

CHAPTER IV  
ALTERNATIVE MODELS: THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MELANESIAN MISSION

The Anglican Evangelical Model

The Evangelical model for mission predominated in the Anglican community as well as in Methodist and Dissenter circles. Although in theory a hierarchical institutional structure responsible for the oversight of all the social functions of the faith existed in the Church of England, Anglican participation in mission followed the Evangelical model so closely as to provide a classic example of this mode of organization. Lay, private and Evangelical elements dominated Anglican mission for the first forty years of the nineteenth century. The institutional Church, now itself under serious attack by the forces of reform, acted as a suspicious and resentful associate at best. This chapter will examine why, in a very diverse religious communion, one approach to mission prevailed for so long and why alternatives finally began to emerge.

The importance of the Evangelical party in the Church of England far exceeded its numbers. It never secured a majority of the communicants, and it had limited impact on a deeply suspicious Church hierarchy for whom Evangelicalism carried the taint of Dissent. But by the end of the eighteenth century, the organizational prowess of Evangelicals and the quality of their leadership made them a force to be reckoned with. The first informal organization of like-minded Anglican

Evangelicals centered around Cambridge Evangelical dons and wealthy patrons who gathered a group of young clergymen to staff parishes throughout England "to leaven Anglican preaching insensibly with the spirit of the new pietism."<sup>1</sup> More significant for Anglican mission was the formation of the so-called Clapham Sect, an informal association of wealthy, upper-middle class laymen deeply committed to Evangelical ideals. Of its members, William Wilberforce became the best known, thanks to his participation in virtually every social reform movement in England for the first three decades of the nineteenth century. These included the anti-slavery movement, the movement for the improvement of the living conditions of the urban poor, penal reform, and, of course, Christian mission to the heathen peoples of the expanding British Empire.

As early as 1793, Wilberforce launched an unsuccessful campaign for a revision of the charter of the East India Company which would have opened India to Christian mission. By 1796, the Electic Society, another informal group closely associated with the Clapham group, expressed its specific concern about the spiritual state of the heathen and began contemplating the formation of an Anglican missionary society. For three years they hesitated over the problems of finding qualified missionaries and possible offending the bishops and the SPG. These concerns notwithstanding, the group called a public meeting in 1799 and formally established the Church Missionary Society.

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<sup>1</sup>Elie Halevy, History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, trans. E. I. Watkin and D. A. Brooke, 6 vols. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961. First published 1913-48), 1: p. 435.

These Anglican Evangelicals were at some pains to explain the necessity of such a society. After all, the Anglican community already had a missionary society with close ties to the Church hierarchy. And few points of doctrine would have prevented Anglican Evangelicals from cooperating with already established non-Anglican missionary societies. In fact, Anglican Evangelical clergymen had been instrumental in the formation of the LMS. The latter course of action was deemed unacceptable because of the confusion which would inevitably result once the heathen began to form religious communities of their own. It was felt to be far better to have these new communities firmly attached to existing dominations than to further splinter Christendom by fostering hybrid native churches.

The issue of the SPG presented thornier problems and points up the most basic conflict between independent Evangelical Anglican mission and institutional Church. The SPG, with its close affiliations with the Anglican hierarchy, had never, despite its private nature, had much difficulty accepting the principle that no enterprise bearing the Anglican banner ought to be undertaken without the approval of the institutional establishment. But the Evangelicals had little desire to work under even the nominal authority of the bishops. Practically, they had no reason to suppose that the bishops would find the sort of Anglicanism they proposed to preach congenial or that they could influence the course of the SPG. And, in a theological context, they were loath to recognize any authority not based on spiritual worth. Hence, the founders of the CMS, when faced with the question of

ultimate authority over Anglican mission, unhesitatingly came down on the side of the private society.<sup>2</sup>

The plan of action developed by the CMS called for it to concentrate its efforts in areas and among peoples not touched by the SPG. Hence it concentrated on Africa in conjunction with the Evangelical effort to abolish the slave trade, and India which, finally, as a result of Evangelical lobbying, opened to mission in 1813. The first English CMS-trained missionaries entered the field only in 1809 after the CMS itself took on the training needed for Anglican mission. The CMS, in common with other Evangelical groups, utilized laymen to a greater extent than clergy in its endeavors. This practice also led eventually to conflict with the Church's hierarchy. For despite the fact that CMS employees often spent years in the field, the bishops proved reluctant to ordain candidates trained outside established university channels. Indeed, for the first fourteen years of the society's existence, ordination was consistently refused its missionaries on the grounds that, however dedicated they might be, they lacked the social skills and education necessary for the priesthood.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these difficulties and the suspicion the Church establishment continued to harbor for Evangelical activities, the CMS was undeniably the most active force in Anglican mission. It was largely through the urging of CMS missionaries in the field that the Church

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<sup>2</sup>Eugene Stock, History of the Church Missionary Society, 2 vols. (London: The Church Missionary Society, 1899), 2: pp. 63-66.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89.

finally bestirred itself to create five new bishoprics for India. In a new field of interest, the Pacific, this private society worked for forty years among the Maori of New Zealand before it rather reluctantly accepted an official British presence there. When an influx of European settlers appeared to be inevitable, the CMS campaigned for the creation of a bishop for New Zealand and even agreed to pay half his salary even though its specific mission was to the Maoris.<sup>4</sup> Exeter Hall (the great assembly hall of the CMS and other Evangelical groups) exercised such an influence on public opinion that Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the promoter of New Zealand settlement, complained, "if you had made no provisions for religion in your colony, and if people here only cared enough about you to find that out, your scheme would be vituperated by religious men, who are numerous; by religious women, who are very numerous; and by the clergy of all denominations who are very powerful."<sup>5</sup>

#### Institutional Renaissance and the Melanesian Mission

It has been suggested that the Evangelicals' success, of which mission was a large part, was so great that their particular vision of Anglicanism nearly "captured" the Church in the first decades of the nineteenth century. But although Evangelicals continued to be a major element in Anglicanism and certainly dominated mission, this

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<sup>4</sup>W. P. Morrell, The Anglican Church in New Zealand (Dunedin: Anglican Church of the Province of New Zealand, 1973), pp. 22-23.

