

Not Peace but a Sword: Missionaries, Humanitarianism, and Slavery in Late

Nineteenth-Century Central Africa

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Abstract

This chapter examines two missionary responses to the conditions of late nineteenth-century Central Africa. The first was the Abbey, or mission colony, which was used by the Catholic White Fathers who established themselves in Central Africa in 1885. The second, embodied in faith missions such as the Plymouth Brethren who entered Katanga in 1886, involved the repudiation of the message of Christianity, Civilisation and Commerce in favour of an evangelical simplicity and identification with local societies. Providing little evidence of engagement with a non-violent, reconciliatory ethic that underpins peacemaking, the Plymouth Brethren and White Fathers instead became embroiled in the slave trade and internal slavery and made little headway until colonial occupation which they both came to accept as the best means of allowing Christianisation.

Keywords: abolitionism, African trading barons, empire, faith missions, humanitarianism, the Plymouth Brethren, slave trade, the White Fathers

Introduction

The notion of peacemaking had little currency in the Nineteenth Century Missionary Movement to Africa. Instead broad ideas about social transformation were

organised around the concept of humanitarianism, which had been given such a stimulus by the abolition of the slave trade within the British Empire in 1807 that by the 1840s it had become a defining element of British national and imperial identity. Elements within international civil society engaged in passionate debate about the duties that accompanied the possession of empire. Chief amongst these groups were missionary societies and their allies such as the Aborigines' Protection Society (APS) which were accorded a semi-formal status as mediators between the British and local peoples and had some success in the defence of the indigenous inhabitants of colonial settler societies. Empire made concerted political action possible, allowing missionaries in a transnational network stretching from Cape Town to New Zealand to influence British legislators in London. By dint of their long service and commitment to liberal and humanitarian values men such as John Philip of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Samuel Marsden of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in New Zealand and Australia might qualify as peacemakers in their efforts to mitigate the worst effects of cultural encounter on imperial frontiers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Certainly, their model of Christian humanitarian imperialism had its greatest triumphs in this period.

However, empire, even the rapidly expanding British version, had its limitations and while humanitarian intervention continued in Africa during the latter half of the nineteenth century its achievements were more modest. Imperial parsimony and a reluctance to intervene beyond colonial borders trammelled moral action, restricting its aims and reach. The end of American slavery following the Civil War and the high-profile career of David Livingstone kept humanitarianism on the agenda but the context for missionaries entering Central Africa was radically different. First,

missionaries began to turn away from the imbrication of Christianity, Capitalism, and Commerce, exemplified by the work of John Philip of the LMS, to a simplified programme of evangelism. Secondly, they increasingly moved beyond the bounds of empire. Now working in the African interior, they were politicised by the Indian Ocean and Luso-African slave trades rather than by white settlers. Here the activities of missionaries captured public attention from time to time, but they never had the notoriety of their predecessors working in South Africa or New Zealand. It was more important that missionary societies working in Central Africa came to terms with indigenous authorities.¹

The penetration of capitalist imperialism into the region had taken an indirect form leading to the emergence of new trading barons-cum-war lords who operated the Indian Ocean and Luso-African slave trade in a climate of extreme violence. These African leaders used missionaries for material and political advantage but proved little interested in the import of their message.

What is striking about the missionary encounter with Africa in the late nineteenth century are the limitations, even absence, of missionary visions of peace, and the impact of this lack on effective peacemaking. Beyond a great enthusiasm for evangelism, the desire to eradicate slavery, and a vague notion of civilisation, most missionaries entering Central Africa possessed few theological ideas about how to transform the societies they encountered.² There was certainly little evidence of a non-violent, reconciliatory ethic that underpins the peace idea. Besides a literal

¹ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2–47.

² Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 290–92.

reading of the Acts of the Apostles missionaries styled themselves on heroic figures from literature and drew some of their best and worst missiological models from their understanding of the Christian encounter with medieval Europe where missionaries faced so-called barbarous pagan tribes. These strategies included protective enclaves and the very inverse of peacemaking: crusading.

The core of this chapter compares and contrasts two missionary responses to the conditions of late nineteenth-century Central Africa. The first was the Abbey, or mission colony, which was used by the Catholic White Fathers who established themselves in Central Africa in 1885. The second, embodied in faith missions such as the Plymouth Brethren³ who entered Katanga in 1886, involved the repudiation of the message of Christianity, Civilisation and Commerce in favour of an evangelical simplicity and identification with local societies. The chapter will examine how in their attempts to come to terms the crisis-ridden societies they encountered both the Plymouth Brethren and White Fathers became embroiled in the slave trade and internal slavery and made little headway until colonial occupation which they both came to accept as the best means of allowing Christianisation. Alliance with colonial authorities facilitated the creation of protective enclaves within large mission communities in which social relations could be revised. Faced with insecurity and what they saw as the capricious nature of indigenous leaders they saw the benefits of externally imposed order and took the pragmatic view aptly summarised by Ian Linden that Africans “could only be freed for Christianity by the Sword”.⁴

³ Many of these missionaries would have described themselves as Open Brethren rather than using the generic label Plymouth Brethren.

⁴ Ian Linden, *The Catholic Church and the Struggle for Zimbabwe* (London: Longman, 1979), 9.

