

## CHAPTER III

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND

#### Compromise and the State Church

The potential for a multifaceted response in England to the challenge of mission stems in part from the very formation of its state church. While the old consciousness of the Church as a separate institution with its own imperatives never disappeared entirely, the Church of England, from the moment Henry VIII broke away from the Church of Rome and declared himself head of the English Church, was irrevocably tied to the secular state. The state, as embodied by both the Crown and, increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by Parliament, did not hesitate to use this still rich and valuable pawn in political machinations with less than spiritual aims. Yet because the English Church had to accommodate the priorities of the secular state that had created it and continued to control it, it exhibited a flexibility and an accommodation in matters of doctrine and dogma not always found in more independent institutions. For the forceful Tudor monarchs of the sixteenth century, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, domestic stability represented a pressing political priority. If, to achieve that end, the Crown and the English Church had to refrain from insisting on absolute adherence to precise doctrines in matters of religion--from, "making windows into men's souls"--then refrain they would. The Elizabethan Compromise, in short, allowed for

considerable diversity of religious opinion within the established state church; an allowance stemming less from modern perceptions of toleration than the contingencies of state policy.

In the heated religious atmosphere of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, compromise was difficult to maintain. Whatever social, political and economic divisions underlay the English Civil War, the Interregnum, and the Glorious Revolution, seventeenth-century Englishmen also saw these conflicts as confrontations rooted in religious differences. But in 1689, the principle of toleration of religious practice, even outside the confines of the Church of England, proved victorious and found expression in the Bill of Rights. As it entered the eighteenth century, then, English Protestantism was characterized by nothing so much as diversity. The Anglican Establishment itself continued to contain "low church" Calvinist elements as well as those who still identified to some degree with the older Catholic tradition. Churchmen who saw the Church's established status as right and natural shared the Anglican communion with those who railed against the interference of the state in the affairs of a spiritual institution. Outside the established Church itself, the Dissenter bodies thrived, despite the civil disabilities the practice of their faith cost them, and presented a dizzying array of religious perspectives.

Thus when all the conditions were in place for Christian mission to be perceived as relevant to the lives of believers, English Protestantism, by virtue of its very diversity, had the potential for a varied response. That response was not, initially, however, particularly innovative, tied as it was to the overseas goals of the English Crown.

The Early English Missinary Effort and its Limitations

The extention of the English presence into North America in the early seventeenth century greatly enhances the opportunities for the Anglican Church to act on the Great Commission. The Church would, of course, expand in the New World by ministering to the spiritual needs of English colonists. But now for the first time in hundreds of years, it also found itself in contact with the heathen in the person of the American Indian. Despite their relative lack of experience with such a group, neither the Church nor the Crown nor the colonizing body, the Virginia Company, appears to have felt any equivocation over the Commission. One scholar of seventeenth-century Anglican mission perceives in the records of the Virginia Company "a thrill of awakening missionary zeal."<sup>1</sup> Be that as it may, the company's charter contains a very specific religious charge. "So noble a work," it reads, "may by the Providence of Almighty God hereafter tend to the glorie of his Divine Majesty in propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and misserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God and may in time bring the infidels and savages to human civility and to settled and quiet government."<sup>2</sup> It has also been suggested that the idea of Englishmen carrying the Protestant religion to the New World and thus checking the Catholic

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<sup>1</sup>George Brydon, Virginia's Mother Church (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1947), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

powers of Spain and France had considerable attraction in the diplomatic schema of the era.<sup>3</sup>

While little appears to have been done in the first critical years to implement these charges, by 1617 the Crown itself requested contributions for what was in essence the first general appeal for Anglican overseas mission. Fifteen hundred pounds was raised for an Indian school, and land was set aside in the colony for its support. But significantly, the initiative for this action came, not from the institutional church, but the Crown. The funds themselves were raised through a public appeal and did not involve the regular revenues of the Church.