<sup>5</sup>K.L.P. Martin, Missionaries and Annexation in the Pacific (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 6.

wholesale takeover did not occur.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the Church against all odds, began to reassert its institutional and spiritual authority. That process, in turn, gave rise to new, distinctive mission models.

For all its difficulties, the Church of England in the early nineteenth century was still a body of some strength. In proportion to the population it remained one of the richest religious bodies in the world. It retained official ties to the Crown and unofficial ties to the ruling classes which were perhaps an even greater source of strength. Certainly they help explain the fact that Parliament, even in the face of mounting criticism of the Church, still voted it grants amounting to a half-million pounds between 1809 and 1829. The Church also managed to continue to accommodate under the Anglican banner a great diversity of belief. While, as we have seen, this elasticity had distinct disadvantages in some respects, it did give a certain validity to the Church's claim to be a national prestige, it hardly seems illogical to assume that something of the self-confidence and energy of the nation should rub off on its national church.<sup>7</sup>

But while residual strength and national associations may partially account for the Church's revival, the very seriousness of the challenges facing it in this period indicate that its institutional survival required more fundamental changes. Certainly criticism of the Church was nothing new. By the 1820s, however, the general reassessment

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<sup>6</sup>L. E. Elliott-Binns, Religion in the Victorian Era (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1936), p. 50.

<sup>7</sup>David D. Edwards, Leaders of the Church of England, 1828-1944 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 8.

demanded by the French Revolution and Evangelical agitation had given rise to a new spirit of reform which brought virtually every aspect of English society under new scrutiny. As long as the Church enjoyed the protection of Parliament, it was relatively safe, but Parliament itself had become a target of reform. With the electoral reforms of 1832, Parliament ceased to be the exclusive domain of England's monied and largely Anglican upper class. Not only had the franchise been enlarged, but the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 that had restricted the civil rights of Dissenters, and Catholic Emancipation in 1829 insured the presence of members of Parliament with limited sympathy for Anglicanism or the very concept of Establishment.

The Church made an easy target. As if its existing inadequacies were not enough, the Church, in 1831, had been a willing tool of the anti-reform forces in Parliament that packed the House of Lords with High Church bishops. Almost to a man, the bishops voted against a proposed reform bill that year. Thus in the Parliamentary battle between reformist Whig and conservative Tory, the Church was identified as an ally of the forces of privilege and obstructionism.

At their most extreme, critics in Parliament saw no reason for the Church's continued existence as the national church. "I do not want to reform the Church," raged one Dissenter MP, "I want to pull it down."<sup>8</sup> Others, like the Utilitarian, James Mill, attacked the Church on the grounds of its social uselessness. In his view, English society

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<sup>8</sup>Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966-70), I (1966):61.

would be far better served if churches housed mechanic's institutes, and the clergy was put to lecturing on ethics, botany and political economy. Or alternately, they might supervise social meetings and "sedate Sunday dances."<sup>9</sup> Still others saw no reason why the state could not confiscate the property of its national church and use it as it saw fit; a very instructive comment considering the near sacred status of property in the Victorian era. Even enlightened supporters of the Church viewed Disestablishment as inevitable. The less sympathetic gleefully awaited its fall from grace.<sup>10</sup>

Yet historians of the Victorian era generally agree that between 1830 and 1870, the Church enjoyed greater institutional strength than in almost any other period. It is in this period that it began to assert direct institutional control over mission for the first time. Moreover, the association of Anglican mission and the British Empire began to dissolve in favor of an independent world role for Anglicanism. In order to fathom these changes, all of which were reflected in the Melanesian Mission, it is necessary to examine the process of institutional change in the nineteenth-century Church.

In his most insightful Bureaucracy and Church Reform,<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Thompson points out that what the Church, in common with other

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-64.

<sup>10</sup>Desmond Bowen, The Idea of the Victorian Church (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), pp. 1-6.

<sup>11</sup>Kenneth A. Thompson, Bureaucracy and Church Reform (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 1-6.



institutions, really faced at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the transition from a communal to an associational form of organization better suited to a rapidly changing social structure. In other words, the Church's survival and continued viability depended on the modernization of its institutional structure. Such associational organization was characterized by increased scale and complexity made possible by increased control and administration of finances. The clergy, too, was transformed from communal leaders to salaried coordinators. To implement this crucial modernization process, the Church, in Thompson's view, had to first appeal to values dominant in contemporary society, i.e., an appeal to the concept of a strong national church as a force for order, stability and social improvement. Such a course was entirely congenial to Churchmen like Charles Blomfield, bishop of London, who, perceiving the critical nature of the threat to the Church, worked closely with Parliament's Ecclesiastical Commission to correct the worst abuses before Parliament dismantled the Church's institutional and financial base.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, it was Blomfield who also first proposed some coordination of Anglican mission. Mission may have struck him as one means of establishing the Church's vital social role. Or perhaps in his awareness of the necessity for more refined modes of organization and authority, he was uncomfortable with the old private, unstructured and independent nature of Anglican mission. "I have," he wrote in establishing the Colonial Bishops Fund in 1841, "always been of the

