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9-21-2022

Missions

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Recommended Citation

Hartley, Benjamin L., 'Missions', in Jonathan Yeager (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Evangelicalism* (2022, Oxford Academic, 21 Sept. 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190863319.013.25>.

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CHAPTER 25

MISSIONS

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In 1719, the most famous of early evangelical hymn writers, Isaac Watts, published a collection of verse, *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. This collection became the most frequently published book in eighteenth-century America.¹ Ninety-nine editions appeared over the next several decades. The volume included what is likely the earliest “mission hymn” in the English language.

Jesus shall reign where e'er the Sun
Does his successive Journeys run;
His Kingdom stretch from Shore to Shore,
Till Moons shall wax and wane no more.
[Behold the Islands with Their Kings,
And *Europe* her best Tribute brings;
From *North* to *South* the Princes meet
To pay their Homage at his Feet.
There *Persia* glorious to behold,
There *India* shines in *Eastern* Gold;
And barbarous Nations at his Word
Submit and bow and own their Lord.]²

These verses illustrate not only the heartfelt devotion to mission that characterized early evangelicalism but also portray several other themes critical to our understanding of the missionary movement, which will be explored in this chapter.

The first of those themes involves an examination of the political contexts where evangelical missions first took shape. In his hymn, Watts expressed his hope that Jesus' reign shall “stretch from Shore to Shore.” Britain's imperial reign was also “stretching” at the time Watts wrote these words. The War of Spanish Succession (1701–1714) secured Britain a leading role in global trade, and this imperial might influenced, in complex ways, the eighteenth century missionary movement.³

In recent years, postcolonial theorists have spent much energy making the argument that missionary activity was a tool of imperialist domination.⁴ To a degree that is true.

But if the missionary movement is to be rightly understood, it must be examined using a more diverse array of questions. In his survey of eighteenth-century Christianity, Irish historian David Hempton has succinctly argued that “[i]n understanding missions, one needs to be as aware of diffusion, limitation, resistance, translation, subversion and liberation, as one is of repression, control, and exploitation.”⁵ The historian must give the influence and complex texture of imperialism its proper attention without deprecating equally complex missionary motives, diverse missionary activities, and variegated responses of Indigenous persons, which often included robust missionary activity of their own. All of these motives and actions were as frequently in opposition to imperialistic designs of the metropole as they were in favor of them.⁶

A second theme explored in this chapter is the mission theory and practice employed by early missionaries and early Indigenous Christian leaders in their efforts to make sense of the Christian faith in light of the culture(s) with which they were surrounded and of which they were a part. Watts’s hymn touched on this idea in the very last line of the third verse: “Submit and bow and own their Lord.” Watts here expressed his hope that people the world over will one day be followers of Jesus. This process of Indigenous “ownership” of the Christian faith took many different forms, was rarely smooth, and frequently prompted resistance from several quarters, both European and Indigenous. Indigenization was a two-way process involving missionary adaptation of the Gospel message to new cultures as well as new converts’ cultural adaptation to Christian theology and biblical norms.⁷ The texture of this resistance to and ownership of the Christian faith was integrally related to the imperial context itself and thus our two-fold thematic framework in this chapter involves a measure of reflexivity with these two factors.

It is not possible in this chapter to consider every place where early evangelical mission was engaged, but Watts’s hymn provides clues as to where some of the most important locations were for eighteenth-century evangelicals. Only Persia and India are mentioned specifically in his hymn, and the Persia reference is mostly aspirational as there was no significant Protestant missionary presence in Persia in 1719. But the reference to India in this hymn likely resonated powerfully for Watts.⁸ The pioneer missionary to India, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, died in 1719, after thirteen years of service in India. Watts had likely followed the progress of the Indian mission for a number of years before this.⁹ Watts also refers to “the Islands” in his hymn, and it is not much of a speculative leap to surmise that Watts would have primarily had in mind the islands of the Caribbean. British trade in the Caribbean—deplorably, much of which was built on a slave economy—had been strong for decades by 1719, even if Anglican mission efforts there under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel were just beginning and not prospering. In the 1730s, the Caribbean became the most important mission effort for early Moravian mission work. Methodist mission activity there began in 1759, and Baptists initiated work in the Caribbean by 1783.¹⁰

In addition to India and the Caribbean, this chapter also briefly examines late eighteenth-century initiatives in South Africa. The phenomenal growth of African Christianity in the twentieth century is simply too great for this vast continent to be

neglected in any survey of the initial rise of evangelical missions. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, South Africa was already becoming one of the most intensively "occupied" fields of missionary service in the world, and robust Indigenous African initiatives were beginning as well.¹¹ In 2018, a new milestone was achieved for African Christianity: demographers now estimate there are more self-described Christians there than on any other continent in the world.¹²

This chapter's review of the interrelationships among these three regions, their imperial contexts, and missionaries' operative mission theories is a modest corrective in contemporary "world Christianity" scholarship. Too much attention is given to the distinctive nature of "world Christianities" in various contexts while neglecting transnational connections and the sense of global unity that missionaries and Indigenous Christian leaders experienced.¹³ Southern India, the eastern Caribbean, and South Africa were mission destinations where early evangelicalism was most dynamic and where it involved the greatest variety of evangelical workers. The relationships among missionaries and their supporters in all of these locations helped set the course for subsequent nineteenth-century development in evangelical mission theory and practice.¹⁴

Finally, by beginning in this chapter with the mission to Tranquebar in southeast India in 1706, I am departing from a historiographical convention established by a number of scholars, including mission historian Andrew F. Walls, who viewed the rise of evangelical missions as corresponding to the rise of several missionary societies at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Earlier efforts in India are sometimes distinguished by these historians as Pietist missions rather than evangelical ones, although other historians do not make as clear of a distinction.¹⁶ In my view, the significant correspondence and published news reports about Indian mission that circulated among evangelicals in Britain in the mid-1700s, including the circles in which Isaac Watts operated, provide sufficient warrant for considering nascent evangelical missions of the early eighteenth century.

