lands, and he implied that the British settlers had been as guilty as the Boers. The Wesleyans, who had suffered the destruction of three of their mission stations by the Xhosa, repeated settler allegations that Philip had incited the Xhosa to rebellion, and denied that the British settlers had been guilty of any injustice towards the Xhosa.(23) They believed that the principal source of the troubles on the frontier was quite simply 'the moral state and habits of the Caffre tribes', who shared with all nomadic tribes a natural propensity to robbery which could be checked only by the benefits of Christianity and a settled existence.(24)

The response of the Cape government under Sir Benjamin D'Urban to the 'aggression' of the Xhosa was to issue a proclamation in May 1835 sentencing the offending Xhosa groups as 'treacherous and irreclaimable savages' to be expelled for ever from all land west of the Kei River (the Ciskei). To Philip and his LMS colleagues D'Urban's proclamation represented a denial of the power of the Gospel as well as of natural justice. Philip immediately made urgent representations to T. F. Buxton and the LMS to demand of the British government that the decree of expulsion should be reversed. However, Philip made it very clear that he was not averse to the extension of the colonial frontier to the Kei River, provided that the land rights of the Xhosa within the Ciskei were fully guaranteed.(25) Buxton and the Rev. William Ellis of the LMS accordingly urged Lord Glenelg, the Colonial Secretary, to 'restore the country to the Caffers, or if it must be part of the Colony, not to give it to the Colonists, but preserve it for the Caffers, bringing them under the laws of the Colony'.(26)

During the autumn of 1835 Glenelg changed his mind about the justice and policy of D'Urban's annexation, and at the end of December

he ordered D'Urban to prepare to abandon the Ciskei - a decision which Glenelg confirmed in 1836. The decision was greeted with anger and dismay by the British settlers and the Boers; it was the last straw for frontier Boers exasperated by humanitarian interference, and they began the legendary 'Great Trek' northwards to escape British rule. D'Urban and the settlers blamed Philip for Glenelg's decision, but it is far more likely that the Colonial Office was motivated by fear of the additional cost which extension of the frontier would involve.(27) Moreover, Philip did *not* want abandonment but a benevolent imperial rule which would give the Xhosa security in their lands and the benefits of British law.

Although increasingly at odds with Philip over the interpretation of the causes of the 1834-5 war, the Wesleyan missionaries took an almost identical view to Philip of the direction which frontier policy ought now to take. William Shaw favoured the incorporation of the 'ceded' territory within the colony but with ample lands reserved for those Xhosa willing to place themselves under British protection.(28) Shaw testified to this effect before the parliamentary select committee on aborigines, appointed in 1835 under Buxton's chairmanship as a direct result of Philip's agitation on behalf of the frontier Xhosa. The committee also heard evidence from the Rev. John Beecham, joint secretary of the WMMS, that William Boyce, a strongly pro-settler Wesleyan missionary, considered D'Urban's policy of expulsion to be unwise and objectionable. Boyce believed, like Philip, that 'if taken under colonial protection and British law... (the Xhosa) might not only have their active enmity neutralized, but be converted into our good friends'.(29) Although less far apart in their prescriptions for frontier policy after 1834 than they themselves acknowledged, the two groups of missionaries still differed markedly in the extent of their sympathy for settler interests. Relations between Shaw and Philip reached their nadir in 1838-9 in a vituperative exchange of correspondence, subsequently published by Shaw.(30)