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<sup>12</sup>Bowen, The Idea of the Victorian Church, pp. 15-16.

opinion that the great missionary body ought to be the Church itself. It seems to me to follow, as an inevitable consequence, from the very definition of the Church, that all operations which are to be performed for the advancement of the Saviour's Kingdom upon earth should be the Church's operations."<sup>13</sup> He goes on to propose that the lack of unity and uniformity in the SPG and CMS be eliminated by bringing them under the control of the bishops. The Evangelical CMS had serious reservations about such a move. "The Saviour alone," proclaimed a CMS official, "is the great Fountain of Life and . . . Ecclesiastical discipline, however valuable, is but the channel through which the waters of life should flow to the perishing nations of mankind."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless the constitution of the CMS was amended to give the bishops final say in matters of ecclesiastical order and discipline. Although the daily affairs of the society were managed by its own committees as before, we are still at this point at some distance from the days when the CMS felt free to employ German Lutheran clerics without any reference to the Church hierarchy.<sup>15</sup>

The Church of the 1840s, then, can hardly be equated with the tottering institution of the turn of the century. Thus when George Augustus Selwyn, a committed advocate of a strong, authoritative Church, sailed for New Zealand as its first Anglican bishop in 1841, there were reasons other than his own forceful personality for his expanded vision of his own authority and the world role of Anglicanism. It is hardly surprising that when he undertook the Great Commission, he

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<sup>13</sup>Stock, History of the Church Missionary Society, 1, p. 390.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

organized it along lines consistent with the Anglican institutional revival but almost totally at variance with the traditional course of Anglican Evangelical mission.

At its foundation, the Melanesian Mission of the Church of England, that Selwyn created as part of his vision of world Anglicanism, fell heir to diverse, and frequently disparate, attitudes toward mission. A relative latecomer to the field, it benefited from the ground-breaking work of the Evangelical movement which had made responsibility for mission one of the operating assumptions of English society. As Victorian Englishmen and determined Christians, the Mission's personnel shared this general belief in mission as a duty and privilege and Christianity as an unmitigated blessing for the heathen everywhere. In other matters--both philosophical and methodological--it found itself at odds with the dominant Evangelical approach to mission. Before examining the religious and intellectual roots of those differences, it seems advisable to understand how they revealed themselves in practice in Melanesia from the Mission's earliest days.

#### The New Mission Model in the Field

The Melanesian Mission of the Church of England began its service to the islanders of the northern New Hebrides and the Solomons in the southwestern Pacific in 1849. In that year George Augustus Selwyn made the first of the island voyages which he saw as part of his mandate and mission in the Pacific. The mission officially ended in 1975 with the creation of an independent Church of Melanesia within the Anglican communion. At the time of the initial Melanesian voyage, Selwyn had been in New Zealand since 1841. Until his appointment as

bishop he had exhibited no particular interest in the colonial church and had certainly not experienced anything that could properly be designated "a call" to mission. But he did feel himself "bound to answer the call of the Archbishop (of Canterbury) as an officer is at the command of his superior."<sup>16</sup>

Duty in this instance dovetailed nicely with what was, for Selwyn, a rare opportunity. In the wake of the reform legislation and extended franchise of the early 1830s, Selwyn, like many other Anglican clergymen, had come to see the establishment status of the Church of England less in terms of protection and favor and more as a threat to the strength and independence of the English church. Both the colonial church and the mission to Melanesia which was included in his letters patent provided the energetic young bishop with a chance to create his own vision of a revitalized church.<sup>17</sup> Far from being mere dependencies and institutional responsibilities of the home church, these new fields of Christian endeavor held the promise of becoming the new church, freed of the Erastian fetters of Establishment. As such, they could provide an instructive example to an English Church which many saw as seriously flawed if not actually moribund. It was

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<sup>16</sup>Gladstone-Selwyn Correspondence, Jan., 1841. The Gladstone Papers. The British Library, London. Series 44-299 ff.

<sup>17</sup>Selwyn's letters patent from the Colonial Office set the boundaries of his jurisdiction as bishop of New Zealand at 34° 30' north. This enormous extension of his sway may have been a mistake, with 34° 30' south being the real intent of the Colonial Office. For a recent exposition of the controversy, see R. M. Ross, "Evolution of the Melanesian Bishopric," New Zealand Journal of History, Oct., 1982, pp. 122-45.

a grandiose vision, but no one, throughout his long life, ever accused Selwyn of thinking small.

On his arrival in New Zealand, Selwyn had to establish an Anglican Church for the growing European population, integrate his episcopal role with the pre-existing Anglican mission to the Maoris, and begin laying the institutional groundwork for his vision of the new church. His relationship with the missionaries to the Maoris, who, though Anglican, were financed and supervised by the lay Church Missionary Society, began badly, a fact which would have unfortunate consequences for his own mission aims. Neither Selwyn's High Anglican style of churchmanship nor his insistence on the deployment of the ordained clergy in his see without reference to the CMS calculated to endear him to the evangelical mission.<sup>18</sup> For his part, Selwyn had serious reservations about CMS methods, particularly its failure, in his view, to backstop the first enthusiasm of conversion with education and discipline. A falling away from the new faith could already be seen among the young.<sup>19</sup> The situation was further complicated by more incursions on Maori lands and prerogatives by the growing European presence. Indeed, armed conflict over the land issue broke out between the two groups shortly after Selwyn's arrival.

