

***'The Necessity of a Native Clergy':  
'The Failure of Victorian Missions to  
Develop Indigenous Leadership'***\*

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**The Laing Lecture for 1990**

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*Faith in the City* has an all too brief historical section. It ends, however, with an important conclusion: 'One factor in the situation is a recurrent theme of church history: where deep divisions in culture and language exist between different sections of society, a clergy drawn mainly from one section (in the case of England, the middleclass) is likely to have serious difficulties in communicating with members of other social groups.'<sup>1</sup> The point is by no means original. It has been made about England for at least one hundred and thirty years. It was an insight learned in overseas missions and then applied to the class-dominated culture of England. So Bishop Steere, a high church bishop from Central Africa, concluded in the eighteen-eighties: 'One thing Missions have learnt everywhere—the advantage, if not the necessity, of a Native Clergy, and it would be well if England learnt the same lesson.'<sup>2</sup> Bishop Steere, I want to argue, was but applying an accepted missiological truism in a different context. It was the accepted wisdom of the sixties, seventies and eighties and yet its application overseas was scarcely more successful than in Britain. By the end of the century it was being disregarded as an objective. In the second half of the paper I want to ask why the practice was so woefully out of step with the theory and why the theory came to be abandoned.

**THE INDIGENOUS CHURCH IN MID-VICTORIAN  
MISSIONARY THINKING**

By the 1840s the missionary movement had palpably failed to deliver its early expectations. Societies faced high mortality, low recruitment, serious financial crises and worries about the calibre of the churches established. All this made the case for radical reassessment very strong. It was made most tellingly in the thinking and writing of two men—Rufus Anderson, the secretary of the American Board (a Congregational missionary society) and Henry Venn who was secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) between 1841 and 1873. Both pointed in the same direction—the development of self-supporting, self-

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governing and self-extending churches—and, in so doing, gave voice to what very rapidly became the accepted wisdom of missionary strategists.

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<sup>1</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City: A Challenge for Action by Church and Nation* (London 1985) para 2.20.

<sup>2</sup> R M Heanley, *A Memoir of Edward Steere, DD, LLD: Third Missionary Bishop in Central Africa* (London 1888) 383.

I want to give primary attention to Henry Venn because he was by far the most influential missionary thinker of his time in Britain. He was son of John Venn, one of the leaders of the Clapham Sect. He was a moderate evangelical out of sympathy with the intense premillennialism of some of the younger evangelicals and a very strong Anglican who worked for a closer relationship between the CMS and the English bishops.<sup>3</sup> As a missionary thinker he drew on three main sources—first, the Bible, particularly the book of Acts; second, his knowledge of the contemporary missionary scene through his very close relationship with missionaries, indigenous Christians, local bishops, other societies and missionary thinkers; third, his study of church history. Remarkably, in this last respect, he gave many years to writing a book on Francis Xavier (the great sixteenth century Jesuit missionary) and his missionary principles<sup>4</sup> at a time when it was very unusual for evangelicals to concede that there was anything of value to be learned from Roman Catholics. Yet in all this enquiry he remained essentially a pragmatist and his theories emerged out of the interaction with missionary problems rather than in abstract scholarly formulation.

He quickly reached the conclusion that the missionary must work for the euthanasia of missionary operations.<sup>5</sup> He must work, in other words, for an indigenous ministry and church, able to support itself and under a colonial bishop. Then the missionary would be able to move to the 'regions beyond'.<sup>6</sup> That would involve the development of indigenous ministry, and here Venn was controversial and clear. The indigenous pastors should not, either by training or salaries, be raised 'to habits and expectations too far above the people'.<sup>7</sup> They should be given a simple vernacular training in which they would preserve their own dress and lifestyle and would not, in the main, be taught English, Latin, Greek or Hebrew. Otherwise, as he wrote a little later, they would be 'in danger of being trained up as exotics, and of becoming unfitted for holding the right position in the Church of their nation'.<sup>8</sup> Such ideas not surprisingly led to conflict with some like the high church bishop of New Zealand, Selwyn. Selwyn insisted that Maoris should know Greek and English before being ordained to the priesthood.<sup>9</sup> Consequently he ordained very few and Venn and the CMS frequently charged him with disastrously weakening the Maori church in New Zealand.<sup>10</sup>

Behind Venn's thinking here was a different attitude to civilization from that of many missionaries. While Livingstone sought to propagate Christianity, commerce and civilization, Venn (along with Anderson) firmly rejected the idea that civilization was integral to Christianity. It might, probably would, follow it but missionaries must avoid the 'bewitching' idea that 'we must settle and civilize in order to convert'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> C Peter Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church: A Study in Victorian Missionary Strategy* (Leiden 1990) 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Missionary Life and Labours of Francis Xavier Taken from His Own Correspondence with a Sketch of the General Results of Roman Catholic Missions among the Heathen* (London 1862).

<sup>5</sup> Williams, *Ideal*, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> CMS Archives (hereafter CMSA) University of Birmingham, G/AZ 1/1 no 116, 9/7/ 1861, 'Minute of the Organization of Native Churches in Missions'.

<sup>7</sup> CMSA, G/C 1 vol 26, 389-392, 18/4/1848, Committee of Correspondence Minutes.

<sup>8</sup> CMSA, C I2/L6, 188-194, 2/10/60, Venn etc to Royston.

<sup>9</sup> CMSA, CN/L4, 392-404, 403, 3/6/1844, & CN/L5, 476-481, 480-481, 1/2/1851, Venn to Bishop Selwyn.

<sup>10</sup> *CMI*, (1852) 161; (1856) 157; (1857) 29-31; (1860) 8-11; (1867) 67-68, 267-268; (1881) 135.

<sup>11</sup> CMSA, C II/L4, 351-365, 356-357, 5/6/1856, Instructions to the Revd W T & Mrs Storrs.