Despite this promising start, the Anglican missionary effort soon waned. The school fell victim to an Indian uprising in 1621 before it was fully operational, and interest in it never revived.<sup>4</sup> This apathy can be attributed to the harshness of colonial life. The Virginia colonists had trouble enough simply maintaining life. Mission to the Indians, who were a major threat to their continued existence, could hardly have been much of a priority. Moreover, England itself was soon embroiled in a civil war in which religious issues played a major part. For much of the seventeenth century England found itself quite literally a nation of armed religious camps. Thus, however

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<sup>3</sup>William Kellaway, The New England Company, 1649-1776 (London: Longman's, 1961), pp. 1-9.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-59.

sensitive the Anglican Church might have been to the Great Commission, it had only a limited ability to act on it.<sup>5</sup>

With the Glorious Revolution of 1689 and the succession to the throne of William and Mary, a religious and civil truce prevailed which gave the Anglican community new freedom to respond to mission. This reaction, however, was only partly a factor of civil peace. Equally important was the influence of a growing movement for the creation of charitable and benevolent societies. Two theological systems formed the basis for this social activism. The theology of divine benevolence represented a synthesis of Christian truth and the growing rationalism of the era. It maintained that since God is the creator of a rational universal order and, in His benevolence, has given man the ability to comprehend that order, it behooves man to imitate that benevolence and reason and create a rational social order. The second source, German pietism, held that acts of charity were outward manifestations of and exercises in personal piety. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the foundation of numerous hospitals, schools for the indigent and foundling homes provides evidence of the impact of this "practical Christianity." Many of those laymen and clergy who participated in the revival of interest in mission came out of this movement. Quite aside from the charge of the Great Commission, they could hardly have

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<sup>5</sup>There was one English effort at mission in this period, but it was under the auspices of neither Crown nor the Church of England. In 1649, the Long Parliament chartered the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England. For fifty years it was the only English body working (none too successfully) with the Indians. Its membership was entirely Puritan. Kellaway, The New England Company, p. 8.

wished for better candidates for civilizing, rationalizing and Christianizing than the heathen Indian or, a new factor in the eighteenth century, the African slave.<sup>6</sup>

Given the relative social stability of the period and the growing spirit of "divine benevolence," those appealing for the Church's aid to the colonies and particularly to slaves and Indians now found their words falling on much more receptive ears. Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican clergyman who had served in both Virginia and Barbados, published a tract as early as 1680 entitled The Negro's and Indian's Advocate, which enjoyed a wide readership. By 1685, twelve Oxford scholarships had been set up in a private bequest that required the holders to serve as Anglican clergymen overseas. Toward the end of the century, Thomas Bray, the colonial commissary of the Bishop of London, reported from his own observations in Maryland the desperate condition of the faithful and the heathen in the colonies. The most significant result of this renewed interest in mission was the formation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1701.<sup>7</sup>

The SPG (as it will be referred to hereafter), by far the oldest of the Anglican missionary societies, exhibited, even at this early date, many of the eccentricities and tensions that characterized the missionary effort of the Church of England well into the nineteenth century. One such point was the matter of the society's relationship to the institutional church and, in turn, the Church's relationship

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<sup>6</sup>John Nelson, "Anglican Missions in America, 1701-1725: A Study of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," PhD Thesis, Northwestern University, 1962, pp. 1-16.

<sup>7</sup>Brydon, Virginia's Mother Church, p. 187.

to the Crown as it pertained to the question of mission. At the time of the SPG's formation, the general belief appears to have been that the Crown was responsible for the spiritual welfare of the colonial population. Though the Crown had shown only the most perfunctory interest in the matter after the early years of the seventeenth century, the Church was not technically at liberty to undertake independent action. The precise nature of the role of a Church legally tied to a secular state in that state's overseas possessions and later outside those boundaries appears to have been an ever-present conundrum.

The solution, if it can properly be called that, worked out in this period was to organize missionary enterprise on a private basis under largely lay leadership rather than as an official effort of the institutional church. By leaving mission in the hands of committed laymen, the Church could respond to the 'spiritual imperative' without seeming to infringe on the prerogatives. The founding membership of the SPG had no formal connection to the Church although clergymen from all strata of the Church hierarchy did join. Indeed the SPG's charter charged the initial formation of the group to the archbishops of Canterbury and York, the bishops of London and Ely and Dean of Westminster.<sup>8</sup> Its non-clerical membership was Anglican to a man with no hint of the sort of ecumenicalism which characterized some later missionary societies. These substantial merchants and professional men may have indeed seen the SPG as such as a bulwark against

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<sup>8</sup>"Abstract of the Charter of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts." Printed in London, 1731. University of Hawaii microfilm.

