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Church History 2

From Mission Field to Mainstream:
The Effect of 19th Century Missions
on the
Present-day Anglican Communion

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Christianity today is facing a major geographical shift, with the Church growing rapidly in the Southern Hemisphere while stagnating or contracting in North America and Europe. This shift, which began in the late 20th century and is projected to continue throughout the 21st century, bears witness to the evangelical missionary activities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Interestingly, the churches established in the course of these missionary activities are now posing major challenges to the churches of their “mother” countries. While theological liberalization has weakened the mainline denominations of Europe and North America, the churches they birthed in their missionary endeavors have remained doctrinally orthodox. In addition, the churches in the Southern Hemisphere are now beginning to assert their numerical dominance to influence the direction and theology of their mother denominations.

A comprehensive treatment of this topic would exceed the scope of this paper. Therefore, this paper will concentrate on the current tensions and recent events of the Anglican Communion. While the Episcopal Church USA (hereafter referred to as ECUSA) and the Church of England have attempted to liberalize their doctrines, practices, and theology, recent events demonstrate the tenaciousness with which the African churches of the Anglican Communion adhere to the doctrine inherited from their founding missionaries of these Churches. The resulting tensions have resulted in conflicts and recriminations that currently threaten the very Anglican structure of the Western world.

The Beginning: Nineteenth Century Missions and Theology

The Anglican Church of the 19th century held to doctrinally orthodox beliefs inherited from the Reformation. In America, ECUSA priests and preachers participated in the Great Awakenings of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These participants included such ministers as George Whitefield, who participated in Great Awakenings in both England and the colonies; and Philadelphia’s Dudley Tinge,¹ who led great revivals not only at his own church but throughout the city. The missionary movement that arose from the religious awakenings in England led to the founding of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799.²

Unfortunately, the visionaries who founded the CMS did not represent the majority view of Anglicanism. Most of the Church hierarchy bitterly opposed mission work, considering evangelicalism a “disease to be extirpated” rather than a positive force for the gospel.³ In fact, after the formation of the CMS, the letter sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury went unanswered for more than a year, and then the Archbishop’s answer came by way of personal interview with William Wilberforce, one of the CMS founders.⁴

The men who applied for mission work held to the orthodox beliefs commonly held in Anglicanism since the time of Thomas Cranmer and embodied in the 39 Articles of Faith: Belief in the Trinity (Article 1), the sufficiency of Scripture for salvation (Article 6), and original sin (Article 9). Furthermore, like those who established the CMS, they were greatly influenced by the evangelical fervor of the religious revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries⁵

One of the CMS founders, Charles Simeon, wrote a series of commentaries that defined evangelical Anglican theology.⁶ Simeon's commentaries outline some of the doctrines that would later become flash points in the fight within the Communion. In his notes concerning 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, in which Paul addresses those Corinthian Christians who have left homosexuality and other sexual sins, Simeon writes, "To those who are yet living in sin — Is there a person here, who, whether openly or in secret, gives way to uncleanness? Thou 'shalt never inherit the kingdom of God.'⁷"

Mission: Africa

Sierra Leone

The CMS, of course, began with a global view toward missions, but their first endeavor targeted Africa. The first CMS missionaries were, ironically, German Lutherans: Melcoir Renner and Peter Hartwig.⁸ Renner and Hartwig landed in Sierra Leone, a colony for freed slaves, in 1804. This mission was a disaster, as Renner and Hartwig first stayed longer in Freetown than planned and then spent their time arguing with each other. The Freetown populace considered their arguments the prime entertainment of the day.⁹

Undeterred, the CMS tried again in 1806, again sending Germans to Sierra Leone. This time, the missionaries concentrated on education and eradication of the slave trade when their missionary efforts failed.¹⁰ One of the missionaries, Leopold Butscher, argued that the slave trade could not cease until the inland tribes found a new commodity to sustain their trade with the Europeans.