Thus he had a theoretical frame in which the task of civilizing was not central. The point is crucial in understanding why he was so committed to the self-governing church, had such confidence in indigenous leadership, and such a sharp antipathy to anybody, like Selwyn, who threatened the prospect. It was for this reason that he was able to be very tolerant of political, cultural and even moral ethical differences.<sup>12</sup>

If an indigenous clergy in a self-supporting church then why not an indigenous bishop? Venn did not at first give much thought to the episcopal tier of government. He assumed that the nearest European colonial bishop would add to his responsibilities for the English Anglican community that of the emerging indigenous church, and that someday an indigenous bishop would be appointed. He was prompted to further thought when Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and others influenced by Tractarian thinking began to argue in the fifties for a much greater role for the bishop in missionary work. The primitive model, they urged, was of the bishop leading forth a band of missionaries and establishing a church with its own indigenous clergy and institutions. This contrasted sadly with what actually happened in contemporary missionary work when the bishop was only introduced at the end of the process. Consequently they proposed the extension of the episcopate in India. Venn was at once on his guard. His motives were part evangelical suspicion of bishops, particularly in a setting where they would be beyond the healthy checks and balances to their power which were taken for granted in England, part a fear that CMS (and therefore evangelical) influence would be undermined, and part a conviction that an English bishop would impose a model at the top which was European rather than indigenous. This last point exercised him greatly and drove him to new and more creative thinking.

If, the CMS argued with the voice of Venn, a European was appointed he would inevitably carry with him some of the temporal rank that went with episcopacy in England, and that would make the indigenous clergy more aware of an 'immeasurable inferiority' so that they would only feel able to approach the bishop 'in a servile and almost abject manner'.<sup>13</sup> The basic weakness of the proposal was, its journal the *Intelligencer* urged, that it would produce an episcopate which was 'not homogeneous with the Church'. If proof was required of this, it continued, the observer need look no further than the disastrous record of Anglicanism in Wales and Ireland. In both places English bishops, who not only had no cultural or political sympathies with the people but were also the representatives of a conquering race, had been imposed. As they had no affinity with the clergy or the people, the result had been 'the isolation of the church from the native community around it and the cessation of all action on its part as a Missionary church'.<sup>14</sup> An English bishop in India would then increase the dependence and servility of the Indians, he would be seen as a representative of a conquering race, and

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he would give the impression that Christianity involved cutting national roots. What the Indians wanted to see was whether Christianity could 'leave behind English materiality, and, as a simple spiritual system, enter into the Hindu and deal with Hindu materiality as it has

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<sup>12</sup> *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (hereafter *CMI*) (1857) 20: Even though institutions of government may be connected with idolatry and may appear absurd, 'they are the framework of society; and, till they are replaced by a more enlightened system, they must be respected'.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* (1858) 173.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

done with that which is English'.<sup>15</sup> Import an English bishop and the result would be the opposite. You would have someone 'naturalized as regards England' but 'an alien to them'. Indeed the *Intelligencer* prophesied, 'Commence with an Anglican Episcopate over a native church, and there will never be a native Episcopate.'<sup>16</sup> These were the missiological problems with the missionary bishop scheme.

It had a further fatal weakness which its opponents did not hesitate to exploit. Its basic contention was that the policy was but the missionary method of the early church. There were, it was urged against them, significant examples of great missionary leaders who had not been bishops at the beginning of their missionary undertakings—for example Boniface in Germany and Augustine in England.<sup>17</sup>

Undoubtedly these high church clerics spurred Venn to more vigorous thinking about the nature of the church on the mission field.<sup>18</sup> He now made it clear that an indigenous bishop was his objective for the church. The missionary must by every means seek to begin the task of disengagement and, in particular, to avoid dependency by passing pastoring work into the hands of local ministers. Yet in all this he was by no means greatly ahead of his fellow mission leaders. Similar points emerged from the first Protestant, and mainly non-Anglican, missionary conference in Liverpool in 1860. It stressed the inappropriateness of pastoring by 'the dominant race'; the need for liturgical and governmental structures which expressed local culture and the importance of training a minister without injuring his 'national character' and so that he could 'in his dress, food, manners, and style, continue to resemble his fellows', differing only 'in the possession of a purifying and ennobling faith', while 'still one of themselves'.<sup>19</sup> No doubt Venn and Anderson had been very influential but there was much, even in current political thinking, which supported such thinking.

Where it was not supported in the main was by the missionaries. Venn found himself constantly frustrated by them. In his estimates of overseas converts he always remembered the advice of an African merchant; 'treat us like men, and we will behave like men... treat us as children and we shall behave like children'.<sup>20</sup> Missionaries by contrast expected too high standards of their converts forgetting that they were young Christians, that there had been many weaknesses in the New Testament church and that nominal Christianity was as inevitable overseas as in England. They were unable to cope with the desire for independence on the part of their converts because this challenged their own role.<sup>21</sup> They constantly underrated 'the social and intellectual capabilities of the native races'<sup>22</sup> and no better example of this lay to hand than that of the'

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* (1861) 277.

<sup>16</sup> *Loc cit*.

<sup>17</sup> G White, 'The Idea of a Missionary Bishop in Mid-Nineteenth Century Anglicanism' (General Theological Seminary New York MST 1968) 89.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>19</sup> Liverpool, *Conference on Missions Held in 1860 at Liverpool* (London 1860) 227-231, 280, 310.

<sup>20</sup> *CMJ* (1873) 141.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Ideal*, 39-40.