INDIA

No other missionary destination for Protestants in the eighteenth century was more imperialistically diverse and complicated than India. At the time of missionary arrival in the Danish colony of Tranquebar in 1706, Portuguese, French, and English trading posts already dotted the eastern Indian coastline to the north and south. They were minor players on the Indian scene compared to the Muslim Mughal Empire, which extended its southern border to the region around Tranquebar at this time. In subsequent decades, this Indian empire's political power waned, but its impact on culture and economics persisted in a number of regional kingdoms in India. Tranquebar (known today as Tharangambadi), had, since 1620, been leased from the local ruler of Tanjore (now Thanjavur). The Tranquebar colony was a strip of land three by five miles in size, within the Thanjavur kingdom. The territory had probably been leased to the

Danish East India Company in order to earn profits for the kingdom as well as to provide competition to French and Portuguese trading posts located about fifty to seventy-five miles to the north and south.¹⁷ Tranquebar was a city of 18,000 inhabitants, most of whom were Indian, but with a sizable enough European population to support the construction of a new Danish Lutheran church five years before the first missionaries arrived.¹⁸ There had been chaplains who were responsible to serve the European population prior to the arrival of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, but it was only by Ziegenbalg and Plütschau that a sustained effort was made to reach Indians with the Gospel.

The Protestant missionary effort to Tranquebar also involved careful negotiations with European political entities both secular and religious. This missionary initiative involved the sharing of personnel as well as resources among three very different European powers: Halle Pietist institutions aligned in some ways with the Prussian state; the Danish King; and a British voluntary organization, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).¹⁹ The desire for missionaries in Tranquebar first emerged with the Danish king, Frederick IV, who possessed nearly absolute power as monarch.²⁰ His court chaplain, Franz J. Lütken, was not able to find missionary recruits in Denmark, so he appealed to Halle, Germany, for help. August Hermann Francke, a genius in organizing and publishing in Halle, soon spread word about the Tranquebar mission. Francke additionally helped in the ongoing supervision of missionaries whom he had previously taught, and he even wrote letters to the Tranquebar congregation in a manner stylistically reminiscent of the Apostle Paul.²¹ The SPCK provided logistical and financial support to the Tranquebar mission and was mostly agreeable in its support of a Lutheran mission, although confessional differences caused problems from time to time.²² This whole arrangement was further supported by the fact that Queen Ann of England was married to Prince George of Denmark whose chaplain in England was Anton Wilhelm Böhme, Francke's English-language promoter.²³

Ziegenbalg and Plütschau struggled with the political context from the very beginning of their work. Even before the missionaries left Copenhagen, the Danish king snubbed the directors of the Danish East India Company by not consulting them regarding the impending missionary initiative. The directors, in turn, sent a letter to Tranquebar urging officials of the East India Company to stifle the missionary effort as soon as the two young men arrived. The troubles with the Danish Company continued, and Ziegenbalg was even imprisoned for four months for his opposition to the Danish government over its mistreatment of a Tamil widow.²⁴

The relationship that Ziegenbalg and Plütschau had with the Thanjavur kingdom directly to their west was even worse than their relationship with the Danish East India Company. The ruler prohibited the missionaries from even entering Thanjavur territory. To do so risked death. It so happened, however, that this eventually provided an opportunity for Indigenous catechists to go where missionaries could not and to initiate effective work in Thanjavur.²⁵ Thanjavur became one of the most active Christian communities later in the century and the home of one of the most successful of eighteenth-century missionaries, Christian Friedrich Schwartz. Thanjavur was also important in the lives of

three of the most important Tamil Christian leaders: Satyanathan Pillai, Vedanayagam Pillai, and "Raja Clarinda."²⁶

When one considers the initial fifty years of Protestant missionary presence in southern India, there are three dimensions of mission theory and practice that are most striking: the mission's focus on understanding Indian religious thought, Bible translation, and education. Few missionaries who followed Ziegenbalg over the next century showed as much interest in Indian religious ideas as he did; in just two years, he was able to work through the contents of 119 Tamil writings on religious and ethical reflections. He was so impressed by Tamil ethical writings that, in 1708, he translated three short works into German for supporters back home to read for themselves. He also wrote a book on Tamil society and compiled 145 letters from Tamil contacts into a 1713 work entitled *Genealogie der Malabarischen Götter*.²⁷ These studies of Indian religion were all done before completing a translation of the New Testament.