the inroads of Dissent and Roman Catholicism in the colonies and as an exercise in charity and benevolence.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps because of its strictly denominational character and its informal ties to both the political and spiritual establishment, American historians have called into question the SPG's missionary effort. They criticize the purpose the organization served in colonial society, particularly with regard to its work among slaves and Indians. Despite the impetus given mission by appeals for the needs of these heathen, the SPG charter mentions neither specifically. It has been suggested that whatever its original intent, the society quickly gravitated toward work among the European settlers. Certainly there are instances that support this view. Samuel Thomas, for example, came to Carolina in 1702 to work with the Yamasee tribe. But in very short order, he reported to London that the Yamasee were "not at leisure" to receive his teaching and that he intended to take up parish work among the settlers. Of the 309 SPG missionaries who worked along the Atlantic coast in the eighteenth century, not one is known to have actually lived among the Indians. Such limited work as they did pursue, say their critics, was designed as much for the needs of the Crown in securing Indian allies for its struggles with France and Spain as for the salvation of souls.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Nelson, "Anglican Missions," pp. 1-29.

<sup>10</sup>Henry W. Bowden, American Indians and Christian Missions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 134-36.



A brief sampling of the annual "state of the society" sermon delivered annually at the parish church of St. Mary-le-Bow in London certainly confirms the fact that the society had more than one focus and that the emphasis given a particular interest varied. George Berkeley, the bishop of Cloyne, begins in 1731 with a restatement of the Great Commission. The duty to bring all men to God cannot be shirked. And while he notes the condition of the Church among colonists and reaffirms the need for an orthodox clergy, the bulk of his remarks are addressed to the treatment of Indians and slaves. Interestingly, he praises the French and Spanish for their more humane treatment of these souls.<sup>11</sup> Philip Bearcroft in 1744 likewise states that the society's mission is to these groups. But having said so, he devotes most of his remarks to the work among the settlers. Slaves and Indians are lumped into the common category of "barbarians," though slaves appear to be the more tractable. As for "the wild Indians" there is no remedy other than to await "the Lord's time for success."<sup>12</sup> But the fact remains that the SPG at least attempted to maintain a competent, educated clergy in the colonies. The institutional church,

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<sup>11</sup>George Berkeley, "A Sermon preached before the incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; at their anniversary meeting in the parish church of St. Mary-le-Bow on Fri., Feb. 18, 1731." Printed by J. Dawning in London, 1731. University of Hawaii microfilm.

<sup>12</sup>Philip Bearcroft, "A Sermon preached before the incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; at their anniversary meeting at the parish church of St. Mary-le-Bow on Friday, Feb. 15, 1744. Printed in London by E. Owen. University of Hawaii microfilm.

aside from private clerical membership in the SPG, confined its support to setting aside one Sunday a year in which appeals for the support of mission could be made from its pulpits. Otherwise, the SPG had to rely on private bequests and subscriptions, and finances remained a chronic problem.<sup>13</sup>

On balance, to say that the SPG mission lacked focus and enthusiasm and may have had political overtones is to say no more than that it reflected eighteenth-century Anglicanism. For the most part, the English Church in the eighteenth century had little of the emotional energy and direction characteristic of mission movement in the next century. Even its strengths tended to sap the energy of mission. In the intellectual sphere, for example, Anglican clerics in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries produced the "golden age" of English theology. The source of this creativity was the alliance between reason and Christianity that developed as theologians struggled to construct a philosophical religion in harmony with the period's growing rationalism. In their view, reason became the road to a true understanding of Christianity. While, as we have seen, this development could and did have positive consequences for mission, this analytical approach to belief also had dangerous implications for the Faith. This marriage of reason and faith proved extremely difficult to maintain in the face of the expanding world view and scientific outlook of the eighteenth century. "How," queries one scholar, "could the tutelary deity of a petty tribe be the God who ruled over all things

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<sup>13</sup>Nelson, "Anglican Missions," pp. 1-29.

and all men? How could even the God of medieval imagination, the God worshipped by Christians when Christendom was regarded as approximately identical with the universe, be still the ruler of the whole earth, in which Christians formed but a small minority and of a universe in which the earth was but a grain on the seashore"?<sup>14</sup> English theologians showed considerable skill in answering such challenges, and the split between reason and faith was never as dramatic in England as it was on the Continent, particularly in France. But their very success tended to produce a "bland piety and prosperous reasonableness" totally unsuited to missionary zeal.<sup>15</sup> It was not without reason that the famous jurist, Blackstone, complained that in the London churches he attended, "it would have been impossible to discover whether the preacher were a follower of Confucius, of Mahomet, or of Christ."<sup>16,17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Sir Leslie Stephen, English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1902), 1:81.