<sup>22</sup> CMSA, C A2/L3, 386-398, 291-392, 24/10/1864, Venn, 'Memorandum on the, Relations between the British Colonies on the West Coast of Africa and the Native Races'.

missionary attitude to the appointment of the one time African slave, Samuel Crowther, in West Africa in 1864. He was, of course, the first African bishop of modern times and Venn had been the key figure in his appointment. In effect the missionaries refused to serve under him and eventually areas of European missionary occupation were excluded from his supervision, even though they lay in his natural diocese. This led Venn to a new conclusion:

My own lengthened experience of Missions, in all parts of the world, strongly impels me to the conclusion that the European element in the native church is the great snare and hindrance to its growth: and that if native churches were kept separate with a complete organization of Bishop, priest and Deacon they would exhibit a more firm and rapid development.<sup>23</sup>

It must be stressed that this was an extremely radical suggestion for an Anglican, particularly at a time when Catholic views of the church were becoming ever more influential. In Catholic ecclesiology, backed up by most church history, it was vital that there be but one bishop in each geographical area. What Venn was proposing, and he was fully aware of the fact, was that dioceses should sometimes be divided according to race rather than geography.<sup>24</sup> It was, he came to believe, the only solution given the likelihood of continued missionary and settler dominance by the normal routes. He thus reached the remarkable conclusion: 'the proper position of a missionary is one external to the native church'.<sup>25</sup>

This very radical thinking only emerged in the mid-sixties. He immediately sought to implement it in relation to a new diocese proposed for Ningpo in China. The missionaries and the settlers should be under the colonial bishop in Hong Kong but the emerging Chinese church should have its own bishop. Any other solution, the *Intelligencer* argued, would be likely to destroy Chinese national distinctiveness. If the indigenous clergy were under an English bishop who also had responsibility for the settlers and missionaries, then the church would be regarded as English, and the indigenous clergy 'as suspected persons, intriguing for the advancement of English interests'. Services would be seen as being 'too peculiarly Anglican'.<sup>26</sup> Rather, Christianity must be propagated 'without its Anglicanism'. It could then be 'nationalized' and be 'in an advantageous position for permeating the whole race'.<sup>27</sup> To the charge that this involved an ecclesiological anomaly, the CMS responded that the traditions were intended to apply only to 'persons and Churches of the same race and language'. Where cities had many races, as in contemporary Jerusalem or Constantinople, it had been quite common to have separate bishops for the different racial groups.<sup>28</sup>

To advocate the division of diocese by racial rather than by geographical lines opens Venn to the charge that he was pressing for a

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<sup>23</sup> CMSA, C II/L6, 429-431, 431, 26/12/1864, Venn to Bp Cotton.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Ideal*, 34, 42.

<sup>25</sup> W Knight, *The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn*, BD (London 1880) 287.

<sup>26</sup> *CMI* (1869) 105. See also C P Williams, "'Too Peculiarly Anglican': The Role of the Established Church in Ireland as a Negative Model in the Developments of the Church Missionary Society's Commitment to Independent Native Churches, 1856-1872", in W J Sheils and Diana Wood (eds) *Studies in Church History* 25 (Oxford 1989) 299-310.

<sup>27</sup> *CMI* (1869) 105, 98.

<sup>28</sup> CMSA, G/AZ 1/2, no 306, 10/11/1869, 'Memorandum on the Best Means of Providing Episcopal Superintendence for a Native Christian Church Beyond Her Majesty's Dominions'.

sort of Christian caste system or apartheid. There is some truth in this, but it is important to see that it comes out of his strong sense of the reality of cultural difference, and that it went alongside a deep commitment to the capacity of indigenous peoples—he argued passionately, for example with regard to Africans, that they were equal to Europeans in capacity. In all his dealing with them, he asserted, he had ‘never been able to detect any inferiority of natural ability’.<sup>29</sup> His preferred solution ‘was the amalgamation of races’<sup>30</sup> but the dominance of the cultural and church models of the European missionaries, settlers and administrators, was so great that there was no prospect of a ‘native’ church unless a more drastic solution was attempted. Otherwise, local churches would never develop their own institutions, liturgy and organization, but would remain poor carbon copies of the Church of England and (excellent as that was in an English context) it simply would not do in an African or Asian setting. His case, however, ran into the ever-present disinclination of missionaries to trust their converts and of the high church opposition to non-geographical episcopates. The only appointment of an indigenous bishop was that of Crowther.

Venn is often regarded as a rather isolated figure, whose strategy was far ahead of his time and was quickly discarded after he died in 1873.<sup>31</sup> We have already seen how his thinking about the need for the development of a culturally appropriate indigenous ministry was echoed by nonconformists. More catholic thinkers came to make the same point, whether through Anglo Catholics such as Bishops W G Tozer and Edward Steere in Central Africa,<sup>32</sup> or through Roman Catholics such as Bishop Daniel Comboni in the Sudan.<sup>33</sup> In keeping with this, in 1863 the far from evangelical Church of England body, the Church Congress, declared that Christians ‘ought not to dream of engrafting British habits, dress, or even language, on the young nations that are born to Christ in our day’.<sup>34</sup> Though his convictions about the need for an indigenous episcopate in the near future, and about the necessity of over-lapping episcopates, were not so widely shared in Anglican circles, he was far more representative of the current wisdom than is generally granted.

Nor was his approach discarded shortly after his death. Rather the contrary, for within his own society it became the accepted orthodoxy, and within mission circles generally there were many echoes of it. As far as the CMS is concerned it made its position absolutely clear in 1877. There would have to be, it declared, in areas like India and Ceylon, different churches for the indigenous peoples and for the Europeans. ‘Where’, it reasoned:

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<sup>29</sup> CMSA, G/AC 1/16, 55-56, 56, 28/11/1863, Venn to the Revd W Fawcett.

<sup>30</sup> *CMI* (1858) 171.

<sup>31</sup> For bibliography of these attitudes see Williams, *Ideal*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Clearly there was a change in emphasis within Anglo Catholicism in the sixties and seventies from the attitudes of Selwyn. Stanley suggests that this may have been a consequence of the perceived failure of the first expedition of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (of course inspired by Livingstone) under Bishop Mackenzie (Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester 1990) 74). For further evidence of Anglo Catholic reservations about its role in relation to commerce and civilization arising from the UMCA failure see Owen Chadwick, *Mackenzie’s Grave* (London 1959) 173, 239. Symonds suggests that because Anglo Catholics saw the church as universal they sought ways of building it ‘with roots in its own society’ (R Symonds, *Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause* (London 1986) 213).