Ziegenbalg's attentiveness to Indian society and religion was not always looked upon with favor by August Francke, his former teacher and advocate in Halle. Francke once chastised him, saying that he had been sent to India to "eliminate heathenism in India and not to spread heathen nonsense in Europe."²⁸ But Ziegenbalg continued to write appreciably about Indian culture in his reports home. He discussed his own growing cultural awareness in the *Halle Reports* in 1710: "Once I had reached the stage of being able to read their books I realized that the same philosophical questions that are discussed by learned men in Europe are also dealt with quite competently here, and that they also have properly written laws."²⁹ The appreciation for southern Indian culture and religion exhibited by Ziegenbalg continued to grow and spread among missionaries and Indigenous Christians alike. By the end of the eighteenth century, Thanjavur was a center of Indian learning. Enlightenment influences, as historian C. A. Bayly observed, went in more than one direction and included an Indian to European exchange of knowledge as much as the reverse.³⁰

Ziegenbalg's work in Bible translation began in 1708, just two years after his arrival. He worked on it together with other projects on Tamil society and religious and ethical thought mentioned above. A New Testament was completed and published by 1715, and, by the time of his death in 1719, he had completed a translation of the Old Testament up through the Book of Joshua. Ziegenbalg's translation work was of a collaborative nature from the start and involved his seventy-year-old blind teacher, students in the mission schools, and a Tamil poet.³¹ As most Tamil Christians were not considered of sufficiently high status to read Hindu scriptures, the availability of a Tamil Bible may have been received as a culturally, linguistically, and spiritually affirming experience on the part of many recent converts.³²

The influence of the Danish-Halle-SPCK missionary endeavor on education in India has been described by historian Robert Frykenberg as nothing short of an "information revolution." In addition to the collaborative efforts among Europeans and Indians in preserving and analyzing ancient texts in India, there was, at the beginning of the mission, an expectation of Ziegenbalg and other Halle-influenced missionaries that learning and literacy should be spread widely. This expectation was radically different

from the cultural assumptions of members of elite castes in southern India, and yet it was primarily from Indian Christians that this idea of "public information" was realized.³³

The experience of these early missionaries in Tranquebar inspired many subsequent missionary efforts in India and even more evangelical imagination for mission. Prior to his arrival in India in 1793, however, it appears that the Baptist minister William Carey knew little about the century-long work of evangelicals in Tranquebar or how this effort had expanded elsewhere. As an English dissenter, Carey simply did not run in the social orbit of those evangelical Anglicans who were more familiar with what the SPCK had been doing in India for nearly a century.³⁴ Nevertheless, after arriving in India and settling in Serampore, Carey likely learned a great deal more about the preceding Danish-Halle missionary experience. Maria and Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's youngest son had served with the Danish East India Company in Serampore in the mid-1750s, and there were a number of other connections between Tranquebar and Serampore in the years preceding Carey's arrival.³⁵

In contrast to the Baptist Carey's relative ignorance of what had transpired in India for the previous century prior to his arrival, the Methodist mission promoter Thomas Coke knew well the progress earlier missionaries had made in India and was enthusiastic for continued missionary work in the region. As early as 1784, Coke wrote to Charles Grant, director of the East India Company, to inquire about the history and culture of India. Grant responded with a lengthy and informative letter some months later. Coke mentioned specifically Christian Friedrich Schwartz, the most impressive of late eighteenth-century missionaries in India, on two occasions in his letters. By 1811, Coke had made preliminary plans for four missionaries to be placed in locations (Tanjore and Travancore) where considerable converts had already been made.³⁶ In April of 1813, eight months before his departure for India, Coke even corresponded with William Wilberforce and volunteered to serve as the Anglican Bishop of India.³⁷ Coke never made it to India, although his Methodist movement eventually did; Coke died en route and was buried, appropriately, in the Indian Ocean.

THE CARIBBEAN

The political context in the Caribbean into which the first evangelical missionaries came in 1732 was, in some ways, strikingly different from the one faced in India because the initial mission efforts of the Spanish two hundred years earlier differed greatly from those of the Portuguese in India. The Spanish came to the Caribbean islands with a much greater show of force, new and decimating diseases, and a practice of colonization that differed drastically from the Portuguese method of setting up trading posts with only a few settlers. In the Caribbean islands where Protestant missionaries first went, the Indigenous population suffered greatly from disease and violence but were still present, frequently intermarrying with more recent arrivals, both settlers and slaves. The Leeward and Windward chain of islands in the eastern Caribbean were politically

complicated in similar ways as India had been. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Spanish, English, Dutch, and French all vied for influence and mercantile dominance in the region. By the time that the Moravians arrived, however, there was not any Indigenous rule like those of the Thanjavur kingdom or Mughal empires in India.