Christianity, Humanitarianism, and Empire

This essay builds upon recent scholarship, which has begun to nuance the triumphal history of abolitionism as a legitimization of British civilising mission and the hallmark of a benevolent imperialism by highlighting the limitations of imperial power and instrumentality of the anti-slavery rhetoric.⁵ The idea of trusteeship, advanced by Edmund Burke in 1783 to avoid the repetition of abuses committed by the East India Company, appeared to be appropriate for the eighteenth century society where government was limited and the idea of imperial control over other societies was still fairly undeveloped. Nevertheless, the rather limited notion of ‘protection’ that trusteeship entailed persisted as a key plank of the humanitarian approach to empire throughout the nineteenth century. British governments remained keen to limit the expense of direct intervention.⁶ Missionaries were at times dismayed by the consequences of imperial policies such as the empowerment of traditionalist chiefs or Muslim emirs under indirect rule, or as we shall see, the excesses of white settlers. But on the whole they viewed the existence of the British Empire as part of a divine plan for the evangelisation of the world, turning it to their advantage

⁵ Derek Peterson, “Introduction. Abolitionism and Political Thought in Britain and East Africa,” in *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, ed. Derek R. Peterson (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010), 4, 6–7; Boyd Hilton, “‘1807 and All That’: Why Britain Outlawed Her Slave Trade,” in *Abolitionism and Imperialism*, 63–83.

⁶ Andrew Porter, “Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3: *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 199.

wherever they could.⁷ It also made early nineteenth century humanitarian action possible.⁸

The problem was that the British Empire was not as homogenous or rationally organised as its policy makers liked to believe. At times dragged in by adventurers on the spot, or to block foreign rivals, “British expansion”, John Darwin explains, “was driven not by official designs but by the chaotic pluralism of British interests at home and of their agents and allies abroad.”⁹ The administration and defense of such a vast raft of territories was something of a nightmare and British politicians were sparing in their use of soldiers and gunboats. Inevitably, some regions were deemed more significant than others due to their strategic or economic interest. Until 1900 two thirds of British migrants went to the United States of America while almost all of the rest went to four main settlement zones: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa in the British Empire, and these, along with India, usually took priority.

Missionary interests often ran against those of empire when it came to their relations with white settlers. John Philip, the impressive and long serving superintendent of the LMS in South Africa, regarded traders and land hungry farmers as the greatest threat to his organisation’s work. Keen to extend LMS authority over his indigenous neighbours Philip fought a continuous rearguard action against settler groups, blaming them for hindering emancipation, evangelism, and the work of civilisation. He became an inveterate traveller, correspondent, and

⁷ Hastings, *Church in Africa*, 409; Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992).

⁸ Porter, “Trusteeship,” 202; Andrew Porter, *Religion Versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 117.

⁹ Darwin, *Empire Project*, 3.

researcher in support of his holistic mission of Christianity, commerce, and civilisation, founded on the equality of all human beings.¹⁰ An early victory, stemming from his visit to London 1826, was the permanent status given to Ordinance 50 (1828), which enhanced the freedom of the Khoi. In the Cape he made use of a transnational humanitarian network that comprised the Clapham Sect, the anti-slavery Society and the family of T. F. Buxton to pressure the British government to guarantee the rights, freedoms and security of Khoi and Xhosa peoples living on the frontier, feeding in first hand reports of abuses documented by missionaries on the ground. Thomas Buxton, his wife Hannah, and their daughters played a central role coordinating a web of missionary correspondence, which recorded abuses of indigenous peoples in or on the margins of settler societies.¹¹ In this way parliamentarians were alerted to situations comparable to the South Africa such as New Zealand where Samuel Marsden highlighted the violence associated with arms, drink, and rights over women that accompanied European trade with the region.¹²

The *Report* of the Select Committee on Aborigines represented a considerable success for Christian humanitarian imperialism. Liberal minded missionaries had exposed the violent underbelly of European expansion and made it a global issue. They were recognised as exceptional and important intermediaries in relations between settlers and indigenous peoples across empire and their combined

¹⁰ Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground, Colonialism, Missions, and the Context for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002), 243–58.

¹¹ Elbourne, *Blood Ground*, 282.

¹² Alan Lester, “Humanitarians and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Missions and Empire*, The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series, ed. Norman Etherington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64–68, 76.

influence helped move the reluctant British authorities to annex New Zealand in 1840 and Natal in 1843 in order to prevent further depredations.¹³ But by the end of the decade the movement was running out of steam, its optimism replaced by evidence of humanitarian failure and pessimistic views about the possibility of non-European progress. This evidence included: the disaster of the Niger Expedition in 1841; the failure of slave emancipation in the West Indies to engender capitalist relations and Christian conversion; the Indian Rebellion (1857–58) and the New Zealand Wars (1845–72); and the persistence of the slave trade along the West African coast. The cumulative effect of shattered liberal expectations was the rise of Social Darwinism and the hardening of racial boundaries.¹⁴

Nevertheless, humanitarianism remained on the international agenda, experiencing something of a revival in the 1860s and 70s. Abolitionism was given a boost by the North's victory in the Civil War (1861–65) while the very public life and death of David Livingstone drew attention to another slave trade in East and Central Africa dominated by Arabs and their Swahili acolytes, coordinated from Zanzibar. An icon of Victorian Britain, Livingstone's biography was rapidly captured in print, turning him into the standard bearer of civility and liberal values. First, his widely publicised travels in East and Central Africa stimulated a new missionary impulse into these hitherto 'unreached' territories. Secondly, he revitalised the project of Christianity, Civilisation, and Commerce. Doubtless he advocated a civilising mission ideology because it seemed the best means of combatting the Indian Ocean slave trade, though he also had an unwavering belief in the providential origin of

¹³ Porter, "Trusteeship," 207–209; Porter, *Religion Versus Empire*, 82–83, 109–29, 139–44.