The CMS continued to emphasize Africa in its missionary efforts, expanding its missions into Zulu territory in 1836¹¹ and, in 1841, to the Yoruba, Niger, and East Africa missions.¹² Of these missions, the Niger mission proved both a bitter disappointment and a great victory for the CMS.

The disaster came in the casualty rate of the expedition: fully one-third of the crew of the three steamers deployed died of fever. However, one of the CMS missionaries on the expedition, Samuel Crowther, not only survived but also emerged as one of the most influential Anglicans in West Africa in his time.

Crowther was a freed slave who adopted an English name at his Christian baptism into the Church. In 1843, Crowther was ordained in London as Sierra Leone's first African Anglican priest. He was later ordained bishop of the Niger Mission in 1864.¹³

Crowther demonstrated an original aim of the CMS: the founding of native Churches along the lines of the Church of England. The founders of the CMS believed strongly in the episcopacy and liturgical worship, and they could not envision churches formed outside the ecclesiastical structure and lacking formal worship.¹⁴ On the other hand, they also envisioned independent churches that could stand alone without support from the Church of England.

Henry Venn, one of the CMS founders, articulated this policy from the outset. Venn became secretary of the CMS in 1841 and served until his retirement in 1872. Venn's strategy became

known as the “euthanasia of missionary operations.¹⁵” Venn stood against the prevailing trend in the Church of England for “missionary bishops,” arguing missions needed “native bishops” instead.¹⁶ According to Venn, missionary bishops were too dependent on the Church of England and would therefore refuse to make decisions based on the good of the believers in their charge. Venn described his system as an effort “to prepare the Native Converts, in their transition from heathenism to Christianity, for the euthanasia of the Mission in the establishment of a Native Church under Native Pastors and a Native Episcopate.¹⁷” Venn sought to avoid the problems faced by African missions planted by other agencies: the secularization of the missionary, the dependence of the converts on the missionary, and the temptation for missionaries to settle down rather than carry the gospel to new areas.¹⁸ Venn first formulated his policy in 1854, putting forth his now famous “self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending system” philosophy¹⁹. Crowther’s ordination was a major step forward in implementing Venn’s plan.²⁰

Venn faced opposition from all sides in advocating Crowther’s ordination, the most vehement being racist tendencies among the Church of England. Venn received a letter from West Africa opposing Crowther’s position as bishop by saying “to place a ‘white man’ ‘under a black man as bishop’ would be to degrade the European.²¹”

To be sure, Venn often displayed inconsistency in his policies. For instance, he argued for, and received, a missionary bishop to China in 1872.²² However, Venn desired the independence of native converts, and he knew European missionaries often resisted attempts at independent thinking among their congregations.

Unfortunately, while Venn’s policies may have shaped the CMS, secular politics— in the form of colonization and commercial imperialism — would soon intrude on CMS work. Crowther was to be the first victim in the colonization of the Church in Africa.

In 1880, traders on the Niger river began attacking Crowther by offering the CMS the support of the Niger Company on the condition that a European be appointed head of a new mission in Crowther’s territory.²³ Crowther managed to fend off the attack, only to be subverted by a group of young European missionaries in 1890. Crowther died in 1891 and was replaced by a European.

Crowther’s experiences sparked a renewed effort among African churches for independence. That independence would not come until after political independence came in the twentieth century. In spite of these setbacks, Anglicanism continued to advance in Africa, with the creation of dioceses in Western Equatorial Africa in 1893,²⁴ Uganda in 1909,²⁵ and Rwanda in 1939.²⁶

Uganda

The Church in Uganda owes her existence to David Livingstone. After his trip across Africa, Livingstone returned to England in 1857 to garner support for mission work in central Africa. One of the first to answer the call was a man forever linked with Livingstone: Henry M. Stanley, the reporter who uttered the famous words, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume²⁷.” Stanley arrived in

Uganda in 1874 and met Mtesa, the king of the ruling Bagandan tribe.²⁸ Stanley and Linant de Bellefonds, a French citizen, undertook Mtesa's training in Christianity.²⁹

Mtesa expressed interest in Christianity for two reasons: the English ambivalence to the slave trade and English mechanical devices. Mtesa soon professed Christianity, but Stanley was hesitant to baptize him until certain the profession was genuine.³⁰

Trouble came to the mission in 1879 with the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries known as the White Fathers. Mtesa was confused at the differences between Catholicism and Anglicanism. Each group gathered new converts. Arab traders, still seething because the English had replaced them as Mtesa's advisors, stirred trouble as well. The situation was still unresolved when Mtesa died in 1884. Mtesa's son, Mwanga, succeeded him.