Back in Europe, the origin story of Moravian missions to the Caribbean also began in a similar way to that of India. There was both royal support (but not explicit sponsorship as there had been in India) for the Moravians in Denmark as well as opposition from the Danish West Indies Company. The Danish connection for the Moravians derived from the fact that Zinzendorf had been raised on stories of the Danish-Halle mission in India and had even lived with early missionaries to India during a year-long visit the Moravians had in Halle when he was a student of August Francke. Zinzendorf also had ties to the Danish court, and so it is not such a surprise that it was in Denmark that the Moravians sought to make connections for a trip to the Caribbean.³⁸

The first Moravian missionaries to the Caribbean, Leonard Dober and David Nitschmann, began a preaching ministry in 1732, on the island of St. Thomas. But in those first years there were few tangible results and great tragedy. By 1734, both missionaries had been recalled to Germany with little to show for their work.³⁹ Over the next two years, Zinzendorf sent twenty-nine more missionaries to the neighboring island of St. Croix, but many of these missionaries either died or were so weakened by fever that this initiative also ended in failure.⁴⁰

The Moravian mission on St. Thomas finally gained traction in 1736, with the arrival of two new missionaries, Friedrich Martin and Matthäus Freundlich.⁴¹ These Moravians, in the first years of their ministry, preached a message of radical spiritual equality with Blacks which even resulted in an interracial marriage, in 1738, between Freundlich and a Black free woman named Rebecca. As told by historian Jon Sensbach, the effectiveness of Rebecca Freundlich (later, Protten) as a valued Moravian assistant in 1736 and then full member of the Moravian community by 1737 might have been rare but not unique.

Even very early Moravian chroniclers of mission work in the Caribbean extolled the fine work of Rebecca and others as integral to Moravian success on the island of St. Thomas. One such chronicler wrote,

In addition to the many blessed means employed in the missionary efforts to extend the work of God among the Negroes, the major contribution came from the Negroes themselves. It was they who spread the good news throughout the island about Jesus Christ. . . . One light kindled another.⁴²

This “kindling effect” was effective—not only in spreading the Christian message but in stoking fear of the Moravians and their followers among the planter class. Abuse of the Moravians became common. One planter even punished slaves for attending meetings by lighting a Bible on fire and extinguishing the flames on the slaves’ faces.⁴³

In a society dominated by slavery, the Moravian posture toward enslavement is the most important dimension of their mission theory to understand. Every facet of Moravian mission theory and practice was crafted, to good and bad effect, with that

overwhelming reality in mind. Although Martin and Freundlich were appalled by the horrors of slavery, the missionaries soon prioritized the gaining of religious toleration from the planter society to enable them to go about their work on the plantations over efforts to seek manumission of slaves.⁴⁴ Doing so would have likely resulted in them being sent back home by Danish rulers of the islands.⁴⁵

Modern readers considering Moravian accommodations with slavery may rightly lament many of their actions, but in doing so may fail to see the liberating dimensions of their work. Even the missionaries' purchase of a plantation was seen by them as a land acquisition to provide a safe refuge for slaves to pray and study the Bible. The plantation was located in close proximity to many members of the Moravian congregation who had to be wary of evening curfews which restricted their ability to attend distant meetings.⁴⁶ After learning to interpret the Bible from Martin, Freundlich, and their Black assistants, Moravian converts were able to stand in judgment of the poor behavior of planters. Moravian leader August Spangenberg applauded this fact when he visited the island in October of 1736.⁴⁷ Archival sources record several instances of enslaved persons' agency to counter planter oppression. In one case, a slave woman about to be sexually violated read from her Bible words that shamed her abuser, and he relented. In another case, a letter signed by 650 Black people was written to Zinzendorf's childhood friend and now king of Denmark, Christian VI, reporting on the poor treatment of slaves as well as missionaries at the hands of planters on the king's island domain.⁴⁸

Zinzendorf's theory of mission for missionaries in the Caribbean reflects an understanding of the importance of flexibility in their work and an abundance of patience that their work may not yield many conversions. Zinzendorf even displayed trust in Indigenous persons and their culture when he encouraged missionaries not to use the "Herrnhut yardstick."⁴⁹ By this he advised missionaries not to measure success on the mission field in the same way they would back home in Herrnhut.⁵⁰ One wonders how much of Zinzendorf's intercultural generosity was due to the hours spent as a young man speaking with missionaries from Tranquebar, but on this point one can only speculate. In practice, Zinzendorf and Augustus Spangenberg both had a hard time *not* applying the "Herrnhut yardstick" to their work in the Caribbean but that they cautioned against it still shows they were cognizant of this as a danger.

Zinzendorf's more flexible approach to mission may also stem from his theology of the Holy Spirit and the nature of the conversion process. He taught that "The Saviour is tied to absolutely nothing. He will not be dictated to. Each instance takes its course. The Holy Spirit portrays Jesus to souls. . . . To one this happens distinctly, to another indistinctly."⁵¹ In Zinzendorf's 1740 *Plan for a Catechism for the Heathen*, he advised missionaries to prioritize concern for the individual person with whom one was sharing the Gospel. The catechism begins with the nature of the human person, progresses to questions about Jesus and the process of conversion, and almost as an afterthought mentions teaching about the Trinity.⁵² He further counseled that this "catechism" should not be used in a rote fashion but as a "plan of order in which you will publicly teach," all the while acknowledging the importance of being guided by the Holy Spirit.

The contributions of Zinzendorf to a generous evangelical mission theory in the Caribbean contrast sharply with statements that he gave during a short visit to St.