¹⁴ Lester, "Humanitarians and White Settlers," 80.

technology as a powerful manifestation of the gospel's effects.¹⁵ But, Livingstone aside, as Andrew Porter observes the major difference between the 1840s and 1870s was "humanitarians' final abandonment of visions of sweeping transformations of indigenous societies".¹⁶

New Models of Mission

A manifestation of this restricted vision was that elements of the missionary movement lost faith in the liberating potential of Western progress, uncoupling Christianity from commerce and civilisation. It accompanied a key theological and eschatological shift in missionary thinking most prominent in new faith missions but also reverberating through established Protestant and Catholic missionary work. In the first half of the nineteenth century British Protestant millennial beliefs had drawn force from Enlightenment ideas of progress. Missionaries had viewed their task as the conversion of the world which would inaugurate the millennium of peace, happiness, and plenty, at the end of which Christ's second coming and final judgment would occur. This post-millennialist viewpoint fitted with a reforming mission of Christianity and commerce. The new strain of eschatological thinking was more pessimistic, viewing the world as moving towards its end in the expectation Christ's imminent return and judgment. Only after Christ's return would the millennium dawn. For the missionary movement, premillennial thought created the imperative to evangelise with the greatest possible vigour before the Second Coming

¹⁵ Lawrence Drietsas, *Zambesi: David Livingstone and Expeditionary Science in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 83–85.

¹⁶ Porter, "Trusteeship," 216.

commenced.¹⁷ In political terms, pre-millennial eschatology was a logical response to the failure of mid-nineteenth-century social reform and missionary movements to bring about societal change.¹⁸

By the 1860s criticism of established missionary societies had grown fierce and would intensify in the following two decades. Prominent organisations such as the LMS were now regarded as extravagant and their programmes of Commerce, Civilisation, and Christianity appeared to be reaping diminishing returns. Particular concerns were raised about bloated bureaucracies, churches, and chapel buildings, missionary housing, and the employment of teachers and medical missionaries. Critics demanded simplicity and turned to the Plymouth Brethren for models of governance out of which the faith mission emerged. Missionary societies were to be abandoned in favour of a simpler programme of 'mission' and much of the bureaucracy of the home organisation was to be dismantled and replaced with a small committee of wise elders whose main task was to test missionary vocations. The successful were dispatched to the field with little formal training to work under a senior missionary overseer empowered to make decisions based on knowledge of local conditions. Activities linked to commerce and colonial development were to be abandoned in favour of single-minded evangelism conducted by lay preachers, both indigenous and European. The promotion of Western culture with Christianity was to

¹⁷ Porter, *Religion Versus Empire*, 193–94.

¹⁸ Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 38–42; Peter Kay, "Cecil Polhill, The Pentecostal Missionary Union, and the Fourfold Gospel with Healing and Speaking in Tongues: Signs of a New Movement in Missions," North Atlantic Missiology Project, Henry Martyn Centre, Cambridge, Position Paper no. 20, 1996, 10.

be avoided and missionaries were to assimilate themselves to indigenous modes of living.¹⁹ Thus, new faith missions deliberately sought isolated and unfamiliar territory, far from the contaminating influence of European colonialism and pre-existing missions, usually called 'regions beyond' in missionary literature.

The iconic faith mission was the China Inland Mission (CIM) founded in 1865 by J. Hudson Taylor of Plymouth Brethren background. Adrian Hastings casts Taylor as an extreme advocate of cultural diversity, but his was the first of many faith missions that became increasingly prevalent during the twentieth century as evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity gathered force in the mission fields.²⁰ More importantly here, the CIM was soon followed in Central Africa by what became the Garenganze Evangelical Mission founded by another member of the Brethren, Frederick Stanley Arnot. Furthermore, the acceptance of cultural diversity had a wider appeal, finding its way into models of an inculturated indigenous church advanced by Henry Venn, honorary secretary of the CMS, and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. It also expressed itself in the notion of apostolic poverty, advocated by the founder of the Catholic White Fathers Missions to Central Africa, Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, although this commonality with the Brethren was trammelled by more destructive tendencies such as a crusading mentality and the purchase of child slaves.

Nonetheless, an immediate effect of Livingstone's much publicised lectures in Oxford and Cambridge on the conditions and needs of Central Africa was the

¹⁹ Andrew Porter, "An Overview, 1700–1914," in *Missions and Empire*, 54; Porter, *Religion Versus Empire*, 191–92.

²⁰ Hastings, *Church in Africa*, 290.

founding of a new missionary society in classical mould. This was the Anglo-Catholic Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), which drew some of its earliest and most famous recruits from Oxbridge graduates. The failure and aftermath of the first UMCA mission up the Shire River in 1861 led by Bishop Charles Mackenzie was a presage of things to come. Lasting little more than six months Mackenzie and his band were overwhelmed by a combination of hunger, isolation, and disease, succumbing to malaria and dysentery in January 1862. Beyond the challenge of their conditions came the profound dilemmas thrown up by their encounters with slave caravans. Were they to pass by on the other side or liberate by force? If the latter was the case, by what authority did they fire their guns? How were they to deal with runaway slaves demanding their protection, and how were they to govern freed captives?²¹ In the event UMCA missionaries chose to challenge Yao slavers and raiders with their firearms, causing disquiet amongst their supporters at home. In 1864 Mackenzie's successor withdrew the UMCA mission from Magomero on the Shire River establishing a new base on Zanzibar, which had good communications with Britain and provided a secure environment for the training of African leaders. Twelve years later the Mission re-established itself in the African interior on Likoma Island in Lake Malawi. Here the UMCA missionaries fashioned their missionary practice from their own church history, mindful that northern England and Scotland had been initially evangelised from the offshore Islands of Lindisfarne and Iona respectively.

²¹ Owen Chadwick, *Mackenzie's Grave* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959); Hastings, *Church in Africa*, 409.