Mwanga's ascension and subsequent actions nearly destroyed the CMS mission. Although Mwanga had studied Christianity with both the Protestants and Catholics, he soon listened to the Arabs succeeded in convincing him the missionaries were only a precursor to European colonization. Mwanga instituted intense persecution on the Christians, Catholic and Protestant alike.³¹

The persecution was both widespread and brutal. In 1885, Anglican bishop James Hannington, newly arrived from England as missionary Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa, was detained and brutalized by Mwanga's men. Hannington's last words were prophetic: "Go tell your master that I have purchased the road to Uganda with my blood³²." In 1886, Mwanga burned 32 young court pages (22 Roman Catholic and 10 Anglican) alive for refusing to renounce Christianity

In a short time, the CMS mission was reduced to one person: Alexander MacKay, a Scottish engineer and missionary. Mackay first sailed to Africa in 1876 and immediately began putting his engineering skills to use. After he arrived in Africa, he constructed a 230-mile road to Lake Victoria; he then built a boat to complete the trip to Uganda.³³ During Mtesa's reign, MacKay engaged himself in translation of the scriptures and teaching prospective converts. In the heat of Mwanga's persecutions, MacKay remained in Uganda because he was simply too valuable an engineer to be killed or exiled. The Muslims finally convinced Mwanga to expel MacKay in 1887, but he simply moved to Tanganyika on Lake Victoria and continued his translation work. MacKay died in 1890, the year the Anglican Church dispatched Alfred R. Tucker as the new bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa.³⁴

If Mwanga thought persecution would destroy Ugandan Christianity, he seriously miscalculated. The attitude of the martyrs, especially that of the martyred court pages, led others to inquire about the faith. Christianity began spreading even faster than the persecution. In a twist of fate, the Muslims deposed Mwanga, but the Christians re-instated him as ruler.³⁵ The Anglican mission, under Tucker's leadership, grew into a self-supporting organization. When Tucker arrived in Uganda in 1890, his flock was composed of approximately 200 baptized Christians. In 1908, baptized Anglicans numbered nearly 63,000. ³⁶ Although persecution remains a hallmark

of the Ugandan Church, its growth continued throughout the twentieth century to total nearly 8 million members.³⁷

Rwanda

CMS involvement in Rwanda was either providential or accidental. Dr. Albert Cook founded the Mengo Hospital in Uganda in 1897 and returned to England to recruit doctors to serve there. Two medical students answered the call: Algie Stanley Smith and Leonard Sharp.³⁸ The two sailed for Uganda in October 1914, only to find upon arriving they had been drafted to aid the British war effort in Africa during World War I.

While serving the British army filled their medical interests, both men held a deep passion for missions. They had read the book *The Heart of Africa* before sailing to Uganda; the kingdoms described in the book grabbed their attention. Smith and Sharp became determined to spearhead missionary activity for the CMS in Ruanda-Urundi. Unfortunately for them, these kingdoms lay in German territory.

British advances during the War eliminated German rule in Ruanda-Urundi. Smith and Sharp applied for permits to visit the kingdoms. By some oversight, they received their permits. The Belgians then in control of Ruanda-Urundi never had a chance to approve the permits — but neither could they veto the trip if they didn't know about it.