Thomas in 1738–1739, when he delivered one of the most vigorous evangelical defenses of slavery of his era: “God has punished the first Negroes with slavery. The blessed state of your souls does not make your bodies accordingly free, but it does remove all evil thoughts, deceit, laziness, faithlessness, and everything that makes your condition of slavery burdensome.”⁵³ This speech was in part intended to placate the planter class of the islands to prevent future imprisonment of missionaries for whom Zinzendorf had just successfully lobbied release, but the speech was also a kind of watershed event for Moravians who were now increasingly seen as friends of the planters.⁵⁴

The Moravian missionary experience clearly influenced the mission work of other evangelicals who arrived in the Caribbean in the decades after their pioneering efforts in the 1730s. The first Methodist mission efforts began on the island of Antigua in 1759, when an Antiguan planter, Nathaniel Gilbert, returned from a visit to London where he had met John Wesley and began following the Wesleyan way along with two of his slaves, Mary Alley and Sophia Campbell. Gilbert died shortly after returning from London, but his two slaves’ evangelistic work built on the prior Moravian work on the island and bore fruit that proliferated well into the 1780s.⁵⁵ A Methodist Society of two thousand was thriving in 1786, when Thomas Coke arrived with missionaries to “begin” work in Antigua. Methodist work in the Bahamas and Baptist mission in Jamaica began due to the leadership of Black missionaries as well, who spread Christianity in the Caribbean after leaving the United States with other Black Loyalists following the Revolutionary War.⁵⁶

Like Zinzendorf, Methodist mission promoter Thomas Coke both condemned slavery and condoned it. He was quite willing, for example, to give credit to Protestant missionary activity on British islands for preventing slave insurrections and continuing “the preservation of many of [Britain’s] richest colonial possessions” without troubling his readers too much with the disturbing truth about the exploited persons who created that richness.⁵⁷

The factors that led to the success of early Protestant missions in the Caribbean differed in almost every way from what led to success in India. Unlike the first missionaries in India, we have no evidence of Moravian interest in Indigenous religions; neither were they successful in establishing a thick network of schools supported by Indigenous rulers. Bible translation amid the linguistic diversity of newly arriving African slaves was also not a strategy they pursued. Instead, a mission theory that valued the contributions of Black assistants and alternately criticized slavery and accommodated itself to it was the most critical factor explaining the successes and failures of missions in the Caribbean.

SOUTH AFRICA

As was the case in the Caribbean, the context in which Christianity was established in South Africa was mostly one of exploitation of Indigenous persons. The Dutch were not the first European arrivals to the shores of South Africa, but their establishment of Cape

Town, in 1652, was the most significant and long-lasting. The Dutch, however, made minimal efforts to share the message of Christianity with Indigenous inhabitants of the Cape; the first convert among the Khoikhoi, whom the Dutch called Eva, died imprisoned and alone on Robben Island in 1674. Disease, violence, and slavery had devastated the Khoikhoi by the time the first Moravian missionaries arrived in 1737 with a more explicit missionary vision than their Dutch forebears. The San, a neighboring ethnic group, also saw their land encroached upon and, just two years after the Moravians' first arrival, began a long-lasting series of attacks against European colonists, known to Europeans as the "Bushman War."⁵⁸

The genesis of Moravian missionary George Schmidt's call to South Africa came from Halle missionary Ziegenbalg who had stopped over at Cape Town on his way to India from Europe. Ziegenbalg described the dire conditions of the Khoikhoi to two Dutch pastors, who then passed the word along to the Moravians. Schmidt spent six years in a prison before answering a call to mission service, an unusual, but in hindsight, fitting experience of missionary preparation for the South African context. Theological disagreement between Schmidt and the Dutch Calvinist settlers and the challenge of serving in the midst of war, made his life in South Africa perhaps as lonely and difficult as it was in prison, and, after six years, Schmidt returned home.⁵⁹

The arrival on April 1, 1799, of Theodorus van der Kemp (1747–1811) of the newly established (1795) London Missionary Society was a new beginning for Christianity in South Africa. It represented a fresh chapter in early evangelical mission history. Between the years 1792 and 1799, evangelicals in Britain established three different missionary organizations which became engines for mission growth for the next century.⁶⁰ The London Missionary Society (LMS; at first simply called "the Missionary Society") was the most ecumenically inclusive of the three British societies, a fact celebrated by its devotees. After committing himself to the LMS, Van der Kemp convened a meeting that established the Netherlands Missionary Society in 1797 that was closely modeled on the one established in London. In Holland he also set a goal to organize a similar society in South Africa, which he did less than a month after arriving there.⁶¹

Van der Kemp's ministry is one of the most remarkable and praiseworthy of missionary endeavors in South Africa. His energetic spirit combined with humility toward Indigenous persons was matched by a robust disdain for White settler slave society and profound disinterest in material possessions. Originally from Holland, Van der Kemp had a varied career as soldier and student of philosophy, theology, and medicine. Shortly after a heartfelt conversion in 1791, which followed the tragic drowning accident of both his wife and daughter, Van der Kemp befriended Moravians and was soon helping them on their publishing projects. He never became a Moravian, however, even if their love for mission seems to have inspired him. The ecumenical openness of a group like the LMS better suited Van der Kemp's more pragmatic and adventurous spirit. On November 26, 1798, the Directors of the London Missionary Society sent the fifty-one-year-old Van der Kemp on his way with a closing hymn befitting the occasion, "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun."⁶² A few days after arrival in South Africa Van der Kemp also visited the newly established (since 1792) Moravian mission among the Khoikhoi to both encourage and

learn from them. The Moravians, in turn, cheered Van der Kemp on in his plans to begin a new ministry effort among the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape.⁶³