<sup>15</sup>Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966-69) 1 (1966), p. 344.

<sup>16</sup>Eugene Stock, History of the Church Missionary Society, 2 vols. (London: The Church Missionary Society, 1899), 2:33.

<sup>17</sup>It should be noted that this intellectual dilemma was by no means confined to the Anglican community. Dissenter and non-Conforming bodies which had been a doctrinal force to be reckoned with in the seventeenth century also suffered from a certain neuralgia in this period. As the civil and religious disabilities imposed on them dissipated and their ministers entered the intellectual mainstream, the old Calvinist orthodoxy lost much of its impact. The doctrine of predestination with its emphasis on man's inability to control his own fate in particular lost ground. Elie Halevy, History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, trans. E. I. Watkin and D. A. Barker, 6 vols. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961. First published 1913-48) 1:398.

Even had the rationalism of the eighteenth century not been so pervasive and so intellectually insidious, given the institutional weakness of the Church of England, it would have had grave difficulty checking these inroads. Parliament had steadily encroached on the independence and institutional privilege of the Church to the point that it was virtually impossible to separate a purely religious question, be it doctrine or mission, from the political realm. After the beginning of the century, Convocation, the legislative body of the Church, rarely met. As early as 1664, Parliament had assumed the right to tax the clergy, hence extending its financial control of the Church. Even questions of censorship and heterodox writings were decided by secular courts, not Church bodies. In other words, what Blackstone may not have realized was that the Church as an institution had virtually no means of acting on his complaint even had it wished to do so.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note that not everyone found either rationalism or the dominance of the civil authority an unfortunate state of affairs. The "calm light of reason" might place a certain restraint on religious fervor, but it could also bestow a certain quiet confidence. "I do in my conscience," wrote the contemporary theologian, Tillotson, "believe the Church to be the best constituted Church this day in the world . . . framed to make men soberly religious, securing on the one hand from the wild freaks of Enthusiasm and on the other from the gross follies of Superstition. And our Church hath this peculiar

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<sup>18</sup>Gay, The Enlightenment, p. 344.

advantage above several professions . . . that it acknowledgeth a due and just subordination to the Civil Authority."<sup>19</sup> Many educated Englishmen would doubtless have agreed with him. If it was not the stuff from which mission was made, eighteenth-century Anglicanism could provide a most comfortable religious life. The ideals of moderation, reason, and restraint, worthy enough in themselves, had the added advantage of rocking very few boats.<sup>20</sup>

This moderation, however, did little to improve the Church's already weak position with the state. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Church became more and more involved in secular politics in order to ensure a hearing for its interests; a policy of necessity which would have unfortunate consequences in the next century and indirectly influence the course of Anglican mission. The Church became a tool of skillful Hanoverian politicians. The twenty-six bishops who sat in the House of Lords had little choice but to vote as they were told given Parliament's control of church offices. A system of preferment arose whereby bishops who were appointed not endowed by Parliament, moved from modest to lucrative positions according to their degree of cooperation with the dominant party in Parliament. Naturally enough, this further ensured a compliant Church. Samuel Johnson's criticism that no one "can now be made a bishop for his learning and

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<sup>19</sup>S. C. Carpenter, Eighteenth Century Church and People (London: John Murray, 1959), p. 28.