The two men found the area just as they anticipated and returned excited at the prospect of establishing missions there. After the war, Smith and Sharp returned to London to convince the CMS to sponsor them in Ruanda-Urundi, going so far as to promise to raise their own funds.³⁹

The two men hit a snag with the Belgian government, which gained permanent control of Ruanda-Urundi after World War I. The Belgians refused to grant them the permits necessary to enter the area. Undeterred, Smith and Sharp established a mission at Kigezi in Uganda. Smith and Sharp, with their new wives, began work in Kigezi in 1921 while waiting for the opportunity to continue their original plans.⁴⁰

In 1922, the Belgians granted the British government a strip of land in eastern Ruanda for a proposed Cape-to-Cairo railway. Smith and Sharp immediately applied for and received permission to enter the area.⁴¹ Although the British abandoned the railway project in 1924, Smith and Sharp (and the CMS) were in Ruanda to stay. Geoffrey Holmes, one of their co-workers, established relations with the Tutsi ruler Musinga. Holmes soon received help: the Reverend Herbert Jackson and an English-educated native, Kosiya Shalita.

Thus, by the 1930's CMS work was firmly established in what would later become Rwanda. Rwanda's Anglican primate would play a major role in Anglican affairs later in the century.

Cause for Conflict

Meanwhile, Anglican theology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries came under attack from the liberalizing influences of Darwinism and secular philosophies. This trend affected missions in two ways: the theology of the missionaries commissioned and deployed, and in the theological training of native converts sent back to Europe for training.

A prime example of the effects on foreign missions can be found in the story of Anglican professor William Henry Griffith Thomas. Thomas served at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford from 1805 to 1910 and at Wycliffe College of the University of Toronto from 1910 to 1919.⁴² In 1920, Thomas accepted an offer to travel to China to minister to missionaries there. Before he left, Thomas was advised “by one who knows the Chinese situation not to introduce controversial topics in any of my addresses but to leave these to be mentioned by missionaries, which, it was said, is certain to be the case.”⁴³

According to Thomas, missionaries in China were “already divided into two camps, those who favoured critical views and those who were strongly conservative.”⁴⁴ Among the views expressed by some of the younger missionaries were a denial of Biblical infallibility; a minimizing of the supernatural; and a move from Christian exclusivism regarding salvation.⁴⁵

Thomas also encountered the problem of the “returned student,” which he described as “the man who has been to America and obtained a degree there.”⁴⁶ According to Thomas, the chief complaint of the native Christians in China was that such a student “often returns home to China with views of the Bible and Christianity that are definitely critical.”⁴⁷ These students often denied the resurrection and the tenets of the Apostles’ Creed.

While Thomas’ experience concerned missionary activity in China by American missionaries, the Church of England suffered the same effects. Scientific humanism was making inroads in the Church, leading one Anglican cleric to state that “in the last generation men were unable to take Jesus as Lord, and were sad. Now they are choosing other masters, and are glad.”⁴⁸

While the effects of modernism decimated the Church of England and ECUSA, the Churches of Africa were experiencing problems of their own. Even after independence swept the continent in the 1950’s and 1960’s, Christianity was still connected with the former imperialism that had held it captive for centuries.⁴⁹ African leaders sought to re-make Christianity in the context of African culture. As one African Christian put it, Africans would accept Christianity not “as I see it in Europe, but Christianity according to Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰ This tendency would have far-reaching consequences, especially within the Anglican Communion.

Successes of Orthodoxy

Even with the problems faced by the Church and its association with the imperialist policies of Europe, the Churches of Africa continued to grow. In 1998, the Church of England recorded 2.8 million active members among a membership of 27 million; ECUSA recorded only 2.5 million total members that year. Meanwhile, the Anglican Churches of Africa numbered 20.5 million in 1998.⁵¹ This growth brought a new sense of empowerment to the Anglican Churches in Africa.

This empowerment produced conflict foremost in the issue of human sexuality. ECUSA first addressed homosexuality in the 65th General Convention in 1976. Resolution A069 stated that “it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.”⁵² Between 1976 and 1994, the General Convention considered 25 resolutions pertaining to homosexual rights within ECUSA.