Britain's abandonment of the Ciskei in 1836-7 was no more than a temporary hiccup in an apparently inevitable process which sucked Britain into deeper and deeper involvement in southern Africa. Within a decade the British had annexed not merely the Ciskei but Natal as well. The small portion of the story which we have examined poses one telling question of importance to the theme of this paper. Which of the two opposing groups of missionaries stood more clearly for the cause of 'liberation'? Philip and the LMS showed the same resolution in defending native interests against settler exploitation as Knibb and his BMS colleagues had shown on behalf of the West Indian slaves. Philip, like Knibb, had found himself propelled into the political arena by his concern for humanity and the interests of the Gospel. Yet Philip was a believer in 'commerce and Christianity' and a disciple of Adam Smith, advocating consumerism as the solution to the economic dependence of Khoisan or Bantu.(31) More embarrassing to the status of Philip as a liberal hero is his unashamed advocacy of racial segregation, which enables one historian to describe him unfairly as 'an advocate of *apartheid* ahead of his time'.(32) Most incongruous of all to the mind of a modern political liberal is Philip's fervent belief in the benevolent purposes of British imperialism: Britain, like ancient Rome, was called to spread her rule and her institutions among barbarian peoples to

protect them from oppression and raise them to civilisation.(33) Shaw and his colleagues in the WMMS, on the other hand, claimed to be non-political, but in practice espoused most of the political and territorial ambitions of the British settler community. William Boyce and the leaders of Grahamstown Wesleyanism even defended the Voortrekkers and deplored 'the loss of so many stalwart Boers from the defensive power of the Colony'.(34) Yet the Wesleyan missionaries were, strictly speaking, far less 'imperialistic' than Philip. They did not share Philip's grandiose imperial dreams, but instead advocated colonial self-government on the West Indian pattern in order to free settler power from humanitarian-inspired control from London.(35) The choice in South Africa in the 1830s was thus between Philip's humanitarian imperialism and the Wesleyans' white colonialism. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Philip's imperialism stood closer than the apolitical conservatism of the Wesleyans to the true spirit of the liberating gospel of Christ. Missionary imperialism begins to look more and more like an extension of missionary humanitarianism rather than its opponent.

In the final section of this paper I wish to cite three examples from the Victorian period in which nonconformist missionaries, supported to a considerable extent by sections of the nonconformist public in Britain, favoured openly imperial solutions to particular problems. The first case, Fiji, we shall examine in some detail. The second and third - Bechuanaland and the Congo Free State - can receive not much more than a passing mention.

In an age of singularly slow missionary progress Fiji stood out as a spectacular example of evangelistic success. The first Wesleyan missionaries arrived in 1835 to find a society of palpable 'heathen darkness' in which infanticide, human sacrifice and cannibalism were endemic. Yet within twenty years Fijians were being converted in large numbers; by 1868, out of a population in the islands of about 120,000, almost 106,000 were reported to be regular church attenders.(36) Political authority in the islands was disputed between Cakobau, the Christian ruler of Bau and self-styled 'King' of Fiji, and Ma'afu, who held sway in the eastern part of the group with the backing of the King of Tonga. Before September 1858 there is little evidence of any pressure from the Wesleyan missionaries for Britain to assume sovereignty of Fiji. As long as Fiji offered freedom for evangelical action and some measure of political stability, they remained largely indifferent to imperial possibilities.(37) The erosion of this indifference came about when these conditions were first threatened in 1858-9 and then progressively destroyed in the course of the 1860s.

The earliest occurrence of Wesleyan missionary pressure for the annexation of Fiji is in 1858-9, when the integrity of the islands was threatened, first by a French frigate (reputedly with two 'Romish priests' on board) and then by an American warship demanding compensation for the ransacking of the house of the American consul.(38) The British consul, W. T. Pritchard, induced the fearful Cakobau to sign a treaty yielding the sovereignty of Fiji to Britain in return for Britain's assumption of responsibility for the American debt. Pritchard then set out for London to seek ratification of the deed of cession. The cause was a hopeless one. Britain stood to gain very

little from the acquisition of Fiji, and Pritchard returned empty-handed in November 1859. 'Everyone', commented one Wesleyan missionary, 'is sorely disappointed that Fiji is not accepted by our Government'. (39)

By 1861, however, Wesleyan enthusiasm for British annexation was more qualified. The threat from France or America had receded, and some missionaries feared that British rule would provide an excuse for Pritchard to bolster his already dictatorial position in the islands. After 1861 the prospect of cession to Britain was laid quietly to rest. (40) Its reappearance a decade later was due almost entirely to the effects of economic change. The American Civil War of 1861-5 created a world shortage of cotton, and hence stimulated experiments in cotton cultivation in tropical areas recently penetrated by European influence. The impact of cotton on Fiji was immediate and profound. The number of white settlers in the islands rose from a mere 30 or 40 in 1860 to 2,000 in 1870. (41) A substantial white planter community brought two major problems in its wake, problems which were not to be resolved without the imposition of British rule.