<sup>33</sup> For Comboni see Pietro Chiocchetta, *Daniel Comboni: Papers for the Evangelization of Africa* (Rome ET 1982). In any event Catholicism came to have a greater tolerance of cultural, social and religious differences (see Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1959-1975* (Cambridge 1979) 70).

<sup>34</sup> *CCR*, 1863, 237.

the Anglo-Saxon cannot be at home, there neither can his Church... While the English wish to enjoy the order and discipline of their Church exactly as in England, the Native Christians already show signs of desiring for themselves a Church modified to some extent in its forms, its ceremonies, and its organization, to suit

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their oriental nature and their oriental life. Hence it is essential that the ultimate function of an independent Native Church be steadily kept in view, and no action taken which would interfere with or hinder such a consummation.

That meant discouraging European structures and doing everything to hasten indigenous ones.<sup>35</sup> It meant contemplating the possibility of dioceses on racial or tribal rather than geographical grounds, though united in a provincial structure.<sup>36</sup> A contributor to the *Intelligencer* in 1880 put the reality graphically: 'No alchemy, not even that of the Gospel of Christ, will ever fuse the migratory and alien European strangers and sojourners, perpetually driven forth and back to their homes by climate, with the children of the soil.'<sup>37</sup> In any event Christianity was not in essence western and ought not therefore to be transported as if it were. Rather it is 'an Oriental religion' and, consequently, 'if we left it to work its own way, it ought readily to assimilate itself to Eastern minds'. As that happened it would avoid, he declared, the damaging associations between Christianity and English political power for it had to be acknowledged that Christianity was 'the badge of a victorious and hated race'.<sup>38</sup> New Zealand, where the Maori church was weak and where there was great hostility between the English and the Maoris, was a good example of the sort of disaster which would ensue where the policy was designed 'to fuse' the racial groups.<sup>39</sup> In keeping with this, the CMS pressed for missionary bishops who would have exclusive charge over the 'native' church, and for indigenous bishops.

But not only the CMS. It is central to my contention that this vision was shared by others. Thus the SPG wanted missionary bishops who would have charge of its missionaries and their congregations, but not of other Europeans.<sup>40</sup> Thus Bishop Steere of the High Anglican UMCA believed that each nation should have 'its own Church and its own bishop and clergy'.<sup>41</sup> He was therefore enthusiastic about the ordination of Africans and urged that they should remain close to their origins. 'The heathen cannot suspect Christianity of being a crusade against all they hold dear on seeing that the preachers of the new religion in no way differ from themselves save in the purity of their lives and steadfastness of their faith.'<sup>42</sup> It was no business of the church to bring civilization. 'She can leave national habits and customs alone, sure that the indwelling Spirit will, in His own good time, work out in any particular national church that special form of civilization which is best suited to the nation.'<sup>43</sup> There were similar themes in nonconformity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *CMI* (1877), Memorandum bound in *CMI*.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, *Ideal*, 83-84.

<sup>37</sup> *CMI* (1880) 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* (1881) 133.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>40</sup> Williams, *Ideal*, 64, 69.

<sup>41</sup> J T Moriyama, 'The Evolution of an African Ministry and the Work of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa in Tanzania, 1864-1909' (University of London PhD 1984) 93.

<sup>42</sup> Heanley, *Memoir*, 245.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

<sup>44</sup> R Lovett, *History of the London Missionary Society, 1795-1895* (London 1899) 2, 265-268.

Despite all this, the Victorian missionary enterprise is notable for its failure to indigenize, to grant independence and freedom, and to respect other cultures. Why should this be? It is evidently not a failure to address the issue but rather to apply the convictions which amounted almost to an accepted wisdom. If the Victorians saw the problem and

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failed to implement solutions which would gain much acceptance today, they become a richer quarry for the missiologist than if they had been blissfully unaware of it. They also become much more disturbing for a generation which tends to assume that it has the solution because it has become conscious of the problem. To an examination of the reasons for their failure we now turn.

## **THE REASONS FOR THE FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT THE INDIGENOUS MODEL**

### **Missionary Paternalism**

The most constant factor through the entire period is the difficulty missionaries have in handing over authority to those they suspect will work very differently and to the detriment of the foundations which they have laid. In 1878 Christopher Fenn, a CMS secretary, told missionaries of his 'absolute conviction that in all Missions without exception the tendency acting irresistibly in almost every Missionary is to undervalue the strength and worth of Native Christian activity'. He pleaded for the ending of what he called 'coercive European control'.<sup>45</sup> So a regular cameo ensued. The society made a suggestion that an Indian or an African should be promoted in the church—not infrequently arguing that he should become a bishop. The missionaries wrote home and said they thought it was an excellent idea 'in the abstract', but the reality was that the particular man or his church was not ready just yet. He must have a further period of trial in a subordinate position.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps in a few years time!

### **Ecclesiological Difficulties**

The fundamental problem here was providing an ecclesiological justification for overlapping episcopates. It is particularly a CMS problem as, apart from the SPG for a short time, no other society proposed it as a way forward. It is interesting that it was a viable idea at the beginning of the period, supported by, for example, Tait when Archbishop of Canterbury. As late as 1880 the senior bishops in England met to consider a matter of dispute between the CMS and the Bishop of Colombo in which this question was central. They were undecided. It was, they said, 'a most difficult and important question and one which cannot be hastily settled'.<sup>47</sup> The CMS argument was that it happened anyway in places like Jerusalem and Constantinople, and between American and English bishops in Europe and Asia, and that it had no desire to create racial churches. It would remain perfectly open for Indians to join the Church of England and for the English to throw in their lot with the local church. What it objected to was to have the self-governing church 'indefinitely postponed, because on the one hand

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<sup>45</sup> CMSA, C I2/L8, between 451-452, 1/10/1878, Annual Letter.