Indeed, Livingstone had advocated a similar missionary model in his correspondence, endorsing the system of St Boniface's mission in the eighth century, which was to plant monastic communities amongst pagan Germans. While each of these medieval mission communities evangelised, they also founded schools instructing in Latin, and initiated new forms of agriculture. Livingstone also expressed his admiration for the mission of the Jesuits in China and Angola, which had sought to promote cultural and economic change as an aspect of the Christian message rather than a narrow short-term concentration on personal conversion.²² This holistic approach represented for Livingstone the most realistic chance of realising his vision of civilising Christianity and the best means of providing mission communities in Central Africa with permanence and security. It also explains his widespread appeal to Anglo-Catholics and Catholics as well as evangelicals. The former Professor of Church History at the Sorbonne, Charles Lavigerie, envisaged a similar model of enclaves to pioneer White Fathers' mission around the Great Lakes, though such a scheme did not save the White Fathers from embroilment with slavery and the slave trade or eventual need for protection from the colonial state.

Mission and Slavery in West Central Africa

West of the Shire Valley in what became the Congo Free State (1885–1908) (present day Democratic Republic of Congo) societies were in profound crisis, caught in a vice-like grip between the Indian slave trade from the west and Luso-African slavers' trade from the east. The latter inveigled their way into local politics by taking sides in

²² Andrew Ross, *David Livingstone: Mission and Empire* (London: Continuum, 2002), 122. On Boniface see C. H. Talbot, "St Boniface and the German Mission," *Studies in Church History* 6 (1970): 50–51.

succession disputes, arming one side against the other, causing the collapse of the kingdoms of the savannah. Belgian commercial penetration from 1885 intensified the process, speeding up the destruction of longstanding moral economies. Power was separated from political responsibility and it degenerated into force driven by economic imperatives such as drought, exhaustion of export resources, or declining export prices. Traders repudiated alliances with chiefs, and traditional leaders broke faith with their subjects.

Indicative of the changing political circumstances was the transformation of the practice of procuring slaves. Prisoners of war or pawns for debt were still the first to be enslaved but on the forward edge of slaving zones communities enslaved their own in acts of betrayal, or they enslaved their neighbours by means of kidnapping and raiding. As John Springer, pioneering Methodist Episcopal Church missionary to the Lunda, observed, the “stranger unattended or friendless” was particularly vulnerable.²³ The balance of power between kings, officers, kinsmen, and citizens was destroyed. Trading barons such as Tippu Tip, Ngongo Luteta, and Msiri ruled without consent through armed plutocracies, which John Lonsdale termed “a single-minded African imperialism of unfree trade”.²⁴ As a means of self-assertion they fashioned themselves into what David Gordon describes as “warrior leaders”, engaging in extreme acts of theatrical violence, involving torture, execution, and display of body parts. Some of the major perpetrators of this violence and their axillaries later found

²³ John M. Springer, *Pioneering in the Congo, Katanga* (New York: Katanga Press, 1916), 170.

²⁴ John Lonsdale, “The European Scramble and Conquest in African History,” in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 6, eds. J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 710–11.

employment in the Congo Free State and were responsible for the mass killings that became known as the Red Rubber Crisis.²⁵ Insecurity ruled the day. Villages were overrun or simply disappeared because they were unable to function. Those that did survive did so through extraordinary measures: agriculturalists lived in stockades, on hilltops, or fled into the forest, living in caves or mobile camps; and fishing communities such as those on Lake Kisale constructed defensible islands of reeds on which to reside, while others dug subterranean hideouts.²⁶

The idea of a secure Christian environment embodied in an abbey certainly made sense as a strategy but missionaries entering the Congo region had limited theology for engaging with the societal breakdown around them. Mackenzie's journal entries for his failed UMCA mission reveal him wavering between submission to Christian martyrdom and obligation to defend his followers before opting for the latter. Missionary writing was replete with Pauline resonances about suffering for the sake of gospel in regions beyond but there were few references to Christ the peacemaker. Indeed, missionary pioneers were just as likely to frame their narratives in heroic genres of the hunter or adventurer drawn from imperial adventure fiction, which in turn drew romantic notions from Arthurian or crusade sources.²⁷ Popular

²⁵ David M. Gordon, "Precursors to Red Rubber: Violence in the Congo Free State, 1885–1895," *Past and Present* 236, no. 1 (2017): 145–56.

²⁶ W. F. P. Burton, *When God Changes a Village* (London: Victory Press, 1933), 2–19; W. F. P. Burton, *Honey Bee: Life Story of a Congo Evangelist* (Bath: Echoes of Service, n.d.), 7–9; Clément Brasseur, "L'Urua et le Katanga," *Le Mouvement Géographique* Troisième Article, Pt. II (Avril 1897): 436–48; Thomas Q. Reefe, *The Rainbow and the Kings: A History of the Luba Empire to 1891* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 189–90.

²⁷ Gareth Griffiths, "Popular Imperial Adventure Fiction and the Discourse of Missionary Texts," in *Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality, and Missions*, eds. Jamie S. Scott and Gareth Griffiths (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 60, and 51–66; Linden, *Catholic Church*, 11.

depictions of missionaries in the early nineteenth century as patiently suffering pacifists evolved into more muscular depictions of heroic masculinity.²⁸

To some extent Lavigerie's adoption of the notion of crusading to underpin White Fathers' missions to Central Africa reflected a reactionary and romantic vein of the French Church as it sought to counter anti-clericalism and find its roots in the Medieval Era. Nevertheless, Lavigerie did envisage his work as a crusade against the forces of slavery, Islam, and, for good measure, Protestantism.²⁹ In 1879, troubled by the threats to Catholic missionaries in Central Africa he suggested to Cardinal Simeoni, the prefect of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, that it might be possible to "restore, under new form, elements of the old military orders of chivalry, who rendered such great service to the Church in barbarous times and in similar circumstances".³⁰ Henceforth, until his death in 1892, he sought various means of creating a band of armed Christian brothers—an *Association militaire et religieuse*—which would act as auxiliaries to missionary Fathers. Following a series of failed attempts to reconstitute the Order of Malta he founded the *Institut des Frères Armés* in April 1891. Although this was short lived, and failed to recruit men of sufficient calibre, its militaristic sentiments lived on in Lavigerie's missionary order.³¹

²⁸ Clare Rachel Brown, "The Art of Mission: The Role of Visual Culture in Victorian Mission to Southern Africa, 1840–1910" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 2018), 82.