<sup>20</sup>L. P. Curtis, Anglican Moods of the 18th Century (Hampden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 33.

piety; his only chance for promotion is his being connected with someone who has parliamentary interest" was far more than just another example of the good doctor's misanthropy.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, had he been so inclined, Johnson could have expanded at length on the condition of the Anglican clergy. Political considerations and an anachronistic institutional structure both corrupted and victimized the clergy. Absenteeism and pluralism, the subject of so much anti-clerical propaganda in the next century, were rife. A series of official inquiries made around the beginning of the nineteenth century revealed that of eleven thousand "livings" belonging to the Anglican community, six thousand lacked a resident incumbent.<sup>22</sup> And while some posts carried substantial incomes, the lesser parish clergy, and particularly the curates hired by incumbents to staff their non-resident livings, suffered considerable financial hardship. Whereas the Archbishopric of Canterbury had an income of nineteen thousand pounds a year, the average parish living amounted to only about twelve hundred pounds, and a curate could be had for a mere eighty pounds.<sup>23</sup>

Under such conditions, few but the most conscientious clergy would have decried the sharp decline in church attendance which marked the last half of the eighteenth century. The fact that only six communicants attended Easter service at St. Paul's Cathedral at the turn of

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<sup>21</sup>Gay, The Enlightenment, 1, p. 344.

<sup>22</sup>Halevy, History of the English People, 1, p. 398.

<sup>23</sup>G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 63.

the century appalled Victorian Church historians. For the hard-pressed parish clergy, failing attendance was more likely seen as an easing of their work load.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the Anglican Church may well have been the only Christian denomination which had no theological requirements for ordination. In this period, virtually all candidates for the Anglican priesthood were drawn from either Cambridge or Oxford, neither of which had a specific program for their theological instruction.<sup>25</sup>

In short, for the better part of the eighteenth century, the Church's leadership remained preoccupied with politics while its theologians fine-tuned a doctrine of moderation and intellectuality which had limited appeal to the ordinary people of England. The rank and file clergy, suffering from intellectual and financial inadequacies and generally out of sympathy with their superiors also presented a less than edifying spectacle. The established Church of England could hardly have been less prepared to meet the challenges which were to all but overwhelm it in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the challenge of mission, which would become increasingly urgent as England assumed a greater presence in the world, would be almost completely outside its institutional confines.

#### The Formation of the Evangelical Missionary Model

By the end of the eighteenth century, as the English world view expanded, the plight of the "unenlightened" took on the proportions

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<sup>24</sup>W. P. Morrell, The Anglican Church in New Zealand (Dunedin: Anglican Church of the Province of New Zealand, 1973), p. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Halevy, History of the English People, 1, p. 390.

of an emergency for fervent English Christians. In the space of a very few years, beginning with the founding of the non-denominational London Missionary Society in 1790, Christian laymen of almost every Protestant persuasion had organized mission societies to address the issue. From their first tentative efforts grew the nineteenth-century English missionary movement; a movement that assumed a role in the national consciousness far in excess of anything that preceded it. How can we account for both the original phenomenon and its spectacular growth?

Scholars of mission have commonly posited both a historic/geographic and a religious explanation. The late eighteenth century witnessed a rapid growth of interest in the outside world. The publication of Captain James Cook's Voyages in 1777 and 1784 revealed, quite literally, a new world, not only exotic but also conveniently replete with comply heathen. The perspective for mission, as one church scholar puts it, was determined as much by Cook as by St. Matthew and St. Mark.<sup>26</sup> Still, the mere presence of a new potential field does not fully explain increased interest in organized mission work. To complete the picture, it is also necessary to consider the influence of new religious forces; specifically the spirit of religious revival sparked by preaching of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield in the 1730s. While all of these men were Anglican clergymen, deeply attached to the Church of England, theirs was hardly the rather comfortable,

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<sup>26</sup>Max Warren, The Missionary Movement from Britain in Modern History (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965), p. 10.



rational Anglicanism of the Church hierarchy. For John Wesley, religion was not a product of the mind and discreet reasoning but rather an emotional experience embracing the entire consciousness. The main tenets of his "Methodist" movement, justification by faith alone and Christian perfection or social holiness, combined with a new emphasis on the role of the preacher as an instrument of divine will, became the basis of a religious revival which, in its larger manifestations, was to change the character of English society.

But again, this revival took place largely outside the confines of the institutional Church. The Church hierarchy soon found both John Wesley's preaching style, which appealed to working class crowds, and his doctrine uncongenial. Gradually Anglican pulpits ceased to be available to him. Methodism would develop as a separate domination despite Wesley's own misgivings. The religious fervor sparked by the Wesleys' preaching was not, however, confined to the splinter domination. The old dissenter churches and Anglicanism itself all had members who remained within the fold but whose Christianity reflected the spirit and energy of the revival.