<sup>46</sup> Eg Williams, *Ideal*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> Lambeth Palace Archives, TP, vol 277, 309-310, f 310, 'Advice', 27/2/1880.

English Christians object to be under a Native Bishop, and because at the same time on the other hand, good and well intentioned men start back in horror from a "racial Episcopate"?' Were separate churches for the English and Indians in India any different from those for the English and Swedish in Stockholm?<sup>48</sup> Whatever the argument, however, it became an impossible ideal as the century progressed and a more high church view of the episcopate became normative.

CMS may have been alone in facing the ecclesiological problems of overlapping dioceses, but it was merely attempting a solution to a problem that all faced—how to relate to the dominant parent model, particularly where there was a large expatriate population. The discerning were aware how pervasive this influence was. Within Methodism there was a hugely public controversy about the standards of missionary life arising from the accusation that missionaries lived at a luxurious level dictated by Anglo-Indian expectations.<sup>49</sup> Henry Lunn, whose comments were the catalyst to that particular debate, stated bluntly his conviction 'that many of the missionaries in India were separated from their own converts, and still more from the bulk of the population, by a racial gulf that was a terrible obstacle to missionary enterprise'.<sup>50</sup> If the CMS proposals had not foundered on high church ecclesiology, they would surely have been torpedoed by missionary opposition, as were Lunn's radical proposals to reduce substantially the living standards of Methodist missionaries.

### **The Influence of Imperialism**

Though complex, the connection between missionary work and imperialism has been impressively analysed in Brian Stanley's recent book.<sup>51</sup> Particularly in the first half of the century, the relationship was quite uneasy and frequently fraught, and that for two reasons. First the stress in that period was not so much on settlement and therefore on the role missionaries might have in facilitating it, but rather on what has been called 'the informal imperialism of collaboration'<sup>52</sup>—that is an imperialism which concentrated on trade. Far from wanting to paint the map red, there was a great deal of pressure for disengagement. Second, and following from this, missionaries were often seen as a destabilizing factor because they challenged the existing religious systems in a way likely to upset delicate local balances and trade; because they brought education which, again, by encouraging more sophisticated and ambitious approaches, might militate against trading interests; and because, where there was settlement (as in South Africa and the West Indies) they not infrequently challenged the unjust way the settlers used their power.

By the nineties what is sometimes called the 'new imperialism' was in full swing. It had as its objective colonial control. It promoted long-term

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European settlement and investment. It led to a reassessment of the traditionally hostile secular attitudes to the missionary. The famous colonial administrator, Sir Harry Johnston, for

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<sup>48</sup> *CMI* (1882) 561.

<sup>49</sup> Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, *The Missionary Controversy: Discussion, Evidence and Report, 1890* (London 1890) 4-7.

<sup>50</sup> Henry S Lunn, *Chapters from My Life* (London 1924) 69-70.

<sup>51</sup> *Bible and Flag*.

<sup>52</sup> John D Hargreaves, *West Africa Partitioned: Vol 2, The Elephants and the Grass* (London 1985) 249, 252.

example, remained totally sceptical about the truth of Christianity but was a warm advocate of its value as 'the preparer of the white man's advent'. Should not, he asked, the very fact that missionaries 'live in a European manner, in a house of European style, surrounded by European implements, products and ornaments... open the eyes of the brutish savages to the existence of a higher state of culture, and prepare them for the approach of civilization?'<sup>53</sup> Increasingly, missionaries responded by accepting that they had a role in the imperialistic task. Reflected the young Temple Gairdner as he watched Victoria's Diamond Jubilee proceedings in 1897: 'I should like to serve my Queen. Can I do that better than by taking Christ to her Empire? She would like that, I think.'<sup>54</sup> Missionaries had become part of the imperialist process. Though they remained distinct, and often acted to restrain the excesses of the soldiers, traders and settlers, and were sometimes openly and courageously critical, they worked more closely with them than they had before. It was flattering to be appreciated. It made sense to work for British rule because, as Stanley has convincingly demonstrated, imperialism of some sort was inevitable, and the arguments that, in a British guise, it carried the greatest likelihood of justice and peace, carried weight. They ought genuinely and often reluctantly, as apolitical beings concerned for the peoples amongst whom they laboured, he argues, citing Bishop Tucker, to cast 'the whole weight' of their influences behind 'humanity, justice and Christian duty'.<sup>55</sup>

The effect may have been considerably more positive than is commonly conceded in these anti-imperial days but it was dangerously easy to accept 'the distortions which the prevailing imperial culture' placed on their understanding.<sup>56</sup> One effect was to dull sensitivities, particularly of other cultures. That mid-Victorian awareness of being an 'exotic' in another land disappeared, and with it the drive to move to 'the regions beyond' as soon as possible. In the past, missionary strategists and administrators had seen the missionary operation as short-term. If missionaries had disagreed, they articulated this as a dispute over timing rather than principle. Now missionaries, administrators and strategists came to an unselfconscious agreement that the missionary stay would be long-term (or as long-term as the parousia allowed). They began to speak in terms, not of disengagement, but of ruling. Previously the home administrators had acted as a not ineffective counter force to this tendency in missionaries. By the nineties and the earlier twentieth century it was plain that this was no longer so.

Thus, when there was a major discussion in the CMS in the nineties about how much independence the church on the Niger should be given, one of the committee (well known for his Afroophile views) was forced

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to resign, in effect because he had kept in too close touch with African Christians. It was inappropriate, it was explained to him, for a member of 'the Governing Body' 'to carry on a correspondence with the governed' of a frank kind.<sup>57</sup> Likewise in the UMCA mission, there was a move away from a trusting to a supervising relationship, from a system designed to

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<sup>53</sup> H H Johnston, 'British Missions and Missonaries in Africa', *The Nineteenth Century*, 22 (1887) 723.

<sup>54</sup> C E Padwick, *Temple Gairdner of Cairo* (London 1930) 51.