²⁹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 51.

³⁰ F. Renault, *Lavigerie, l'Esclavage Africain et l'Europe, 1868–92* (Paris, 1971), 1: 253, cited in Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, 45.

³¹ Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, 45–52.

The White Fathers who journeyed from Algiers to Mpala and Karema on Lake Tanganyika in 1885 sought to make individual conversions in a manner that they had been forbidden to in the Islamic north. They envisaged a culturally relativist gospel whereby missionaries adapted themselves to all that was compatible with the Christian faith and morals, assimilated to indigenous tastes in matters of food and housing, and taught in Swahili. However, Lavigie's plans still involved a good deal of social transformation, extending the idea of the religious enclave to that of a Christian Kingdom, governed by an African Christian prince, "which would regenerate Africa as abbeys in Medieval Europe had restored a dying continent".³² Resembling Prussia or Rhodes in the Middle Ages, this new-order state in eastern Central Africa would be a haven for escaped slaves, a centre of evangelisation, and a barrier to Belgium's eastward expansion.³³ Disillusioned by the polluting effects of Western modernity Lavigier instructed that Africans were to be left as they were in their material circumstances but nevertheless wished them to be 'civilised' through Catholic instruction and law because there was no civilisation outside of Christian civilisation.³⁴ The gathered community under the protection of the African leader and European missionaries would be economically self-sufficient and politically independent from the incipient colonial state. Like many nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionaries the White Fathers distrusted European and colonial states and saw mission as a chance to start afresh free from dangerous secularising influences

³² Friedrich Stenger, *White Fathers in Colonial Central Africa: A Critical Examination of V. Y. Mudimbe's Theories on Missionary Discourse in Africa* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001), 52.

³³ Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, 46–48.

³⁴ Stenger, *White Fathers*, 51–53; Reuben Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo, 1890–1962* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

such as socialism and freemasonry.³⁵ More pessimistic than Protestant evangelicals, Catholics also tended to view adult Africans as too enmeshed in pagan culture to be open to Christian redemption, preferring instead to begin work with the latest generation. Thus, their enclaves were to be populated with redeemed slaves, especially children. Reflecting on 55 years of mission work, Lavigerie's protégé and White Fathers pioneer to the Congo Region, Victor Roelens, observed: "The black heathen is a complete egotist. The purpose of his life is to satisfy all the instincts of his nature corrupted by a secular atavism of barbarity, errors and vices."³⁶

Drawing force from the recent campaign against slavery in Brazil, the Catholic movement for abolition was significant in delivering European popular support for colonial occupation, particularly in Belgium, where King Leopold II drew upon multiple authorities, including the Vatican, to legitimate his campaign for a Belgian colony in Central Africa. Like evangelicals, Lavigerie, a leading abolitionist, viewed the redeeming of slaves as a living illustration of Christ's redemption. On the ground the means and meaning of redemption would prove rather problematic depicted in the imagery of conquest, spiritual munitions, and the prayers of Catholic supporting troops in the homeland.³⁷ Lavigerie's missionaries were dispatched from his see in

³⁵ Allen F. Roberts, "History, Ethnicity and Change in the Christian Kingdom of Southeastern Zaire," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (London: James Currey, 1989), 196–200; David M. Gordon, "Slavery and Redemption in Catholic Missions of the Upper Congo, 1878–1909," *Slavery and Abolition* 38, no. 3 (2017): 577–600.

³⁶ Translated from the original: "*Le Noir payen est un égoïste complet. Le but de sa vie est de satisfaire tous les instincts de sa nature corrompue par un atavisme séculaire de barbarie, d'erreurs et de vices.*" See: V. Roelens, "Rôle des missions catholiques dite missions nationales au Congo Belge," cited in Stenger, *White Fathers*, 63.

³⁷ Gordon, "Slavery and Redemption," 580–85; Vincent Viaene, "Nineteenth-Century Catholic Internationalism and its Predecessors," in *Religious Internationalism in the Modern World: Globalization*

Algiers with a sword, blessed during the service of departure.³⁸ At Mplala they inherited not only a station formerly owned by the Congo Free State and its allies in the International Africa Association, but also a band of Emile Storm's *waungwana* military slaves, who presented the Father Superior with a gift of a head and two women and children slaves. Far from disbanding the mercenaries, Lavigerie persuaded former papal Zaouve and model Catholic soldier, Léopold-Louis Joubert, to lead them. Transforming the fighting men into what Gordon calls a "masculine heroic cult", Joubert quickly established the missionaries' authority, demanding a tribute of slaves as an act of submission. And in the absence of a suitable African Prince, Joubert became *de facto* King of a Catholic sovereignty with its own currency on the margins of the Congo Free State.³⁹

The supply of labouring subjects for the White Father's Christian Kingdoms was a perennial issue. In his first short-lived attempt to found a mission at Murumbi Roelens reputedly began the recruitment process with the weight of his boot when a local headman appeared unwilling to apply for a request for 50 workers.⁴⁰ More significantly, the missionaries utilised the full spectrum of transactions in rights in persons beyond capture to build up their 'liberated' enclave: ransoming, debt-enslavement, pawning, and purchase. The latter proved particularly problematic as in practice the Catholic missionaries made little distinction between *acheter*

and Faith Communities since 1750, eds. Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 104; Stenger, *White Fathers*, 94.

³⁸ Hastings, *Church in Africa*, 409.

³⁹ Roberts, "History, Ethnicity and Change," 196–200; Gordon, "Slavery and Redemption," 587–88; Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism*.