Within Fiji itself the absence of any effective governmental authority or rule of law for the expanding settler population brought about numerous disputes over land and a deterioration of relationships between Fijians and Europeans. In July 1867 a Wesleyan missionary, the Rev. Thomas Baker, and seven native agents were killed and eaten in the interior of the largest of the Fijian islands. (42) By 1869 missionaries were reporting a state of political turmoil in Fiji and insisting that some way had to be found of imposing the rule of law if the missionary achievement in Fiji were not to founder amidst the bitterness of racial and territorial conflict. (43) British annexation was once again an attractive prospect. Recognising, however, that the chances of the British government being willing to countenance annexation were still slim, the WMMS general committee adopted the more realistic tactic in March 1869 of urging the Foreign Secretary to 'devise some method by which British subjects in the islands may be made amenable to British law'; specifically the society proposed that the British consul in Fiji should be granted magisterial powers. (44) The Gladstone government did in fact pursue this possibility in 1869 and again in 1871, but to no avail. (45) It took the second problem raised by the rapid economic development of Fiji to generate irresistible pressure for annexation.

The multiplication of cotton and other plantations in Fiji created an acute demand for cheap labour. To satisfy the demand, a labour traffic grew up among the south Pacific islands which was sufficiently unsavoury to be dubbed the Pacific slave trade. (46) The branding of the labour traffic as a new form of the slave trade became the rhetorical platform on which a renewed and successful campaign for British annexation was built between 1872 and 1874. The parliamentary leader of the campaign was the Wesleyan M.P., William McArthur. McArthur's arguments for annexation mixed strategic, commercial and humanitarian considerations, but for the missionaries on the field the dominant issue was whether the British government was to put an end to 'disorder, anarchy, and bloodshed'. (47) After the conclusion of the agreement in October 1874 whereby Fiji was to become a Crown colony the jubilant missionaries sent McArthur a letter congratulating him for

his efforts 'in the deep interests of humanity': the missionaries rejoiced that McArthur had secured for the law-abiding settler 'protection to property and life' and 'for the black man, deliverance from the bonds which, fastened on him by other hands than those of his chiefs, were eating into his soul'. (48)

Fiji provides a classic example of the way in which concerns characteristic of evangelical missionaries throughout the nineteenth century issued, in the changed conditions of the last third of the century, in more frequent and more explicit missionary support for the imposition of some form of British protection or rule. Fiji's Wesleyan missionaries and their domestic spokesmen were more prone than other nonconformists to succumb to grandiose visions of imperial idealism, but this ideological inclination towards imperialism was not in itself sufficient to make the Wesleyan missionaries into consistent advocates of British intervention in Fiji. They pressed for British protection or rule only when Fijian stability and security were threatened - either by external aggression, as in 1858-9, or by the breakdown of internal political order precipitated by the settler influx of the 1860s. The dominant motifs in the pro-imperial agitation of the Wesleyan missionaries were the need for protection against oppression and the necessity of the rule of law. If these objectives could have been secured by something less than British formal control - either by granting the British consul jurisdictional authority or by the declaration of a 'protectorate' (49) - missionary opinion would have been satisfied. However, as Fiji degenerated towards a position in which nobody appeared to possess or exercise effective jurisdiction, full British sovereignty became an increasingly compelling option. A society without law or sovereignty presented an appalling prospect of anarchy; as that grim spectre became more real, Wesleyan enthusiasm for the imagined benefits of British legality grew apace.