<sup>55</sup> *Bible and Flag*, 132, see also 115, 118, 126, 131; ch 5 *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

<sup>57</sup> CMSA, G/AC 2/36, 987-988, 10/7/1891; /37, 182-183, 182, 22/7/1891, the Revd F E Wigram to the Revd J B Whiting.

produce an African church to one that saw no further than the creation of a quasi-English church.

Moriyama, a Japanese scholar who has recently examined the UMCA, can find no trace in 1900 of 'Steere's advocacy and Smythies's [Steere's successor as bishop] enthusiasm for African ministry'.<sup>58</sup> He notes, very significantly, that the bishop in the early twentieth century, Hine, became increasingly convinced of the need to increase contacts with the colonial authorities, and consequently, Moriyama concludes, of the need 'to contain the African ministry within the protection of the missionary paternalism'.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Impact of Racialist Ideas**

There is no doubt that racialist ideas were widespread in the later nineteenth century. There was a confidence in Aryan superiority and a form of 'Social Darwinism' which forecast a racial struggle in which whites would emerge as dominant. Many have suggested that the missionaries were imbued with racialist convictions. More recent careful work has established that few were racialist, if by that is meant a belief that Aryan Europeans were inherently superior. A Danish historian, Hansen, has, for example, studied the attitudes of CMS missionaries at the turn of the century in Uganda. He finds only a very few who were racialist. Most were what he describes as 'paternalistic-evolutionary'.<sup>60</sup> They believed, that is, in the fundamental equality of the people amongst whom they worked, and were therefore positive about long-term progress. That equality had however yet to be realized, and so the case for paternalism, for trusteeship and 'European guidance', remained very strong.<sup>61</sup>

It has to be granted that the difference between racialism and paternalistic-evolutionary thinking may be a great deal more apparent to the scholar sociologist than to indigenous peoples. As far as they were concerned both implied superiority, and there is no doubt that there was a greater distance between missionaries and their converts than previously. Bishop Tucker's travails as Bishop of Uganda in the earlier twentieth century illustrates the point. He strove hard to achieve a constitution which would incorporate missionaries into the emerging church. He encountered sustained and successful opposition from them mainly on the grounds that their privileged position in relation to Africans would be at risk. One of the missionaries, Baskerville, was quite explicit: 'to me the greatest objection seems to be in the proposed

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equality of European and native workers—thereby in some cases placing Europeans under native converts'.<sup>62</sup>

### **Theological Developments in England**

We have seen that missionary thinkers like Venn, Anderson and Steere were very ambivalent about civilization and its relationship to Christianity. They were, however, firmly this-worldly in the sense that they sought to take practical steps for the upbuilding of the church, that they

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<sup>58</sup> Moriyama, 'Evolution', 252.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 270.

<sup>60</sup> H B Hansen, 'European Ideas, Colonial Attitudes and African Realities: The Introduction of a Church Constitution in Uganda, 1898-1908', *The International Journal of African Studies*, 13 (1980) 280.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 255.

<sup>62</sup> CMSA, G3/A7/1898/184, 24/9/1898, Tucker to Baylis.

took seriously the question of its relationship to culture and society, and that they were realistic about the presence of racial tensions and of sometimes quite serious immorality in the young church. Thus Venn was much less judgemental about sexual sins and drunkenness than his missionaries. The Early Church had had such problems, and they were not unknown even in that 'favoured vineyard', England. Certainly sin must be dealt with, but it must not be a justification for a harsh, rejecting judgement of the young church and its indigenous ministers. 'We must not be extreme', he said, 'to mark what is done amiss... if the great Head of the Church be amongst you all will come gradually right'.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, Bishop Steere of the UMCA was very critical of some of his European priests for the severity of their attitudes towards Africans. 'It is better', he contended, 'for a priest to be too lax than too severe in temporal matters'.<sup>64</sup>

A very different breed of missionaries began to emerge in the eighties and nineties. Mainly middle class, often public school and Oxbridge educated, they were nurtured in a world-renouncing premillennialism, believing that Christ could come at any time. They had little interest in contemporary civilization, and indeed in anything other than plucking souls from the impending fire. For those who were evangelical their precursor and guru was Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. It was of course a faith society. Taylor, in his simple dependency on God, rather than the wisdom and strategy of man; in his urgent determination to preach the gospel (to the exclusion of most other traditional missionary activities) thus both bringing nearer the second coming of Christ and avoiding the ensnaring seduction of complex educational and institutional structures; in his belief that the Holy Spirit was a far better selector and trainer than the elaborate mechanisms of the older societies; in his determined emphasis on the laity and non-denominationalism; in his total identification with the holiness ideals of absolute and sacrificial surrender, and in his conviction that the missionaries should not be culturally removed from the people to whom they ministered (demonstrated in the willingness to live extremely simply and to adopt 'native dress'), presented ideals which began to be attractive to many young middle class Christians in the eighties. These ideals were best encapsulated in his faith society, the

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CIM. They were widespread from the mid-eighties onwards at the annual Keswick Convention. As far as Anglicanism was concerned they were given a respectable face through the advocacy of Handley Moule who, as Principal of Ridley Hall Cambridge, did much to channel the new spiritual enthusiasm of his confident, able and sometimes wealthy ordinands.

Hudson Taylor was one of the greatest and most influential missionaries of the nineteenth century, and he has become so much a touchstone of evangelical missionary ideals that it is hazardous in some circles to criticize him. That is scarcely sensible or healthy. Perhaps the most fundamental question to ask is whether he did not interpret the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a far too subjective fashion. Particularly in his early days it was the Holy Spirit working miraculously against normal, 'natural' expectations which he most longed for. On his first voyage to China his double-masted, sailing ship encountered a great storm off Holyhead. Disaster seemed imminent. He could have no peace until he gave away his lifebelt and thus was able to trust only in God. The danger passed. Though he believed that the Lord had delivered him, he came later to see his action as a 'mistake' because it neglected an

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<sup>63</sup> CMSA, C A1/L7, 194-196, 195, 20/11/1861, Venn to Hamilton.