⁴⁰ Stenger, *White Fathers*, 61–62.

(purchase) and *racheter* (redemption). From the viewpoint of those recently redeemed, the distinction was also hard to sustain as they were subjected to a regime of work that probably surpassed that of domestic slaves. The Catholic missionaries pursued the strategy begun by the International African Association whereby forced labour obligations of purchased slaves were slowly reduced over six years, thereby securing profitable labour while fulfilling responsibilities to abolish slavery. The labour value of redeemed slaves was underlined by the fact that runaways were chased down and punished with whippings or on at least one occasion, with the collar. Even the practice of redeeming children allowed the White Fathers to benefit from the slavery. Put to work all day in the fields of their orphanages-cum-agricultural colonies they were educated by means of civilising labour.⁴¹ As Gordon observes, “Catholic redemption was an enslavement which implied manumission” and thus had much in common with Islamic slavery, a system of forced conversion it had set out to eradicate.⁴²

Throughout the era of the Congo Free State the White Fathers’ uneasy relations with the colonial authorities slowly evolved towards collaboration.⁴³ The missionaries’ first station at Murumbi had lasted only a year in the face of threats

⁴¹ Gordon, “Slavery and Redemption,” 586–90.

⁴² Gordon, “Slavery and Redemption,” 594.

⁴³ On 2 January 1872 Lavigerie penned a secret memorandum for the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, outlining his views on the International African Association, King Leopold’s vehicle for the colonisation of the Congo region. The document reveals his suspicion of the businessmen, adventurers, and Protestants surrounding the monarch and doubts concerning the integrity of their projected campaign against slavery. R. P. Marcel Storme, *Rapports de Père Planque, de Mgr Lavigerie et de Mgr Comboni sur L’Association Internationale Africaine*, Académie Royale des Science Coloniales, 11 (Bruxelles: n.p., 1957), 16–138.

from Swahili slavers and continued insecurity threw the Fathers into the arms of the Belgian colonial administration. In return for their silence over abuses on Africans perpetrated by the colonial state and its corporate allies the Catholics received protection, grants of land, tax exemptions, subsidies, and the right to offer practical education to the Congolese. This cluster of privileges was cast in law in the Concordat of 1906 and enshrined Catholic advantage over a growing Protestant threat. In time schools gradually replaced orphanages as the major means of proselytism, allowing for more voluntarism on the part of the Congolese pupils.

The Plymouth Brethren and Problems of Conflict and Violence

In 1886, the Plymouth Brethren missionary, Frederick Stanley Arnot, arrived in Bunkeya, Katanga, capital of the polity governed by the trading baron-cum-warlord, Msiri.⁴⁴ At first glance one would assume that the Brethren had little in common with the Catholic White Fathers, but this was not so. Both movements sought to disentangle mission from western civilisation and both shared a suspicion of the state, though in the Brethren case these tendencies were taken to extremes. The radical difference between the two movements was ecclesiological. As leader of the White Fathers' work in Congo, Roelens was deeply Ultramontane in his inclinations, desirous to act in conformity with directives from Rome. He prepared for his undertaking by studying the 2,317 rules and directives issued by the Sacred

⁴⁴ Plymouth Brethren with a missionary outlook were more accurately classified as Open Brethren. Much of the following is taken from Ruth M. Slade, *English Speaking Missions in the Congo Independent State (1878–1908)* (Brussels: Duculot, 1959), 107–27, 164–67; Robert I. Rothberg, "Plymouth Brethren and the Occupation of Katanga, 1886-1907," *Journal of African History* 5, no. 2 (1964): 285–97.

Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in order to regulate missionary work.⁴⁵

The Brethren, on the other hand, were a collection of decentralised 'meetings', which shunned centralised ecclesiological authorities and any kind of hierarchy. A minimal bureaucracy sustained their missions. Missionary news and needs were publicised by *Echoes of Service* magazine, which channelled funds to missionaries. As the Brethren missionary enterprise increased in scope so the publications office in Bath, England, expanded to coordinate its efforts, taking responsibility for overseas property by means of a limited company. The Brethren lacked the resources, political clout, and international connections of an established Catholic order and its missionaries had little inclination to use their position on the ground to influence the geopolitics of colonial occupation.

All of these faith mission tendencies appeared ill suited to the context the Brethren were entering. In England the Brethren had remained aloof from the civil authorities believing that it was the obligation of the state to provide peaceful conditions for religious observance in return for their obedience, rather than their Christian duty to work for peace that would end social and political conflict. But as Livingstone, the UMCA, and White Fathers had come to grasp these were neither the conditions in which the church had first advanced in Europe, nor did they represent the context of late nineteenth-century Central Africa. The early medieval church had been forced to engage with issues of law and order and social welfare and Arnot's long-term successor, Dan Crawford, eventually came to accept this reality. Unwilling to seek influence in Msiri's court, Arnot and his immediate replacements, Charles

⁴⁵ Stenger, *White Fathers*, 70.

Swan and William Faulknor, chose to build their house at a distance from the capital. When given the opportunity to assist Vice-Consul Sharpe's endeavours to expand the British Empire via treaty making Swan refused to help trick Msiri into a signing a treaty, choosing to translate the whole document.⁴⁶ By acting in this neutral and principled manner they lost the chance to influence the choice of the eventual occupying colonial power of the border region in which Bunkeya was located, seeming to opt for the Belgian status quo. They also surrendered opportunities to bring about cultural change in line with their reading of the New Testament. Horrified by the evils of the regional slave trade centred upon Bunkeya, Msiri's tortures and executions of petty criminals, and more widespread expressions of violence and drunkenness, they were powerless to act.⁴⁷ Possessing minimal international or transnational connections to the authorities in London, or Cape Town, they were unable to draw upon external influences, as the LMS had done in South Africa. Indeed, Msiri made more use of the Brethren missionaries than they did of him. Whites in his capital not only boosted his status but also diminished the influence of Swahili traders, while their knowledge and contacts helped him maintain his alternative trade route to the west via Benguela. Swan acted as official scribe, writing letters to the Sultan, checked the waybills of caravans, yet professed no influence over the king. Writing in 1891, British Vice-Consul Sharpe, recorded

⁴⁶ C. A. Swan, "Difficulties and Dangers in the Early Days," in *A Central African Jubilee*, ed. Montague Goodman (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1932), 97–122; Dugald Campbell, *Blazing Trails in Bantuland* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1933), 65.