It is tempting but unconvincing to attribute the Wesleyan response in Fiji to an in-built Wesleyan propensity to imperialism. Markedly similar preoccupations can be discerned in the responses of Congregationalists and Baptists to parallel crises in other mission fields. The campaign of the Scottish LMS missionary, John Mackenzie, in 1882-3 to persuade the British government to declare a protectorate over Southern Bechuanaland was no stratagem hatched in evangelistic desperation, as the episode's leading historian would have us believe; (50) on the contrary, one of the key-notes of the LMS campaign for Bechuanaland was the need to preserve and protect 'the precious and substantial results of the labours of two generations of Christian missionaries'. (51) The imperialism of John Mackenzie was too idealistic to be merely a pragmatic response to missionary failure. Few Congregational missionaries or missionary supporters shared his lofty dream of 'Austral Africa' - of the whole of Africa south of the Zambesi federated under the British flag. (52) But they gave a ready response to Mackenzie's warnings that gospel success and native interests in Bechuanaland were alike imperilled by the continuance of Boer incursions and land-grabbing in defiance of the Pretoria Convention which the Transvaal Republic had signed. (53) The assembly of the Congregational Union, in passing a resolution in support of the campaign in October 1882, asked the British government, *not* to extend its rule over Bechuanaland, but to 'put a stop' to 'the lawless

incursions of certain Boers from the Transvaal' which threatened 'the utter ruin of peace, civilisation, and Christianity in that land'.(54) Those who supported that resolution would have denied they were promoting British imperialism - although in reality that was precisely what they were doing.

Why did George Grenfell and the other BMS pioneers on the Congo hail Leopold II's Congo Free State with such indecent enthusiasm? It was, above all, because the advent of a settled administration appeared to promise an end to what Grenfell later recalled as 'a state of lawlessness and misery that makes my old diaries blood-curdling and horrible'.(55) Grenfell positively gloried in 'the persistently repressive action of the law' which had begun to curb the evils of the slave trade, the liquor traffic and cannibalism.(56) Paradoxically the very same missionary concern to see the application of legal restraints to the oppressive activities of profit-seekers subsequently led growing numbers of the BMS missionaries, including eventually Grenfell himself, to espouse the cause of Congo reform in the opening years of this century.(57)

Dr Bebbington has shown that in the later Victorian period nonconformists looked increasingly to the state to promote domestic legislation that would extirpate public wrongs and provide a framework for a just and righteous society.(58) Simultaneously with this development, many of the mission fields in which British societies worked were experiencing the devastating impact of expanding white settlement, increased economic development and intensified competition between the European powers for spheres of influence. The consequence was strengthening nonconformist support for policy solutions in these mission fields which in retrospect can be seen to have had manifestly imperial consequences, yet were defended at the time by many nonconformists as the simple dictates of justice, compassion and freedom.

To the extent that late nineteenth-century nonconformist missionaries spoke more frequently than their predecessors of the need to preserve law and order on the mission field, they can fairly be described as more inclined to imperialism than their early nineteenth-century forebears. But they did so primarily because the threats to law and stability *were* more insistent and complex in the era of global partition than in the heyday of free trade. Is there really any substantial difference between the appeal of William Knibb to the power of the British government to abolish West Indian slavery and the appeal of George Grenfell to Leopold II to stamp out the evils of the heart of Africa? Can we draw any tenable distinction between the humanitarian imperialism of John Philip, which we tend to applaud, and the humanitarian imperialism of his disciple John Mackenzie, which we conventionally abhor? These Christian imperialists deserve in fact to be remembered as the liberation theologians of their day - 'political priests' who refused to sever the gospel from a concern for justice and the victims of oppression, yet at the same time men whose thinking was unacceptably coloured by an ideology which claimed to be biblical but in certain essential respects was desperately partisan. Christian history is, after all, made up, not of heroes and villains, but of sinful men and women in whom we can see the grace of God at work.

NOTES

* An earlier version of this paper was read at the Baptist Historical Society Summer School in Bradford on 14 July 1985. I wish to thank the Methodist Church, Overseas Division, for permission to cite from the archives of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society.