<sup>64</sup> Moriyama, 'Evolution', 139.

instrument for deliverance which God had put within his reach. It was an error, he acknowledged years later, which was 'very common'.<sup>65</sup> None the less his preaching veered in this direction, and he certainly attracted those who were disposed towards such an understanding. It was very easy, particularly in the minds of immature followers, for this to become the justification of highly individualistic, even arrogant approaches.

Taylor was himself an admirer and follower of the eccentric Charles Gutzlaff.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, many of Taylor's 'principles' were first advocated by Gutzlaff. It has been pertinently said of Gutzlaff that his confidence in simple proclamation, trusting in the Holy Spirit, is, when 'the preacher belongs to a self-confident aggressive culture', 'unlikely to bear the marks of humility' but rather to 'convey didactic superiority'.<sup>67</sup> Taylor was a man of humility, very sensitive to cultural differences. His own principles, however, produced missionaries who were dangerously self-willed.<sup>68</sup>

To take but two examples, his first group of missionaries was anything but satisfactory, and the relationship with the famous C T Studd was by no means easy. Thus Studd at one stage gave up language study (and persuaded others to do likewise) confident that he would receive a Pentecostal gift to speak Chinese.<sup>69</sup> Taylor was able, often with great difficulty, to guide, restrain or remove his most headstrong followers, but little of this wise caution was apparent in his public appeal, and even less in the heroic myth-image which developed about him. Consequently men and women were drawn by Taylor's passion (and perhaps even more so by the presentation of his passion by others who were far less

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wise and spiritual) sometimes to other societies such as the CMS, with visions which were irrelevant of the past, impatient with the present, and confident of the blessings which lay in store in the future for the obedient and the dedicated.

To return to the CMS, there was much that was admirable in the young and able Niger missionaries, but they singularly lacked either humility or tolerance. They wanted to attack what they considered to be the discredited and compromising structures of contemporary missionary societies. They wanted to get rid of sin, to purify the church and, inevitably, they came into conflict with all the compromises and weaknesses which are endemic in any church. Their most publicized confrontation was on the Niger, and with the work of the aged African bishop appointed by Venn many years before, Samuel Crowther. A group of young missionaries led by Wilmot Brooke and John Robinson—the great-uncle of J A T Robinson—set about reforming the church. Everything must be reorganized. A red string must be drawn across the church to separate the saints and the sinners.<sup>70</sup> There was direct, open, highly confrontational and well-reported conflict with the venerable Crowther over the admittedly rather lax way his diocese was run. African opinion was roused to a fever pitch of intensity. For a time a breakaway church was established. Great relationship damage resulted.

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<sup>65</sup> H Taylor, *Hudson Taylor in Early Years: The Growth of a Soul* (London 1911) 191, especially note 1.

<sup>66</sup> (1803-1851) a pioneer Lutheran missionary in China.

<sup>67</sup> George A Hood, *Mission Accomplished? The English Presbyterian Mission in Lingtung, South China: A Study of the Interplay between Mission Methods and Their Historical Context* (Frankfurt 1986) 46.

<sup>68</sup> See A J Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, 7 vols (London 1981-1989) 5, 137-138, 227-231, 260, 338, 361, 384; 6, 375; 7, 58-60, 145-146, 200, 207, 210.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 6, 375.

<sup>70</sup> CMS, G/Y/A3/L3, 467-468, 468, 14/6/1891, Wigram to the Revd J Johnson.

These missionaries are important for a number of reasons. First, though the CMS disowned their extremism, it learned through them to distrust the capacity of indigenous workers. Experience in Africa, India and elsewhere, said the CMS secretary Wigram, 'has taught us that the cooperation of Europeans is needful'.<sup>71</sup> Far from the Corinthian New Testament model being taken as an encouraging indicator of how imperfect young churches could be, it began to be seen as a regrettable consequence of 'the too early withdrawal of Apostolic supervision'.<sup>72</sup> Brooke, Robinson and Crowther all died in the early nineties, but one of the party, Dobinson, lived on and came—it is a matter of moving significance—to change his views entirely. Indeed by 1894 he was pressing for the appointment of an African bishop.<sup>73</sup> He publicly apologized for the way Africans had been treated in 1890: 'May God forgive us the bitter and slanderous and lying thoughts we had against him [Crowther] and others in those dark days of 1890. I doubt if I can ever forgive myself'.<sup>74</sup> What is crucially significant is that the CMS had moved so far from such a vision that it rebuked him, telling him that he had been neither 'very wise' nor 'very fair' to speak as directly as he had done.<sup>75</sup>

Second, the themes of these missionaries were echoed in many other places and right outside of evangelicalism. A new, intense, unbending theology seemed to walk hand-in-hand with the cultural superiority of the new imperialism. Andrew Porter has noticed it in Anglo Catholic missions.<sup>76</sup> Moriyama draws attention to a new desire among the

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UMCA missionaries to encourage 'simplicity of life' amongst the African clergy.<sup>77</sup> There was, he observes, a theological rigidity and certainty that easily became judgemental and intrusive. The letters of theological students were inspected and even the *Church Times* was banned as being too controversial!<sup>78</sup> There was, in other words, a theological climate of certainty and high expectation which entirely lacked the sort of flexibility that is essential in any operation where the giving of greater responsibility to others is central.

### **Indigenous Disinclination to Accept Self-Government**

A clinching argument that the missionaries brought against self-government was that their converts did not actually want it. An assessment of this sort coming from missionaries must be treated with some caution, but there is some evidence that it had elements of truth. There are advantages in dependency, particularly freedom from ultimate financial responsibility. It also avoided deciding which of the local leaders was best fitted for greater responsibility; and that was a relief in a context where deep tribal jealousies often dominated. Finally, European missionary presence was not infrequently a means of securing power, authority and influence locally. There was, then, sometimes a collaboration in dependency.<sup>79</sup> If it was a factor it

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<sup>71</sup> *CMI*, 1895, 84.