⁴⁷ Frederick Stanley Arnot, *Garenganze: Or, Seven Years' Pioneer Mission Work in Central Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1969 [1889]), 220–21; Swan, "Difficulties and Dangers," 108.

“The missionaries treat Msiri as a great king; do *nothing* without first asking his permission, are at his beck and call, and almost his slaves”.⁴⁸

As in other African contexts the missionaries’ desire to identify with the people reaped few benefits and may have even had deleterious effects.⁴⁹ The diet of sorghum porridge mixed with red palm oil did nothing for the missionaries’ constitutions but more generally a regime of virtuous asceticism raised the suspicion that the whites wanted to take rather than give.⁵⁰ Like many local peoples involved in cultural entanglement Msiri’s Yeke sought a material advance, which the Brethren were unable to provide. Thus, the missionaries’ evangelical endeavours were largely ignored, their school averaging no more than eight to twelve pupils. Only their medical skills appeared to win them any respect.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the Brethren missionaries persisted. Their letters and autobiographies reveal that they believed in a providential God who protected and provided in response to their intercessions. Their suffering and sacrifice were signs of the impending millennium and they looked to the future with hope rather than dwell on the present.

Unlike the White Fathers the Brethren never actively engaged in the local slave trade in order to engineer mission communities. One missionary, Dugald Campbell, even broke their quietist mould and campaigned against it.⁵² Given the impending

⁴⁸ Sharpe to H. H. Johnston, 15 November 1890, in Johnston to Foreign Office, F.O. 84/2114 (1891), Public Record Office, cited in Rothberg, “Plymouth Brethren,” 291.

⁴⁹ Thomas O. Beidelman, “Contradictions between the Sacred and the Secular Life: The Church Missionary Society in Ukaguru, Tanzania, East Africa, 1876–1914,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 1 (1981): 73–95.

⁵⁰ Arnot, *Garenganze*, 197.

⁵¹ Arnot, *Garenganze*, 192–93, 216.

⁵² Campbell, *Blazing Trails*, 30; Slade, *English Speaking Missions*, 292.

millennium there was no time to slowly form a new generation of Christian youth or give up on adults. But while trying their best to deter domestic slavery and the slave trade they were at times implicated, facing the same dilemmas as other missionary groups. Thus, pioneering missionary H. B. Thompson was given a number of Luba slave boys and girls, when visiting Luba territory in 1884—a gift difficult to refuse.⁵³ When encountering slavers en route to the coast the Brethren often felt compelled to redeem children who were then brought up in missionary households to become evangelists and pastors. When the lives of these converts were subsequently celebrated in missionary print as stories of slavery and ‘Christian’ redemption it is clear that they saw their missionaries as yet another set of patrons, albeit more benign ones, to whom they owed loyalty.⁵⁴ But even when Brethren missionaries remained scrupulously clear of the trade, their porters could put them in a situation of guilt by association by choosing to spend their wages on slaves. Or indeed, contracted through chiefs, some of the porters themselves were actually slaves.⁵⁵

The Brethren breakthrough came only after Msiri’s assassination at the hands of a British military officer in 1891. By now, Crawford, the leading Brethren missionary, had relocated the mission station to Luanza, not quite an island but a bluff

⁵³ Clarke, *Katanga*, 25–26. There is mention of Thompson’s 1894 journey in *Echoes of Service* (December 1900).

⁵⁴ Arnot, *Garenganze*, 184, 213; Campbell, *Blazing Trails*, 31; Editorial, *Echoes of Service* (January 1901); C. R. Wilding, *Echoes of Service* (November 1917). Also Campbell, *Blazing Trails*, 217; Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life Stories from East/Central Africa* (London: James Currey, 1993), 168; David Maxwell, “Freed Slaves, Missionaries and Respectability: The Expansion of the Christian Frontier from Angola to Belgian Congo,” *Journal of African History* 54, no. 1 (2013): 79–102.

⁵⁵ Rothberg, “Plymouth Brethren,” 294; Ian Burness, *From Glasgow to Garenganze: Frederick Stanley Arnot and Nineteenth-Century African Mission* (Glasgow: Opal Trust, 2017), 321–22.

overlooking Lake Mweru. From there he could make use of Church of Scotland supply lines through stations in Nyasaland to receive mail and supplies. An outspoken advocate of identification—*Thinking Black*—and critic of those missionaries who rarely ventured beyond the station, Crawford slowly came around to the virtues of working in a stable mission community, where a cohort of pastors and evangelists could be formed before being sent out to build an African church.⁵⁶ He was much aided by a vast influx of refugees seeking security in the anarchy that followed the breakup of the Yeke Kingdom, coming to be known as *Konga Vantu*—the gatherer of the people. In this violent era of political fragmentation and embryonic colonial state formation, Brethren missionaries understood their communities as a “city of refuge” or “cave of Adullam”.⁵⁷ And rather than being peacemakers they saw themselves as guardians and judges, finding themselves the new big men in the vacuum caused by the collapse of African polities. To their horror they now found themselves devoting precious time to settling African ‘palavers’. Over time, Luanza evolved into a fully-fledged mission community, organised in the usual grid of tree-lined streets around a church and large school.⁵⁸

Post Script and Conclusion

Within the safety of large mission communities, missionaries achieved what the sociologist of religion, David Martin, termed “peaceability”: an enclosed social space

⁵⁶ Daniel Crawford, *Thinking Black: Twenty-two Years without the Break in the Long Grass of Central Africa* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1912).