In February 1997, 80 Anglican leaders from the Southern Hemisphere met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to sign a statement condemning homosexuality. In part, the statement read that “we are deeply concerned that the setting aside of biblical teaching in such actions as the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions... is totally unacceptable to us.”⁵³ Later in 1997, African bishops from 16 nations met in Dallas with conservatives from ECUSA and issued a statement confirming the Kuala Lumpur Statement.⁵⁴

In 1998 at the Lambeth Conference, homosexuality again became the defining issue. The conference, held every 10 years, gathers bishops from throughout the Anglican Communion to London to discuss matters pertinent to the entire Communion. At this conference, 736 bishops were registered: 316 from the United States, Canada, and Europe, and 319 from Africa and Asia.⁵⁵ A sub-section of the Conference was charged with crafting a response to the homosexual agenda of ECUSA. The final document declared homosexual activity to be incompatible with scripture and advised against homosexual ordinations or the blessing of homosexual unions. The resolution passed 526 to 70.⁵⁶

In the aftermath of the vote, opposing ECUSA bishops responded with defiance. One bishop, the Reverend Martin Smith, stated that “the Archbishop of Canterbury has made no secret of the threats made by certain bishops from southeast Asia and Africa... not only to walk out of the Lambeth Conference but to break up the Communion unless there was a condemnation of homosexual practice.”⁵⁷

The bishops of the Southern Hemisphere weren't finished. Conservatives in ECUSA, seeking support in their stand for doctrinal orthodoxy in sexual matters, appealed to primates abroad to help in create a new Anglican province. At a consecration service on 29 January 2000 held in Singapore, Bishops Chuck Murphy and John Rodgers were consecrated as Missionary Bishops to the United States from Rwanda and South East Asia by The Most Rev. Emmanuel Kolini of Rwanda and The Most Rev. Datuk Yong Ping Chung of Singapore.⁵⁸ Bishops Murphy and Rodgers thus became the first bishops of the new Anglican Mission in America (AMiA).

Again, ECUSA bishops and dioceses responded by retaliating against African Churches. In a direct response to Archbishop Kolini's participation, Trinity Church, New York, the richest ECUSA parish, denied a \$146,000 request from the Province of Rwanda, citing Rwanda's activities and blaming the province's bishops for “actively working to promote schism within the Episcopal Church in the United States.”⁵⁹

The AMiA has continued its growth in spite of opposition from ECUSA and Archbishop of Canterbury William Carey. On June 24, 2001, Archbishops Yong and Kolini consecrated four additional priests in a service held in Denver. Both Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey and Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold of ECUSA issued strongly worded statements ahead of the consecration service; both warnings were ignored.⁶⁰

Conclusion

It is obvious that CMS missionary activity of the 19th century is now coming full circle. At last count, the Anglican Mission in America claims over 40 congregations. The AMiA now states on its Web site that “we are becoming the mission field.⁶¹” Conservatives within the Church of England and ECUSA now look to the Southern Hemisphere for support in maintaining doctrinal integrity in the face of liberal apostasy. The men who formed the Church Missionary Society in 1799 could never realize the impact their actions would have 200 years later. In the future, the catholic Church may well owe her existence to the missionary activities of the former mission fields of Africa.

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- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.
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- ²⁰ Ward, 157.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 159.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 160.
- ²³ Sanneh, 171.
- ²⁴ Hewitt, 49.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 219.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 270.
- ²⁷ Tucker, 153.

²⁸ Kenneth Scott LaTourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Harper & Brothers, New York & London, 1943) Volume 5, 413.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 413.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 414.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 414.

³² "James Hannington and the Martyrs of Uganda," James Kiefer's Christian Biographies, accessed 8 May 2002, available <http://elvis.rowan.edu/%7Ekilroy/JEK/home.html>.

³³ Tucker, 157.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁵ LaTourette, 415.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 416.

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⁴³ *Ibid.*, 630.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 631.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 632-633.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 644.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 644.

⁴⁸ Hewitt, 409.

⁴⁹ Ram Desai, Editor, *Christianity in Africa As Seen by Africans* (Alan Swallow, Denver, 1962), 70.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵¹ All membership statistics are from Adherents.com [on-line], accessed 13 November 2001, available <http://www.adherents.com/>.

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