At the same time, Selwyn's desire to put this new church on a proper institutional footing (i.e., self-governing and participatory)

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<sup>18</sup>Stock, History of this Church Missionary Society, 1, pp. 432-34.

<sup>19</sup>Henry W. Tucker, Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn, 2 vols. (London: Williams Wells Gardner, 1879), 1:2.

led to his convening synods of clergy as early as 1844, the first such independent ecclesiastical assembly held by Anglicans (apart from the United States) in the nineteenth century. For despite his authoritarian proclivities and his firm belief in the sanctity of his office, Selwyn clearly saw that a healthy, independent colonial church required the broadest possible base of support. "I believe," he told the second synod in 1847, "the monarchical idea of the Episcopate to be as foreign to the true mind of the Church as it is adverse to the gospel of humility. . . . I would rather resign my office than be reduced to act as a single isolated being. It remains then to define by some general principle the terms of co-operation. They are simply these; that neither will I act without you, nor can you act without me."<sup>20</sup>

Given these demands, it is small wonder that Selwyn wrote in 1846, "I have really led a very perturbed life."<sup>21</sup> Even so, he clung to his broader vision of the church in the Pacific. Considering the press of his New Zealand duties, the sheer physical difficulties of supply and transportation and the special problems of Melanesia that had plagued earlier efforts at mission there, Selwyn's optimism and assurance astonishes.<sup>22</sup> He aimed, he wrote his old Eton friend,

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., I, p. 89.

<sup>21</sup>A. B. Webster, *Joshua Watson: The Story of a Layman* (London: SPCK, 1954), p. 70. Quoted in: *David Hilliard, God's Gentlemen* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup>Attempts at the evangelization of Melanesia began in 1839 when the most famous of the London Missionary Society missionaries in the Pacific, John Williams, landed on Erromanga in the New Hebrides and was attacked and killed by islanders. The LMS continued to place

William Evert Gladstone, "to organize if possible some definite system for the evangelization of western Polynesia (Melanesia) including all the 'News'--New Caledonia, New Hebrides, New Britain, New Ireland, New Hanover, and New Guinea--where, if it please God, I hope in ten years to shake hands with the Bishop of Borneo."<sup>23</sup> He was equally clear in his definition of mission. The task at hand "was to take wild and naked savages from among every untamed and lawless people and to teach them to sit at the feet of Christ, 'clothed and in their right mind'. Religion, civilization and sound learning; all in short that is needed for a man, seems to be meant by these three changes--the feet of Christ; the clothing; and the right mind."<sup>24</sup>

If, however, the task and the vision presented few difficulties for this most self-assured of Victorians, even he could not ignore the practical difficulties involved. His staff and monetary resources hardly sufficed for New Zealand. His mission scheme was only one among many, and his High Church principles further limited recruitment possibilities in a population much more inclined to Evangelical views.

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Polynesian teachers from Samoa and Raratonga in the New Hebrides, New Caledonia and the Loyalties but encountered heavy losses and limited success. French Marists Fathers also made unsuccessful attempts to establish mission stations in the area. Only two years prior to Selwyn's initial voyage the Marists had withdrawn from San Cristobal in the southern Solomons after the loss of seven missionaries to disease and violence in the space of 21 months. The only functioning mission in the area when Selwyn began his work was that manned by Presbyterians from Nova Scotia on Aneityum, New Hebrides. Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>Selwyn-Gladstone Correspondence, July 1853.

<sup>24</sup>Charles E. Fox, "History of the Melanesian Mission." Typescript, p. 7. Bishop Patteson Theological Centre Library, Kohimarama Solomon Islands, AJCP #M802-M806.

For that matter recruits of any theological persuasion did not keep pace with the needs of new mission fields in India, China and Africa. Even had an adequate supply of English missionaries been forthcoming, the multiplicity of islands, cultures and languages in Melanesia, distance and disease would have made the existing pattern of resident European missionaries unfeasible.

Selwyn found a solution in the missionizing principles of the early Church. Rather than rely on resident Europeans or Polynesian teachers, he would create a Melanesian ministry which would Christianize from within the island community. For though Selwyn saw Melanesians as "wild and naked savages" he did not, perhaps could not, regard them as lacking in intellect or moral susceptibility.<sup>25</sup> If the Christian message was indeed universal, then Melanesians must prove capable of understanding it and responding to it by creating a Melanesian Church.

Selwyn's concept obviously depended on education, the "sound learning" essential for sound religion. Since resident European missionaries were unrealistic in Melanesia, sound learning, the development of Melanesian teachers and eventually a Melanesian clergy became a matter of bringing promising young Melanesians to New Zealand for Christian education and then returning them to their home islands. Selwyn had already established a boarding school and theological institute for European and Maori youth in Auckland in 1843. This establishment, St. John's, which combined industrial and agricultural training with formal education, made possible the immediate application

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<sup>25</sup>Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 10.



of Selwyn's system. Promising young Melanesians would be taken by mission ship from their islands to St. John's during the summers and taught Christianity, English, arithmetic and writing. In the colder winter months, the "scholars," as Selwyn referred to them, would be returned home. This served both to protect their health and further, it was assumed, the Christian message by the example set by the scholars in the islands. The rotation would continue until the scholar was deemed ready for baptism and knowledgeable enough to return to his island as a permanent teacher. In this manner, a small dedicated English staff on the mission ship and at the boarding school could become, to use a phrase beloved by the mission staff, "white corks upholding a black net."<sup>26</sup>