In terms of mission, the emphasis in Wesley's thought on the love and glorification of God and the Calvinist need for tangible evidence of redemption both helped create a religious climate in which mission was regarded as both a duty and a privilege.<sup>27</sup> The Methodist revival, moreover, provided the basic organizational models that the mission movement would utilize. Through its emphasis of social holiness, it

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<sup>27</sup> Neil Gunson, Messengers of Grace (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 48.

furnished the spiritual motivation for reform and the organizational methodology for transforming private benevolence into organized philanthropy on an unprecedented scale. For unlike the older congregationalist Dissenter churches and a very loosely, not to say chaotically, organized Anglicanism, Methodism, from its inception emphasized "disciplined fellowship."<sup>28</sup> Even before Methodism emerged as a separate denomination, its leaders had, through public meetings, annual conferences, and formation of auxiliary societies, developed an organizational model far superior to that of existing institutions in its ability to act on specific issues. In this network of programs, the laity played an active, critical role.<sup>29</sup>

But does this relatively simple explanation of geographic awareness and the Methodist revival completely suffice to account for the very prominent place mission occupied in English popular consciousness by the mid-nineteenth century? However illustrative the founding of the missionary societies might be of the impact of the eighteenth-century spiritual revival, their initial efforts did not meet with a massive outpouring of popular support, and they remained, in many respects, marginal organizations for the next two decades. The LMS, for example, sent the mission ship, Duff, to the South Pacific in 1796 with only thirty missionaries to cover three major island groups. Of

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<sup>28</sup> Warren, Missionary Movement from Britain, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Asa Briggs, The Making of Modern England, 1783-1887 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), p. 175.

these, only four were ordained clergy.<sup>30</sup> For the next fifteen years, the mission languished. For as long as six years at a time, its members received neither supplies nor instructions from the LMS, and they survived only on the sufferance of powerful islanders.<sup>31</sup> The Anglican Church Mission Society in these early years found it necessary to hire German clergy for its ventures in Africa and India since the English clergy evidenced little interest in undertaking mission themselves. Nor, despite the century that had passed since the founding of the SPG, had Anglicanism addressed the issue of specialized training for the mission field.<sup>32</sup>

The mission calling also initially had limited social acceptability. All the mission societies established at the end of the eighteenth century adhered, to some degree, to the precept that the "skilled mechanic," who could introduce the heathen to the discipline of useful occupation and then convey a simple Christian message, made the most suitable missionary. But the presumed religious commitment and sacrifice of these early, lower middle class missionaries offered no proof against the criticism of those on the scene and in England who saw them as "a Set of Tinkers having no bread to eat in England."<sup>33</sup> To one observer in Tahiti, they looked "somewhat like humble petitioners

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<sup>30</sup>Kerry Howe, Where the Waves Fall (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1984), p. 117.

<sup>31</sup>Colin Newbury, Tahiti Nui: Change and Survival in French Polynesia, 1767-1945 (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980), p. 34.

<sup>32</sup>Stock, History of the Church Missionary Society, 1, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup>Gunson, Messengers of Grace, p. 31.

at a gentleman's door, and it is easy to observe that they are men of no education nor have ever conversed with any but the lowest classes of society."<sup>34</sup>

But by mid-century, the rather marginal position of mission had changed dramatically. Under the umbrella of the great lay missionary societies, an organized network of mission support groups touched virtually every strata of English society. There was little of the tongue-in-cheek in the British and Foreign Bible Society's report of a parrot belonging to a young working class woman, which had been trained to say "put something in the Bible box" and managed to collect ten pounds before it (mercifully) flew away.<sup>35</sup>

Mission acquired, along with its new popularity, a new respectability. By mid-century, the old view that "godly mechanics" trained to "make wheelbarrows and plant turnips"<sup>36</sup> were best suited to the work had largely disappeared, and the backgrounds of missionary recruits reflected a much broader socio-economic spectrum. The number of recruits for the LMS listing manual occupations dropped from one third to one fifth of the total in the period from 1850 to 1869. Conversely, the number of schoolmasters volunteering rose from two percent to sixteen percent of the total in the same time frame.<sup>37</sup> The mission

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>F. K. Prochaska, "Little Vessels: Children in the Nineteenth-Century English Missionary Movement," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 6, Jan., 1978, pp. 103-15.