<sup>72</sup> [Reference missing in original]

<sup>73</sup> CMSA, G3/A3/1894/60, 29/3/1894, 47, 26/2/1894, the Revd H H Dobinson to the Revd F Baylis.

<sup>74</sup> CMSA, G3/A3/1896/54, 30/3/1896, Dobinson to Baylis.

<sup>75</sup> CMSA, G3/A3/L4, 570-573, 571, Baylis to Dobinson.

<sup>76</sup> 'Evangelical Enthusiasm, Missionary Motivation and West Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Career of G.W. Brooke', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 6 (1977) 27.

<sup>77</sup> Moriyama, 'Evolution', 240.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-242.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 227; there were a number of occasions when attempts to develop indigenous leadership seemed to be frustrated, at least in part, by those who stood to benefit from it (Williams, 1990, 134-135).

should not be exaggerated, and there were often times, as after the death of Crowther, when the indigenous cry for recognition was as loud as it was unanswered.

### **Institutional Reluctance to Change**

By the nineties the denominational societies were large organizations with tentacles of influence all over the world. They did not want to give these up. The CMS had, for example, acquired the almost invincible triumphalism of a successful multinational. A glimpse is given of its claims in Irene Barnes's<sup>80</sup> description of Salisbury Square in 1906. With its 256 committees a year, almost 3,600 annual incoming letters, income of about £300,000 pa, 975 missionaries, 8,850 'native' spiritual agents 'under its control', 37 theological and training colleges, 92 boarding schools, 12 industrial institutions, 2,400 elementary schools, 40 hospitals, 73 dispensaries, 21 leper homes, 6 homes for the blind, 18 orphanages, 6 other homes and refuges, and 17 presses and publishing offices,<sup>81</sup> it was a mini-empire and, in truth, no more disposed to grant real independence to its satellites than the Colonial Office.

### **The Development of an Integrationist Model**

By the early twentieth century even the CMS had abandoned self-

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government as a goal for the indigenous church. The aim now identified was still independence but at a distant date and in a church where the races would be united. That was clearly a noble aim but all previous missiological reasoning taught that it would mean that the most culturally dominant would also be ecclesiologically dominant. Eugene Stock, who was the great architect of CMS policy at the turn of the century, accepted this unblushingly. Yes, he acknowledged, European leadership would have a large role in the church,<sup>82</sup> much larger than was once envisaged, but, in an integrated church, nobody would mind. If 'natives with power and influence to lead, are not produced, then, undoubtedly, the English will retain the virtual direction, and the Native Christians will be the first to desire that they should'.<sup>83</sup> Almost all church history taught otherwise and Stock was a church historian! Some of his opponents in South India made the reality very plain. The English would never accept indigenous authority and consequently indigenous Christians would be for ever subordinate. There was a choice. 'The Native Church' must either be absorbed into the Church of England or 'be allowed to run an independent course alongside'.<sup>84</sup>

### **POSTSCRIPT**

The direct consequence was that, in terms of developing institutional structures and leadership, the church overseas seemed to move backwards in the first half of the twentieth century. In India, in 1939, there were only three Indian bishops, and only one of these was a diocesan. In West Africa there were never more than two African suffragan bishops before

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<sup>80</sup> Miss Barnes became editor of the *Gleaner* in 1902 and wrote a number of missionary books mainly for young people.

<sup>81</sup> Irene H Barnes, *In Salisbury Square* (London 1906) 18, 27, 77-80.

<sup>82</sup> CMSA, G/CC b 4/2c, 30/10, 6, 20/11/1899, Constitution of Native Church Sub-Committee Resolutions Tentatively Passed; see also Williams, *Ideal*, 215-227.

<sup>83</sup> *CMI* (1901) 255.

<sup>84</sup> CMSA, G/C 8/2, 'Abstract of Replies to Report and Memorandum on Native' Churches', 18-19.

1937, and there was no African diocesan to follow Crowther until the late fifties. In Central Africa the brave UMCA dream of creating African bishops and archdeacons was not realized and, by the time of independence in 1961, no African had received more than the largely valueless title of canon.<sup>85</sup> The commitment to training ordinands, if anything, declined. Missionaries seemed even more comfortable with imperialism. Few recognized that it was in terminal decline. Lesslie Newbigin describes his first impressions of his Indian Presbyterian mission station in 1936:

When at last we arrived we were astonished to find what looked to our eyes like a spacious palace: broad steps fringed by potted plants, lights at the top, glimpses of spacious rooms within, and a line of white-clad figures standing in an attitude which combined welcome, dignity and complete subordination. We had not reckoned that the word 'bungalow' meant anything so palatial. It was as though we had stepped out of the life of the twentieth-century student into that of an eighteenth-century country gentleman. And that feeling was renewed when we were awakened

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next morning by a servant with a tray of breakfast and found ourselves looking out over a scene of breath-taking beauty.<sup>86</sup>

He noted in his diary:

I must say I couldn't help being horrified by the sort of relation that seemed to exist between missionaries and the people. It seemed so utterly remote from the New Testament. There seems to be no question of getting alongside them and sharing their troubles and helping them spiritually. There never seems to be a word of encouragement. We drive up like lords in a car, soaking everybody else with mud on the way, and then carry on a sort of inspection, finding all the faults we can, putting everybody through their paces. They all sort of stand to attention and say 'Sir'. It's awful. And yet I know how easily tired I get and how much I need the help of things like motor cars and electric fans, etc. There's a sore thing to be tackled here. But one thing is as sure as death: surely they won't stand this sort of thing from the white man much longer.<sup>87</sup>

We can perhaps thank God that they didn't and yet how much more virile and identified with its own culture the church might have been had it taken more seriously the vision of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches which was the accepted wisdom of so much mid-Victorian missiology.

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<sup>85</sup> Moriyama, 'Evolution', 275.

<sup>86</sup> L Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography*, (Geneva 1985) 40.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid* 41.