In 1849 Selwyn took the Undine, a twenty-one ton schooner, on a 3,000-mile voyage in Melanesian waters without charts or weapons and with a crew of only four men. On his return, his wife was awakened in the middle of the night by the bishop, rubbing his hands in glee and exclaiming, "Thank God with me, I have brought them--the work has begun!"<sup>27</sup> The "work" proved to be five Melanesians whom Mrs. Selwyn found squatting by an open fire, roasting potatoes. By 1852, Selwyn had made seven voyages to Melanesia, visited fifty islands and enrolled nearly fifty Melanesians at St. John's.<sup>28</sup> The patterns he established

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>John Evans, Churchman Militant: George Augustus Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand and Lichfield (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 123.

<sup>28</sup>Tucker, Life of Selwyn, 2, p. 23.

in these early voyages continued to characterize the mission's work throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Some features, notably the boarding school-island rotation and the role played by the mission ship remained central to the mission until the turn of the century.

Selwyn's own style also became a permanent influence on the mission. While he occasionally traveled under the escort of ships of the royal navy and had its cooperation in the transport of scholars, he made a point of approaching a new island without any show of strength, usually swimming to shore from the ship's boat, unarmed, with his vocabulary notebook stowed in his high bishop's shovel hat. Once on shore, he utilized trade goods to gain the goodwill and confidence of the islanders, carefully sought the explicit permission of parents before taking away a potential scholar, and kept his curiosity about island places and island ways in check. It was, he maintained, no more than the application of Christian principle to trust in the universal goodness of human nature. Goodwill toward the islanders could only generate goodwill in return.<sup>29</sup>

Goodwill also formed the key element of Selwyn's relations with other missions in the region. In so large an area and with so much work to be done, he saw the importation of the dissensions and divisions of the home churches as disastrous for the credibility of mission work. He therefore sought to be a "helper to their faith and a partner of their joy" to the other struggling missions in the area.<sup>30</sup> On his

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<sup>29</sup>Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup>Fox, "History of the Melanesian Mission," p. 18.

island tours, he made a point of visiting the mission stations of other denominations and encouraging their work although he remained convinced of the correctness of his own methods.

In these early years, too, Selwyn began to articulate the attitudes toward islanders that would become one of the principal leitmotifs of the Melanesian Mission. "This race of men," he wrote, "are not vile but as Cook found them, the most friendly people in the world . . . . I quarrel with the current phrases of the 'poor heathen', and the 'perishing savages' . . . . To go among the heathen as an equal and a brother is far more profitable than to risk that subtle kind of self-righteousness which creeps into mission work, akin to the thanking God that we are not as other men are."<sup>31</sup> By extension, if the islander to be Christianized was not totally vile, his culture might not be either. Thus from the time of the earliest voyages, Selwyn favored a policy of non-interference with Melanesian customs unless they presented a clear conflict with Christian principle.

Selwyn required a very special sort of missionary to implement these ideals. For six years after the initial voyage of the Undine Selwyn was, for all intents and purposes, the Melanesian Mission, a most unsatisfactory state of affairs considering the demands placed on him as bishop of New Zealand. If his dream of an Anglican Melanesia was ever to materialize, he needed someone who could give Melanesia his full attention. Selwyn wanted someone bold, resourceful, scholarly, linguistically gifted, and doctrinally sound. In short, he wanted

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

the best. And the best, in Selwyn's eyes, came out of the English public school-university system of which he himself was a product. Such men, up to this point, had hardly ever been attracted to mission.<sup>32</sup> When Selwyn returned to England in 1854, however, he managed to recruit as his missionary chaplain a young clergyman who epitomized his missionary ideal. John Coleridge Patteson, like Selwyn himself, was a member of an established upper middle-class family, an Etonian, and a university man. Moreover, he shared Selwyn's devotion to the ideal of a revitalized Anglican church. But unlike the dynamic bishop, he possessed a thoughtful, scholarly nature and a special gift for languages.

In 1861, in keeping with Selwyn's long-standing plan to integrate mission into the structure of the church itself, Patteson was consecrated as the first missionary bishop of Melanesia. He would, until his murder by the islanders of Nukupu in 1871, be the mission's principal influence. In his hands, Selwyn's rather rough ideas on mission methods, islander education and the development of an indigenous clergy acquired a measure of intellectual depth and polish which set the Melanesian Mission apart, both in its own eyes and in the eyes of those who have otherwise found much to criticize in the missionary movement.

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<sup>32</sup>For an analysis of the social origins of English missionaries in the Pacific, see Neil Gunson, Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978). Also, Max Warren, Social History and Christian Mission (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1967).

By 1867, when the school for Melanesians relocated from Kohimarama in New Zealand to the more favorable climate and location of Norfolk Island, many of the basic principles and methods of the mission had been established, and at least a beginning had been made for Selwyn's grand vision. The mission ship, the Southern Cross, built with the contributions of English supporters of the mission, made regular bi-annual voyages through the islands to collect and return scholars. The Norfolk Island school, christened St. Barnabas, combined the principles of formal education (now conducted largely in Mota, one of the Melanesian languages, rather than English) with that of the discipline provided by regular work in the school's gardens and shops. Superimposed on this almost monastic order of work, study and religious services was an emphasis on games and celebrations reminiscent of the English public school tradition.