<sup>36</sup>Gunson, Messengers of Grace, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup>Sarah Potter, "Making of Missionaries in the Nineteenth Century: Conversion and Convention," A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain (London: SCM Press, 1975), pp. 103-24.

field had in fact become, through the opportunities it offered for further education and ordination, an avenue for social advancement. Obviously, it still required "determined Christians," but it now occupied a position much closer to the middle-class mainstream of English society. As if to bear witness to this new status, the platform guests at the 1840 mass meeting of the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa held at Exeter Hall included Prince Albert, seven bishops of the Church of England, the Duke of Norfolk, Sir Robert Peel and the French Ambassador.<sup>38</sup>

This change in the status of mission and the upsurge in mission activity had its origins in a most fortuitous--from the standpoint of mission--convergence of the opportunities provided by technological and economic advances with a heightened social and religious awareness. By the beginning of the Victorian era, the values of the Methodist revival had become the larger social/religious phenomenon of Evangelicalism. In purely religious terms, Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on Bible reading, preaching, organized prayer, and personal piety, emerged as the most accepted and practiced form of English Christianity. But, for reasons to be examined, its sense of social responsibility, philanthropy, discipline, and regularity extended to elements of English society unaffected by and even hostile to its religious message.<sup>39</sup> Evangelicalism, in the broadest sense, became the Victorian Weltanschung,

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<sup>38</sup>Geoffrey Morehouse, The Missionaries (London: Eyre Meltuen Ltd., 1973), pp. 22-31.

<sup>39</sup>Young, Portrait of an Age, p. 5.

transcending barriers of religious sect, social class, and economic standing.<sup>40</sup>

The growing acceptability of the Evangelical spirit among members of England's social establishment requires some explanation, particularly as the leadership of Evangelical social reform, including mission, came largely from this group. How did it happen that the values of a movement originally associated with the lower order came to be adopted by the more substantial elements of English society? The fact is that Methodism, for all its appeal to the socially displaced masses of the eighteenth century and its emphasis on social holiness, was politically and economically conservative. Thus, in the growing hysteria generated by the French Revolution, a system of moral reform which presumably would bring about change within the existing social order had tremendous appeal for the English establishment.<sup>41</sup>

This is not to suggest that upper and middle class Evangelicals were necessarily insincere in their convictions. It would hardly be accurate to put the motives of a William Wilberforce, who devoted his entire life to a series of social reforms, down to the preservation of class interests. However, the conservatism of Evangelicalism does help explain the leadership role taken in all aspects of social reform by the substantial and even the socially prominent. A leading scholar of the Evangelical movement indeed maintains that it is inaccurate to credit nineteenth-century reform to Methodism per se. In Ford

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<sup>40</sup>David Thomson, England in the 19th Century (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 107.

<sup>41</sup>Maurice Quinlan, Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners, 1700-1830 (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1965), p. 90.

Brown's view, reform was shaped by the Evangelical portion of the ruling class who made a definite distinction between themselves and Methodists and Dissenters. Most remained in the Anglican fold, and none saw himself as anything other than a social conservative. So while the Evangelical movement touched every sector of English society, it is misleading to think of it as a grass roots phenomenon.<sup>42</sup>

But to say that the social and economic tenets of Evangelicalism were conservative is not to deny the dynamic qualities of the movement. Although private individuals had long taken an active role in social and religious reform in England as elsewhere, the Evangelical laity, drawing on Methodist models of lay participation and large-scale organization, now took the lead. The expanded social role of the private, "unofficial" sector of English society, although sparked by the Evangelical spirit, owed at least as much to the rising wealth and power of the middle classes; a group not necessarily inclined toward the old comfortable "hand and glove" relationships that older private organizations like the SPG had had with official institutions.

Of the three hundred societies devoted to moral improvement, education, and charity created between roughly 1750 and 1850, for example, not one reflects the efforts of the institutional church.<sup>43</sup> Even matters as fundamentally religious as the dissemination of Bibles fell to the private sector which proved more than capable of handling the challenge. The private, evangelical British and Foreign Bible

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<sup>42</sup>Ford K. Brown, Fathers of the Victorians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 3-6.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 329-40.