- 1 Marshman to John Ryland, n.d. (1807), B.M.S.MSS; cited in E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India 1793-1837*, Cambridge, 1967, p.202.
- 2 William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos*, 3 vols., London, 1822, I, p.liv; cited in Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries*, pp.202-3.
- 3 See Ruth M. Slade, *English-speaking Missions in the Congo Independent State (1878-1908)*, Brussels, 1959, p.73; Sir Harry Johnston, *George Grenfell and the Congo*, 2 vols., London, 1908, I, p.5, p.381.
- 4 *Periodical Accounts relative to the Baptist Missionary Society*, vol.v, Kettering, 1813, pp.292-3, cited in Basil Amey, 'Baptist Missionary Society radicals', *Baptist Quarterly* XXVI, 8, October 1976, p.366.
- 5 Stiv Jakobsson, *Am I not a Man and a Brother? British Missions and the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in West Africa and the West Indies 1786-1838*, Uppsala, 1972, pp.301-2.
- 6 J. H. Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica*, London, 1847, pp.149-50. For the general reluctance of the missionary societies to identify themselves with the anti-slavery movement see Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: the Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834*, Urbana, 1982, pp.8-10.
- 7 Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp.25, 76-7.
- 8 Jakobsson, *Am I not a Man and a Brother?*, pp.315-16, 467.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp.306-17; cf. Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp.86-7.
- 10 This account is indebted to Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p.102.
- 11 Cited in Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p.112.
- 12 Jakobsson, *Am I not a Man and a Brother?*, pp.389-94.
- 13 Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, pp.95-6; Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp.133-42.
- 14 Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, pp.142, 150-1; *Baptist Magazine*, XXIV, 1832, p.325.
- 15 W. F. Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell, Twenty-two Years a Missionary in Jamaica*, London, 1849, p.256.
- 16 *Baptist Magazine*, XXIV, 1832, p.325; for a fuller record of this speech see Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, pp.145-8.
- 17 See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p.110.
- 18 See Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell*, pp.176-7, 249-50. The contention of Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p.70, that the 'parent churches' of the BMS and WMMS 'came out in full support' of the abolitionist campaign as early as 1823 is unsubstantiated by the evidence, and is misleading without considerable qualification.
- 19 Basil A. Le Cordeur, *The Politics of Eastern Cape Separatism 1820-1854*, Cape Town, 1981, pp.67-8.
- 20 John S. Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire: British Policy on the South African Frontier 1834-1854*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963, p.86.