As a native Dutchman and missionary with the LMS, Van der Kemp was from the outset a politically ideal candidate for a South Africa which had just passed from Dutch to British control in 1795, but Van der Kemp was not one to "play politics" among the Europeans. Van der Kemp wanted to serve among the Xhosa, and it was to them that he quickly went, developed a relationship with the Xhosa leader Ngqika, and mastered the Xhosa language enough to write a basic grammar of the language. He was a respected preacher among the Xhosa, so much so that three generations after his fifteen-month stay in Xhosaland many of the Christians still called themselves "the people of Van der Kemp."⁶⁴

The mission theory and practice of Van der Kemp in some ways did not differ greatly from other missionaries of his age. He focused a great deal on language-learning, preaching, and teaching the Xhosa with whom he had contact, including King Ngqika. Van der Kemp, however, was more attentive than most missionaries (reminiscent of Ziegenbalg) to documenting cultural and religious details of the Xhosa. In 1800, he published *Religion, Customs, Population, Language, History and Natural Productions of the County (Caffraria)*.⁶⁵ A unique characteristic of Van der Kemp's work among the Xhosa was that he developed a reputation as one whose prayers brought needed rainfall.⁶⁶ His marriage to a slave woman from Madagascar with whom he had four children, and his sponsorship of a joyous day of public celebration over the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, were scandalous in the eyes of other White South Africans. But Van der Kemp seemingly could not care less.⁶⁷

We know very little of Van der Kemp's relationship with his most influential convert, Ntsikana of the Xhosa. Scholars are not even certain how direct an influence Van der Kemp had on Ntsikana, though a strong oral tradition exists that it was substantial.⁶⁸ Ntsikana of the Xhosa was serving as a herder of King Ngqika's cattle when he experienced a mystical vision and heard a voice that said, "Let there be prayer! Let every thing bow the knee!" He aligned himself as a teacher with King Ngqika against a rival prophet among the Xhosa who argued for armed resistance against the Whites during this period of nearly constant warfare with them. Ntsikana, by contrast, pushed for a more pacifist stance, the essence of which was "complete submission to the will of God, where alone peace and protection were to be found."⁶⁹ The following stanzas from Ntsikana's "Great Hymn" illustrate the way he sought to convey this Christian idea in a Xhosa cultural idiom:

He who is our mantle of comfort,
The giver of life, ancient on high,
He is the Creator of the Heavens
And the ever-burning stars:
God is mighty in the heavens,
And whirls the stars around in the sky.
We call on him in his dwelling-place

That he may be our mighty leader.
 For he maketh the blind to see;
 We adore him as the only good,
 For he alone is a sure defense,
 He alone is a trusty shield,
 He alone is our bush of refuge:
 Even He, —the giver of life on high,
 Who is Creator of the heavens.⁷⁰

There are a number of different versions and variations of this hymn as it has been passed down through the generations, some of which contain more explicit Christological content than the example above. Finding refuge in God as a “trusty shield” and a “sure defense” would have been critically important for the Xhosa people who lived in the midst of war. In Ntsikana’s last address to his followers, given according to oral tradition on his deathbed in 1821, he urged his disciples to stick together and be united in keeping the Word of God. To convey this idea he used an African proverb which refers to a “ball of scrapings” from inside the hide of an animal which, when dried, is unbreakable.⁷¹ Ntsikana has been described by historian of African Christianity Adrian Hastings as someone who, in “a unique way . . . represents a genuinely new birth of Christian insight within African society and culture.”⁷² Ntsikana has also been called the first modern African theologian; for Ntsikana, theology was something to be sung, danced, and drummed into the lives of all those who followed. He was a pioneer for what historians and theologians now call African Initiated (or Independent) Churches (AIC’s), which are still an important part of southern African Christianity two centuries after his death.

CONCLUSION

This survey of three locations in the world where evangelical missionaries made an impact illustrates a tremendous diversity of both political contexts as well as missionary theory and practice between Isaac Watts’s publication of “Jesus Shall Reign Where e’re the Sun” in 1719 and Ntsikana’s singing of the “Great Hymn” about a century later. The Moravians, among all of the evangelical movements discussed in this chapter, emerge as the most critical “linchpin” connecting these geographical locations together. The multiple personal relationships between, for example, Ziegenbalg and nameless Dutch pastors who helped get the Moravian South African mission underway, or between Moravian and Methodist slave women on the island of Antigua, were just as important as transoceanic institutional webs. These connections—sometimes aided by imperial might and sometimes not—inspired generations of evangelicals. Relationships themselves sometimes spanned generations, as was the case between missionaries and East India Company personnel in Tranquebar and Serampore, India, which enabled William

Carey and the Baptists to gain a foothold in a place where the British imperial presence clearly did not want them. The strength and beauty of the fellowship, however, was at times more imagined than real: some of the fellowship was a kind of "shouting ecumenism," but disagreements sometimes kept people together better than silence.

The eighteenth-century missionary experience also bequeathed a wealth of experiences in terms of mission theory and practices, but, as subsequent mission efforts would demonstrate, the lessons from these earlier experiences were not always learned. The disempowerment of African leadership in the Christian church over the course of the nineteenth century is perhaps the most vivid example of the failure of missionaries to learn from a previous generation's experience.⁷³ Today, in Western academic circles, there is often a tendency to see early evangelical missions in caricature as earnest preachers and teachers of the Bible. They were that, unapologetically, but the nuances they sought to communicate in their opposition to slavery, their Bible translations, their encouragement of an "information revolution," and even in their hymns are too rarely given attention, much less admiration. Nevertheless, a measured admiration may be needed in order to fully appreciate the influence evangelical missions had on the early evangelical heart and mind in the eighteenth century and the centuries to follow.