⁵⁷ Campbell, *Blazing Trails*, 68, 69, 81.

⁵⁸ Slade, *English Speaking Missions*, 294–95; Robert Dabney Bedinger, *Triumphs of the Gospel in the Belgian Congo* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1920), 48–49.

which allows for the revision of consciousness and social practice.⁵⁹ Here missionaries and Africans could begin to engineer social change, leading to a new class of literate clerks, artisans, pastors, and evangelists and in the process revising social relations in favour of young men. Ex-slave converts also proved to be some of the most effective evangelists and church leaders. Having few social attachments and expanded horizons through their capture and transportation, they were more open to the radical change conversion required, and hence they pushed the Christian frontier far ahead of the missionary frontier in what was an African-led movement. On the whole, mass conversion came only after colonial occupation as Africans sought conceptual control over the rapid social and economic changes that accompanied colonialism.⁶⁰

At the end of our period, on the turn of twentieth century, Christian humanitarianism waxed again, shining considerable light on the atrocities meted out by limited companies on the population of the Congo Basin in the west of the Congo Free State to coerce them to collect Red Rubber—a commodity in much demand in the international market. At the centre of the campaign, which eventually led to the end of the Congo Free State as Leopold II's personal fiefdom, was Edmund Morel of the Congo Reform Association. But missionary networks, beginning with Dr Harry Guinness and John and Alice Harris of the Congo Balolo Mission, generated much of

⁵⁹ David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 286–87.

⁶⁰ Maxwell, "Freed Slaves"; David Maxwell, "Continuity and Change in the Luba Christian Movement, Katanga, Belgian Congo c.1915–50," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69, no. 2 (2017): 326–44; Hastings, *Church in Africa*; Norman Etherington, "Recent Trends in the Historiography of Christianity in Southern Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 201–19.

the funding and publicity.⁶¹ American Baptists and Presbyterians, along with Swedish missionaries, also spoke out and with force. These oppositional denominations were less trammelled by an imperial heritage and more willing to forego a cosy relationship with a colonial state. The movement's form was a presage of things to come. Its transnational reach, which eventually drew in the US State Department, its mobilisation of celebrities such as Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Joseph Conrad, and its use of new media, photographs, and magic lantern slides, to shock western audiences, made it a powerful forerunner of later twentieth century international human rights campaigns.⁶²

Missionaries have been most effective as peacemakers when working in concert with others. As men and women on the spot, often with years of experience, they make authoritative advocates for local peoples. But local connections need networks back to the Vatican, Lambeth Palace, or a well-connected, organised body of supporters in order that reports are properly disseminated across the metropole and beyond.⁶³ Vincent Viaene and Abigail Green usefully draw these forces together into what they argue was a new phenomenon in the late eighteenth century, the religious international: "a cluster of voluntary transnational organisations and representations crystallising around international issues, in which both 'ordinary'

⁶¹ Special Number of *Regions Beyond* (January–February 1908).

⁶² Special Number of *Regions Beyond* (January–February 1908); Porter, *Religion Versus Empire*, 309–10; T. Jack Thompson, "Light on the Dark Continent: The Photography of Alice Seely Harris and the Congo Atrocities of the Early Twentieth Century," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 2002): 146–49, Slade, *English Speaking Missions*, 238–326.

⁶³ Adrian Hastings, *Wiriyanu* (London: Search Press, 1974); Diana Aurret, *Reaching for Justice: The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1972–1992* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1992).

believers and religious specialists could serve as protagonists".⁶⁴ Beginning with the German Pietistic and Euro-American Evangelical Revivals they evolved into mass mobilisations. Supporters, donors, and activists, of which the majority were women, were drawn into international civil society, galvanised by missionary expansion and humanitarianism.⁶⁵

In their attempts to end slavery in Central Africa the White Fathers became slave masters. But their methods were by no means extraordinary relative to other Catholic Orders at work in the Congo Free State.⁶⁶ The Plymouth Brethren did stand out but were outliers for a twentieth century movement of faith missions. They did not regard themselves as humanitarians but as pioneering evangelists, driven to seek and save the lost before Christ's imminent return. What was extreme was the context of profound social crisis that the missionaries encountered. Violence, instability, and isolation had the major determining effect on missionary strategies, undermining aspirations towards identification and cultural diversity. And difference

⁶⁴ Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, "Introduction: Rethinking Religion and Globalization," in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*, 1.

⁶⁵ The Catholic international emerged later in the nineteenth century, initially in defense of the papacy.

⁶⁶ The White Fathers was not the only Catholic Order deeply implicated with slavery. Jelmer Vos' study of the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans) in Soyo, West Central Africa, shows how they engaged in slave trading for instrumental rather than humanitarian reasons. Slaves, especially redeemed children, were easier to control than local freemen and necessary for building up mission communities. Because the missionaries used the same markets and paid the same prices for slaves as regular buyers, their buying practices had a strong resemblance to normal slave trading. See Jelmer Vos, "Child Slaves and Freemen at the Spiritan Mission in Soyo, 1880–1885," *Journal of Family History* 35, no. 1 (2010): 71–110. The Scheutists also redeemed slave children to build their orphanages-cum-mission farms; Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 295–96.

of denomination or national background were of limited significance in the face the warrior leaders who dominated Central Africa prior to violent colonial occupation. In such contexts, humanitarians continue to be overwhelmed by circumstances and face terrible dilemmas, as twentieth century NGOs attempting to deal with the Biafran War or the Rwandan Genocide found to their costs.

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