Society, founded in 1804 over the protests of elements within the Church of England, had by 1825, spent £1,165,000 and issued 4,252,000 Bibles in some 140 languages. Its organizational network encompassed 859 auxiliaries in England and 2000 branch associations (ladies' groups, children's associations, etc.). In the same period, no English archbishop and only five bishops at any given time had ever been members of the indisputable Christian society.<sup>44</sup>

In this almost fevered atmosphere, when even the welfare of "adult orphans" merited an organized benefit society, a renewal of interest in the Great Commission was inevitable. The organization of mission followed established Evangelical patterns, committees and societies devoted to raising public awareness of mission issues succeeded on a level unimaginable in the days when "lost souls" overseas had been the concern of a few monastic orders or a Christian monarchy. Their ability to do so rested to a considerable degree on the new conditions created by the Industrial Revolution. One such condition was the growth of a population with relatively greater disposable income. The proliferation of mission periodicals and tracts depended, in turn, on a literate public. The mass meetings, lantern shows and lectures by missionaries on home-leave would hardly have been possible without the improved transportation of the nineteenth century. In 1842, for example, the LMS could marshal between five and six thousand children for its annual children's meeting at Exeter Hall where they were regaled with tales of fallen idols and repentant cannibals.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 249-50.

<sup>45</sup>Prochaska, "Little Vessels," p. 111.



Economic growth, the rise of the middle class, and technological advances, then, combined with Evangelical enthusiasm to form the background of English mission in the nineteenth century. "The Evangelicals," says G. M. Young, "gave to the island a creed which was at once the basis of its morality and the justification of its wealth and power, and with the creed, that sense of being an Elect People . . . ." <sup>46</sup>

The energy generated by this combination of highly compatible elements sustained popular enthusiasm for the mission cause throughout the Victorian era. The dissemination of the Christian message to the heathen was perceived as a given and not as a matter for debate. <sup>47</sup>

The motto of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, "Evangelization of the world in this generation," seemed a likely enough goal. <sup>48</sup>

As mission grew and appeared to succeed in areas such as Polynesia where wholesale conversions of entire societies eventually occurred, it contributed to Victorian self-confidence. Indeed, the lines between Christianity as a purely religious system and Christianity as an expression of the dynamic West blurred. Civilization and Christianity seemed both logical and desirable to a society whose members assumed their own cultural superiority. Did not Christian Britain's obvious

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<sup>46</sup>Young, Portrait of an Age, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Max Warren, "The Church Militant Abroad: Victorian Missionaries" in The Victorian Crises of Faith, ed. Anthony Symondson (London: SPCK, 1970), p. 63.

<sup>48</sup>Robert Strayer, The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), p. 31.

success bear them out? Britain set a universal standard, and the relative merit of other cultures could be measured by their approximation of it.<sup>49</sup>

Few societies anywhere, in the popular view, came anywhere close, but the so-called primitive cultures of Africa and the Pacific proved particularly susceptible to negative appraisals. LMS missionaries in the New Hebrides spoke of islanders as "exceedingly addicted to lying, stealing and cruelty, uncleanness, war and bloodshed." Another missionary in the same area spoke of "vileness enough to cause the heart to sicken."<sup>50</sup> This degradation could not, however, be seen as fixed or permanent without denying the basic logic of mission and conversion. Christian mission theory had traditionally relied on ideas of degeneration to explain the apparent contradiction between degraded heathen and child of God. The heathen, in short, had once had the same potential for religious and cultural enlightenment as Europeans, but that potential had somewhat failed to develop. It could be regained, but for the moment, the heathen clearly suffered from major deficiencies, a fact made evident to the missionaries as much by their culture as by their spiritual state. They remained, as one scholar of the Victorian era has put it, a creature chiefly in need of "a pair

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<sup>49</sup>Alan C. Cairns, Prelude to Imperialism: British Reactions to Central African Society, 1840-1890 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 98-99.

<sup>50</sup>G. N. Parsonson, "Early Missionaries in the New Hebrides, 1839-1861," M.A. Thesis, University of Otago, 1949, pp. 16-17.

of shorts and a Bible";<sup>51</sup> a creature, in other words, unquestionably in need of civilization and Christianity.

By mid-century, then, the English missionary movement was clearly dominated by an Evangelical model characterized by private, lay, rather than institutional control, complex support organization, middle-class social assumptions, a literal, Biblical view of the Christian message, and the firm conviction that civilization and Christianity were immutably connected.

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<sup>51</sup> J. W. Burrow, Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory (Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 77.