By 1871 Patteson could report to an old Oxford friend that the mission had 145 scholars ranging in age from eight to thirty. Sixty-two of that number had been baptized and twenty-four were communicants.<sup>33</sup> The European staff of the mission acted as instructors at St. Barnabas, accompanied the Southern Cross, and, more and more frequently, undertook extended stays in the islands setting up village schools and supervising Melanesian teachers. The staff remained small, and Patteson's and Selwyn's ideal missionary failed to materialize for the most part. Of the nine men who served the Melanesian Mission

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<sup>33</sup>Charlotte Mary Yonge, Life of John Coleridge Patteson, Missionary Bishop of the Melanesian Islands, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan and Co., 1874), 2:510.

in Patteson's era (1855-1871), only two, Lonsdale Pritt and Robert Codrington, had English university degrees. Patteson, however, personally supervised the training of the three lay missionaries who were ordained in Melanesia during his tenure as bishop.<sup>34</sup>

More importantly, the concept of Christianization by Melanesians appeared to be viable. In 1868, George Sarawia was ordained as the first Melanesian deacon, followed by his advancement to the priesthood in 1873. He also organized a Christian village on the island of Mota in the Banks Islands where, as he expressed it to Patteson, "we all can live together; where we can let the people see what our mode of life is, what our customs etc. are which we have learned from you."<sup>35</sup> A similar venture was initiated on Ra, also in the Banks group in 1871.<sup>36</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of Selwyn's starting point in 1849, these developments all seem to point to the relative success of the mission's methods. The early years, however, also revealed fundamental weaknesses. Although Selwyn succeeded in creating a mission headed by a bishop rather than a lay committee in the manner of the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society, he never managed

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<sup>34</sup>List of Melanesian Mission workers. Miscellaneous Papers of the Melanesian Mission. National Library of Australia, Canberra, AJCP #M802-6. Also see Crockford's Clerical Directory.

<sup>35</sup>Patteson Papers, 1867, SPG Collection, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Australian National University microfilm.

<sup>36</sup>Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 61.

to make mission an integral concern of the colonial church. He attempted, in 1850, to establish the Australasian Board of Missions as the official missionary agency of the Australian and New Zealand churches. The independent Anglican CMS, which had clashed with Selwyn before and remained extremely suspicious of his motives, refused to participate. The Board, and hence the Melanesian Mission, never enjoyed the unified support of the colonial church.<sup>37,38</sup>

Partly as a result, Selwyn's efforts to make the colonial church financially responsible for the mission proved largely futile. From the beginning, the mission's finances depended on contributions of interested parties in England. As early as 1850, friends and associates of Selwyn's had formed the Eton Association for the support of the Mission. Selwyn returned to England in 1853 to raise money for an endowment fund and the Southern Cross. His dynamic personality and dramatic sermons secured this further backing. The popular novelist, Charlotte Yonge, a distant cousin of Patteson's and a devotee of high church principles, was inspired to contribute the royalties from her novel, The Daisy Chain. At no time did colonial contributions meet even half of the Mission's financial needs, and Patteson and his family consistently made up deficits out of private income.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>38</sup>For a detailed discussion of the lack of support of the New Zealand church, see Wendy P. Clark, "A Truly Christian Spirit? Christchurch and the Melanesian Mission, 1868-1875." M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 1966.

<sup>39</sup>Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 44.

In April, 1864, Patteson wrote to his sister, Joan, "I could easily persuade you . . . that no plan is so likely to work at great length, that no plan is so likely to afford hope of doing good to blacks as our plan. I am quite satisfied that no institution exists equal to our small one at Kohinarama for training missionaries to natives of the Pacific at all events."<sup>40</sup> But this conviction was not necessarily shared by his contemporaries. Patteson's own diary for 1866 records a conversation with one Mr. Maunsell, a visitor at Kohimarama, who took him soundly to task for the mission's failures. These included, according to the visitor, lack of organization, the lack of thoroughness that resident missionaries could provide, and an over-emphasis on education at the expense of "prreaching the gospel."<sup>41</sup> On a less elevated plane, some visitors to St. John's and Kohimarama simply felt that the erudite, dedicated Patteson was wasted on islanders who seemed "poor specimens of humanity in every way."<sup>42</sup>

Criticism of the mission and its methods extended to sources more informed than the interested visitor. John Inglis, a Presbyterian missionary in the New Hebrides, doubted the efficacy of what was new in the mission and put its successes down to proven methods. Henry Venn, the secretary of the CMS and a prominent mission theorist, called the mission "visionary and impractical." Such criticism focused

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<sup>40</sup>Patteson Papers, SPG Collection, 1864.

<sup>41</sup>Diary of John Coleridge Patteson, Selwyn Papers, Selwyn College, Cambridge.

<sup>42</sup>Yonge, Life of Patteson, 2, p. 560.



particularly on the expectation that the returning scholars could be truly effective in the Christianization of Melanesia. Once back in their own communities, unsupported by other Christians or a resident missionary, and lacking any particular status in traditional Melanesian social structures, they tended, as Patteson himself recognized, to shed their religion almost as easily as they discarded European dress.<sup>43</sup>

It can be argued that critics of the early mission lacked patience and focused on the mission's lack of concrete numbers of converts. Patteson himself remained deeply suspicious of mass conversions and rapid change. "To follow Christian teaching out in detail, to carry it out from the school into the hut . . . to get the men really to abandon old ways from a sense of responsibility and duty and love to God, this of course comes very slowly . . ." he wrote in 1867.<sup>44</sup> Impatience or theological disagreement aside, contemporary critics did, in fact, pinpoint the visionary element in the mission's expectations given the realities of Melanesian society and geography. Patteson, at least, was not unmindful of the problem. "Oh! that I could live permanently in twenty islands at once," he complained.<sup>45</sup> But he could not, and the young university-educated Englishmen who alone, in his judgement, could do the work properly failed to appear.