- 21 W. M. Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton: The Making of the South African Native Problem*, revised edn., Oxford, 1963, pp.96-101.
- 22 Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire*, p.111.
- 23 Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, p.140; W. D. Hammond-Tooke (ed.), *The Journal of William Shaw*, Cape Town, 1972, pp.13-14.
- 24 Celia Sadler, *Never a Young Man: Extracts from the Letters and Journals of the Rev. William Shaw*, Cape Town, 1967, pp.157-60.
- 25 Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, pp.145-8.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp.162-4.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp.166-7; Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire*, pp.123-9.
- 28 William Shaw, *The Story of my Mission in South-Eastern Africa*, London, 1860, p.143; Sadler, *Never a Young Man*, pp.163-5. The 'ceded' or 'neutral' territory between the Fish and Keiskamma rivers had been established by the British in 1819 as a buffer zone beyond the frontier in which the Xhosa were permitted to reside on condition of good behaviour.
- 29 Parliamentary Papers 1836, VII (538), *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, pp.64-5, 94-5, 495-7; see also Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire*, p.105.
- 30 William Shaw, *A Defence of the Wesleyan Missionaries in Southern Africa: Comprising Copies of a Correspondence with the Reverend John Philip, D.D.*, London, 1839.
- 31 W. M. Macmillan, *The Cape Colour Question: A Historical Survey*, London, 1928, pp.176-7, 216-7; *idem*, *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, p.371.
- 32 Eric A. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa*, 3rd edn., London, 1957, pp.174, 183; Macmillan, *The Cape Colour Question*, p.174.
- 33 Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire*, p.105; Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, pp.146-8, 165-6, 235, 258.
- 34 [W. B. Boyce], *Memoir of the Rev. William Shaw, Late General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Missions in South-Eastern Africa, edited by his oldest surviving friend*, London, 1874, p.176; Le Cordeur, *The Politics of Eastern Cape Separatism*, pp.90, 105.
- 35 [Boyce], *Memoir of the Rev. William Shaw*, pp.177-8.
- 36 Thomas McCullagh, *Sir William McArthur K.C.M.G.: A Biography, Religious, Parliamentary, Municipal, Commercial*, London, 1891, pp.143-5.
- 37 See Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas 1797-1860*, Melbourne, 1978, pp.144-5.
- 38 J. Royce to G. Osborn, 7 Sept.1858, Box 532, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; see K. L. P. Martin, *Missionaries and Annexation in the Pacific*, London, 1924, pp.47-9.
- 39 W. Wilson to G. Osborn, 3 Nov.1859, Box 532, WMMS archives.
- 40 Gunson, *Messengers of Grace*, p.145; J. D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji 1858-1880*, London, 1958, pp.41-2; J. Waterhouse to WMMS, 18 Oct.1860 and 18 Dec.1861, Box 532, WMMS archives; J. Calvert to WMMS, 14 July 1862, Box 532, WMMS archives.
- 41 Legge, *Britain in Fiji*, pp.44-5.
- 42 J. Calvert to Vice-Admiral Erskine, 5 March 1869, Box 532, WMMS archives.
- 43 J. Nettleton to G. Perks, 23 Oct.1869, Box 532, WMMS archives.

- 44 Parliamentary Papers 1868-9, XLIII, *Correspondence Respecting the Deportation of South Sea Islanders*, pp.1106-7.
- 45 Legge, *Britain in Fiji*, pp.116-21.
- 46 Ibid., pp.55-6; McCullagh, *Sir William McArthur*, pp.147-8.
- 47 F. Langham and others to British Consul for Fiji and Tonga, 12 March 1874, Box 532, WMMS archives.
- 48 McCullagh, *Sir William McArthur*, p.182.
- 49 The concept of a 'protectorate' was developed by the European powers in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century to describe arrangements made between a European power and a native ruler designed to exclude other European powers from any interference in the ruler's territory. The protecting power was not deemed in law to possess territorial sovereignty. See W. Ross Johnston, *Sovereignty and Protection: A Study of British Jurisdictional Imperialism in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Durham, N.C., 1973.
- 50 Anthony J. Dachs, 'Missionary imperialism - the case of Bechuanaland', *Journal of African History*, XIII, 4, 1972, pp.647-58.
- 51 Resolution of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1882, cited in John Mackenzie, *Austral Africa: Losing it or Ruling it. Being Incidents and Experiences in Bechuanaland, Cape Colony, and England*, new edn. 2 vols., New York, 1969, I, p.143. For some indication of missionary successes among the Tswana see I. Schapera, *Tribal Innovators: Tswana Chiefs and Social Change 1795-1940*, London, 1970, pp.43, 119-21; Åke Holmberg, *African Tribes and European Agencies: Colonialism and Humanitarianism in British South and East Africa 1870-1895*, Göteborg, 1966, pp.173-4.
- 52 Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, passim; Anthony Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland 1835-1899: A Study in Humanitarian Imperialism*, Cape Town, 1971, pp.49, 53.
- 53 Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, I, pp.142-3; Dachs, 'Missionary imperialism', pp.653-4.
- 54 Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, I, p.143.
- 55 Johnston, *George Grenfell and the Congo*, I, p.480.
- 56 Ibid., I, pp.375-6.
- 57 Ibid., I, pp.377-81; Slade, *English-speaking Missions*, pp.263, 274-80.
- 58 D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914*, London, 1982, p.13.

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