NOTES

1. Stephen A. Marini, "Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American Popular Religion," *Church History* 71, 2 (2002): 279.
2. Brackets and italics are in the original. Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and Apply'd to the Christian State and Worship* (London: J. Clark, 1719), 186.
3. Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise Since 1700* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9–21.
4. See, for example, Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution. Volume Two: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). For a critique, see Donald L. Donham, "Thinking Temporally or Modernizing Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 103, 1 (2001).
5. David Hempton, *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 31.
6. Andrew Porter, "'Cultural Imperialism' and Protestant Missionary Enterprise, 1780–1914," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25, 3 (1997); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed., revised and expanded (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).
7. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 54.
8. W. O. B. Allen and Edmund McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1698–1898* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 201.
9. D. Dennis Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians, 1706–1835*, *Studies in the History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI/Richmond UK: William B. Eerdmans/Curzon Press, 2000), 91. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Continental Pietism and the Evangelical Movement in Britain," in *Pietismus und Reveil: Referate der Internationalen Tagung: Der Pietismus in den Niederlanden und seine Internationalen Beziehungen* Zeist

- 18–22. Juni 1974, edited by J. Van Den Berg and J. P. Van Dooren (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 225–227; Daniel L. Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England: Anthony William Boehm and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 190.
10. Robert Glen, “The History of Early Methodism in Antigua: A Critique of Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood’s *Come Shouting to Zion*,” *African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* “*Journal of Caribbean History* 35, 2 (2001): 256; Edward A. Holmes, “George Liele: Negro Slavery’s Prophet of Deliverance,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 1 (1965).
11. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, eds., *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3. Tiyo Soga, *The Journal and Selected Writings of the Reverend Tiyo Soga*, Graham’s Town Series (Cape Town, SA: Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1983).
12. Todd M. Johnson et al., “Christianity 2018: More African Christians and Counting Martyrs,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, 1 (2018): 25.
13. Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood, eds., *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 20–21.
14. Brian Stanley, “Missionary Societies,” in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Vol. II: The Long Eighteenth Century, C. 1689—C. 1828*, edited by Andrew Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Andrew F. Walls, “The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context,” in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, edited by Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).
15. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 79.
16. Historians who portray the rise of evangelical missions prior to the late eighteenth century include W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise*; Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India*.
17. Martin Krieger, “Tranquebar in 1706,” in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India, Vol. 1: The Danish-Halle and the English-Halle Mission*, edited by Andreas Gross, Y. Vincent Kumaradoss, and Heike Liebau (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2006), 148–150.
18. Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India*, 2.
19. Edward E. Andrews, “Tranquebar: Charting the Protestant International in the British Atlantic and Beyond,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 74, 1 (2017): 11; Brijraj Singh, “One Soul, Tho’ Not One Soyl? International Protestantism and Ecumenism at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century,” *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 31, (2002): 61–84. Daniel L. Brunner, “Collaboration and Conflict in Europe Around the Early Tranquebar Mission,” *Covenant Quarterly* 65, 2 (2007).
20. Dan H. Andersen, “The State of Denmark in 1705,” in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India, Vol. 1: The Danish-Halle and the English-Halle Mission*, 85.
21. Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Rekha Kamath Rajan (trans.), “Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg to August Hermann Francke,” *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India, Vol. 3: Communication between India and Europe*, edited by Andreas Gross, Y. Vincent Kumaradoss, and Heike Liebau (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle), 1341–1346; August Hermann Francke and Rekha Kamath Rajan (trans.), “August Hermann Francke to the Congregation at Tranquebar,” in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India, Vol. 3: Communication between India and Europe*, 1353.

22. Singh, "One Soul," 79–81.
23. Andrews, "Tranquebar," 12.
24. Ziegenbalg was imprisoned between November 1708 and March 1709. Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India*, 1–4; 27.
25. Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India*, 45.
26. Eliza F. Kent, "Raja Clarinda: Widow, Concubine, Patroness: Women's Leadership in the Indian Church," in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity, Vol. 2: Christian Mission in the Indian Context*, edited by Andreas Gross, Y. Vincent Kumaradoss, and Heike Liebau (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2006), 659–684. Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India*, 110–139.
27. Daniel Jeyaraj, "Embodying Memories: Early Bible Translations in Tranquebar and Serampore," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 40, 1 (2016): 46; Will Sweetman, "The Prehistory of Orientalism: Colonialism and the Textual Basis for Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's Account of Hinduism," in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India, Vol. 2: Christian Mission in the Indian Context*, 931–932.
28. Rekha Kamath Rajan, "Cultural Delimitations: The Letters and Reports of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg," *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India, Vol. 3: Communication between India and Europe*, 1234.
29. *Ibid.*, 1227.
30. Robert Eric Frykenberg, "The Halle Legacy in Modern India: Information and the Spread of Education, Enlightenment, and Evangelization," in *Missionsberichte Aus Indien Im 18. Jahrhundert: ihre Bedeutung für die Europäische Gesittungsgeschichte und ihr Wissenschaftlicher Quellenwert für die Indienkunde*, edited by Michael Bergunder (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 1999), 18. C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780–1914* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 12.
31. Jeyaraj, "Embodying Memories," 46.
32. *Ibid.*, 49.
33. Frykenberg, "The Halle Legacy in Modern India," 7–9.
34. Andrew F. Walls, "The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Missionary Movement in Britain," in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India, Vol. 1: The Danish-Halle and the English-Halle Mission*, 126.
35. Daniel Jeyaraj, "Maria Dorothea Ziegenbalg, the First German Lutheran Female Missionary to the Tamil People in South India," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 2 (2019): 117–118.
36. John A. Vickers, ed., *The Letters of Dr. Thomas Coke* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2013), 70, 658, 721.
37. *Ibid.*, 69, 687, 727.
38. Joseph Edmund Hutton and Cyril Garbett, *A History of Moravian Missions: With Maps* (London: Moravian Publications Office, 1923), 15.
39. Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 52.
40. Hutton and Garbett, *A History of Moravian Missions*, 48–49.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Johann Jakob Bossard, edited by C. G. A. Oldendorp's *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma, 1987), 319–320.