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<sup>43</sup>Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, pp. 18-22.

<sup>44</sup>Yonge, Life of Patteson, 2, p. 260.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 138.

Patteson was killed in 1871 on the island of Nukupu in what was widely assumed to be a 'pay-back' for the kidnapping of five islanders by a labor-trade ship some weeks earlier. Having gone ashore alone, Patteson was apparently attacked and killed while trying to establish communication with the islanders. When he failed to return to the Southern Cross, a party went out in search of him but were themselves attacked and driven off. Two of its members in fact died from wounds inflicted in the attack. Later, Patteson's body, wrapped in a woven mat, was floated out to the ship in a canoe. The body had received five wounds, and a palm frond with five knots in its leaflets had been placed in the canoe. The number may have signified the islanders previously carried by labor traders, but the Biblical parallel was certainly not lost on Patteson's Victorian contemporaries.<sup>46</sup>

The dramatic death of the missionary bishop gave a sense of urgency to the growing demand for regulation of the labor trade that resulted in the passage of the Pacific Islander Protection Act in 1872. This act required the licensing of all British vessels. Patteson himself immediately achieved the status of Victorian martyr with all its attendant trappings. Accounts of his life shared space in the inspirational literature of the day with the likes of General Charles Gordon, the hero of Kartoumn, and David Livingstone.<sup>47</sup> A Patteson memorial fund raised £7000 for the purchase of a new mission ship,

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 568.

<sup>47</sup>E.g., see Elizabeth Charles, Three Martyrs of the 19th Century (London, 1866. Reprinted by the Negro University Press, 1969).

a memorial chapel on Norfolk Island, and a permanent endowment. A commemorative tablet honoring Patteson was installed in the chapel of Merton College, Oxford, where the bishop had been a fellow. Exeter Cathedral, the site of his ordination, received a stone pulpit carved with scenes of his martyrdom.<sup>48</sup>

The inspiration of Patteson's death may very well have been one factor in the increased number of university-educated men who entered the mission field in the 1870s. The Universities' Mission to Central Africa, which like the Melanesian Mission had High Church/Tractarian associations, had recruited only twenty-seven missionaries between 1865 and 1874, but from 1875 to 1884, those serving the UMCA numbered eighty-nine. Of these, approximately one third were university men.<sup>49</sup> The Melanesian Mission itself gained two university men, John Richardson Selwyn, the bishop's son and himself the future bishop of Melanesia, and his Cambridge crew-mate, Rev. John Still.

Whatever its larger implications, Patteson's death produced an immediate crisis for the mission itself. Not only had Patteson provided its intellectual and administrative framework, but he and Joseph Atkin, a young missionary from New Zealand who died from wounds received at Nukupu and who had worked with Patteson for years, had been the only members of the mission with a complete knowledge of the islands and

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<sup>48</sup>Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup>David Neave, "Aspects of the History of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1858-1900." M.A. thesis, University of York, 1974, p. 89.

peoples served by the Southern Cross.<sup>50</sup> The mission's preservation owed much to the sustaining presence of Robert Codrington. He pointedly refused the bishopric, citing his age and health, but he served as acting head of the mission until John Selwyn's appointment as bishop in 1877 and continued as headmaster of St. Barnabas until his return to England in 1887. Having been a close associate of Patteson's and thoroughly familiar with his ideals, he provided an element of continuity with the mission's founders. His presence, combined with a growing reluctance to tamper with the ideals and methods of the martyred bishop, forestalled any drastic change in the mission for the remainder of the century.

By the turn of the century, however, the relative isolation of Melanesia had begun to break down. Following the establishment of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1893 the mission ceased to be the sole sustained European presence in the islands. Moreover, to satisfy the colonial office demand that colonies be as financially self-sufficient as possible, the new government encouraged the establishment of large-scale plantations in the Solomons. And because Protectorate officials saw missionaries as valuable allies in the business of pacification and order, it encouraged new missions in areas where no other group had established a mission presence. By 1914, the Melanesian Mission found itself sharing its original mission field with Methodists, Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, and the South Sea Evangelical Mission.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 73.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

The implications of many of these changes for the Mission--now in its fifth decade--are revealed in the account of a voyage on the Southern Cross written in 1892 by Henry Montgomery, bishop of Tasmania. Given the volume of work involved in general education and religious instruction now that the majority of the population in some areas was Christian and the increased contact with Europeans in formerly isolated areas, the role of the Mission in the islands appeared in need of revision. Was the rotation of the European staff from short-term island work to teaching duties at St. Barnabas really efficient or desirable? On the other hand, would the presence of permanent European missionaries lead to an over-reliance on them by native clergy and teachers? Should central schools be established in the islands as feeders for St. Barnabas which would become the "university" of Mission's education network? Given the more settled condition of the area, perhaps the time had also come to introduce women's work to island mission stations. Montgomery also expressed concern over the status of Mota as the mission's principal language given the growing accessibility of Melanesia and the increased role of commerce. Now that traditional custom and practice were more completely known and understood, how indulgent could the historically tolerant mission be without compromising its most fundamental Christianity principles? And finally, Montgomery expressed the eternal conundrum of mission. How, once the initial enthusiasm of conversion passed and Christianity became more or less the accepted religion, could the proper spirit be maintained?

By what means, in short, could the fledgling native church grow and flourish?<sup>52</sup>

In the years prior to World War I, no really clear-cut answers emerged to these questions. Certainly under the third bishop of Melanesia, Cecil Wilson, who began his episcopacy in 1894, European-staffed stations in the islands became a permanent feature of the mission. By 1907, the mission had twelve permanent stations in the islands. To meet this need, Wilson also made a determined and to a degree successful effort to increase the size of the European staff. Consequently, St. Barnabas acquired a stationary, more effective teaching staff. When Wilson resigned in 1911, the male European staff of the mission numbered twenty-nine as opposed to the eight he inherited in 1894.<sup>53</sup> Beginning in 1905, too, women missionaries undertook work with Melanesian women in the islands.

To a degree, these changes reflect not only altered conditions in Melanesia but the new sense of energy and sophistication regarding mission that characterized English Christianity in this period. Given the expansion of the European presence virtually everywhere, the concept of the "evangelization of the world in this generation" did not seem very far afield. This new interest was reflected in the proliferation of popular mission literature and support organizations and growing interest in mission methodology. Mission conferences and journals

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<sup>52</sup>Henry H. Montgomery, The Light of Melanesia (London: SPCK, 1896), pp. 251-53.

<sup>53</sup>Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 134.

gave serious consideration to such matters as the role of medical and industrial missions in the redemption of the "whole man," the relationship of the European missionary to other races, and the coordination of mission effort.<sup>54</sup> If, then, the essential goals of Christian mission remained the same, the means of realizing them at the turn of the century were increasingly viewed as something to be approached scientifically and professionally.

It appeared to some critical observers that the Melanesian Mission could only benefit from this sort of modernization. "I have no doubt whatever," wrote Bishop Montgomery in the new scholarly missionary journal, The East and the West, "that were the Selwyns and Pattesons alive today they would show their statesmanship by adapting themselves to the changed conditions. It is no real loyalty to those great men to keep blindly to their methods in times which have changed so completely as ours have since they planned the Mission."<sup>55</sup>

Despite these progressive sentiments and the actual changes undertaken, the mission exhibited considerable ambivalence over its role in a changing Melanesia. The ideals of the Victorian founders still influenced the mission ethos. Walter Iven's Hints to Missionaries, published in 1907, repeatedly refers the neophyte missionary to Patteson's concepts for a model. They can do no better than "to be

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>55</sup>H. H. Montgomery, "The Anglican Church in the South Pacific," The East and the West I (1903), quoted in Hilliard, God's Gentlemen, p. 143.

imbued with the traditional methods of the work which we inherit from the great men of the past."<sup>56</sup> Of special concern to Ivens, himself an anthropologist of some standing as well as a member of the Mission, was the continued use of Mota and other Melanesian languages in the missionary effort. Yet others, like Robert Wilson, a thorough conservative on most issues, saw English as the only route to the integration of Melanesians into the commercial and technological world of late Victorian imperialism. The role of Norfolk Island also continued to be a point of debate, with the civil authorities urging a transfer of mission headquarters to the islands and others pointing to its expense and inefficiency. But, significantly, the final decision on the closure of St. Barnabas was delayed until 1918. And English did not emerge as the sole teaching language in mission schools until 1931.

Observing the mission from his retirement in England, Robert Codrington clearly expressed this tension. "Bishop Selwyn in a cutter among untouched savages," he wrote, "is not like Bishop Wilson in a 500 ton steel steamer among people who talk pidgin English. . . . We were not in all respects models no doubt but in that particular we were good missionaries--we desired to know and live with the natives. I fear that there has been in that respect a considerable deterioration in N.I. (Norfolk Island) and a change in the way of looking at the working of things."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Rev. Walter G. Ivens, Hints to Missionaries (London: Melanesian Mission, 1907), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup>Robert Codrington Papers, Pac. s.28. 1903. Rhodes House, Oxford.



The course of the mission in the inter-war period, the war years and its transformation into the independent Church of Melanesia lie beyond the scope of this study. Clearly, at least until 1914, its Victorian foundations remained part of the mission's self-image, if not always its actual practice. In many respects that foundation bears out popular conceptions of the missionary movement, and its heroes and martyrs became part of the popular mythology of the age of empire. In pursuing their goal, the members of the Melanesian Mission furnished material for the popular mythology of the age of empire. But "the way of looking at the working of things" of the Melanesian Mission in its regard for Melanesians and their culture and its faith in the development of a distinctly Melanesian Christianity, represented in a self-conscious departure from the Civilization and Christianity formula that had been the mainstay of mission thinking on primitive peoples in the nineteenth century. "Few words," wrote Patteson, "are used so vaguely and understood so little as civilization."<sup>58</sup>

This response, as represented by the Melanesian Mission and the other High Church Anglican missions of the nineteenth century, followed patterns of accommodation and adaptation as old as Christian mission itself. While frequently in eclipse, they had never completely disappeared. In the nineteenth century, the sources for this pattern, in keeping with the accelerated pace of social, technological and intellectual change, had become more complex than ever before. For

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<sup>58</sup>Patteson Papers, SPG Collection, 1863.

determined Christians, however, the sources for accommodation and adaptation must still be sought first in the intellectual sphere that they found most compelling--the religious tradition embodied in the Church of England.