43. Jon Sensbach, "Slavery, Race, and the Global Fellowship: Religious Radicals Confront the Modern Age," in *Pious Pursuits: German Moravians in the Atlantic World*, edited by Michele Gillespie and Robert Beachy (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 227.
44. Moravians initiated this compromise toward slavery that became common among Methodist and other missionaries later in the Leeward islands. Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 307.
45. Hutton and Garbett, *A History of Moravian Missions*, 40.
46. Sensbach, "Slavery, Race, and the Global Fellowship," 107.
47. The missionary leader of the Moravians after Zinzendorf, Spangenberg, noted this fact when he visited St. Thomas in September and October of 1736. Sensbach, "Slavery, Race, and the Global Fellowship," 55.
48. Heike Raphael-Hernandez, "Black Caribbean Empowerment and Early Eighteenth-Century Moravian Missions Documents," *Slavery & Abolition* 36, 2 (2014): 319–320.
49. David A. Schattschneider, "Souls for the Lamb: A Theology for the Christian Mission According to Count Nicolaus Ludwig Von Zinzendorf and Bishop Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg" PhD diss (University of Chicago, 1975), 174–176.
50. *Ibid.*, 89, 105.
51. *Ibid.*, 71.
52. *Ibid.*, 91–92.
53. Sensbach, "Slavery, Race, and the Global Fellowship," 142.
54. *Ibid.*, 143.
55. Hutton and Garbett, *A History of Moravian Missions*, 53. Michael N. Jagessar, "Early Methodism in the Caribbean: Through the Imaginary Optics of Gilbert's Slave Women: Another Reading," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 5, 2 (2007): 163; John A. Vickers, ed., *The Journals of Dr. Thomas Coke* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2005), 75.
56. For the history of Black Methodist initiatives in the Caribbean, see David Bundy, "Thomas Coke as Mission Historian: A Case Study of the Bahamas," *Methodist History* 53, 4 (2015): 222–223; "The African and Caribbean Origins of Methodism in the Bahamas," *Methodist History* 53, 3 (2015): 173–183; Horace O. Russell, *The Missionary Outreach of the West Indian Church: Jamaican Baptist Missions to West Africa in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).
57. Thomas Coke, *A History of the West Indies, Containing the Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical History of Each Island; with an Account of the Missions Instituted in Those Islands, from the Commencement of Their Civilization; but More Especially of the Missions Which Have Been Established in That Archipelago by the Society Late in Connexion with the Rev. John Wesley*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1971), 20.
58. Iris Berger, *South Africa in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22–30.
59. Hutton and Garbett, *A History of Moravian Missions*, 126–130.
60. These missionary societies included the Baptist Missionary Society (originally called the Particular Baptist Missionary Society) (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), and the Church Missionary Society (1799). On the role of the Moravian Church in spurring on evangelical formation of these societies, see J. C. S. Mason, *The Moravian Church and the Missionary Awakening in England* (Woodbridge, UK: The Royal Historical Society, 2001).

61. Ido H. Enklaar, *Life and Work of Dr. J. Th. Van Der Kemp: Missionary Pioneer and Protagonist of Racial Equality in South Africa* (Cape Town, SA: A. A. Balkema, 1988), 79–80.
62. *Ibid.*, 43, 66.
63. *Ibid.*, 79.
64. Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 200.
65. Enklaar, *Life and Work of Dr. J. Th. Van Der Kemp*, 223.
66. *Ibid.*, 102.
67. Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 202.
68. Enklaar, *Life and Work of Dr. J. Th. Van Der Kemp*, 106.
69. J. B. Peires, “Nxele, Ntsikana and the Origins of the Xhosa Religious Reaction,” *Journal of African History* 20, 1 (1979): 60.
70. These stanzas are based on one of the earliest English translations of the hymn, done in 1827. There are many other versions today. Janet Hodgson, *Ntsikana’s “Great Hymn”: A Xhosa Expression of Christianity in the Early 19th Century Eastern Cape* (Cape Town, SA: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1980), 14.
71. *Ibid.*, 56.
72. Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 218.
73. Andrew F. Walls, “The Legacy of Samuel Ajayi Crowther,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, 1 (1992).

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