Apostles and Aborigines : the Social Theory of the Church Missionary Society

by Jean USHER *

Canadian historians have almost exclusively seen culture contact between aborigines and Europeans in the context of fur trade relations. Important as the fur trade era is to the ethnohistorian, it should be clearly distinguished as a period of non-directed culture contact where the trader asks the native to accept only that part of white culture he desires and makes no formal attack on aboriginal institutions. Of greater interest to the social or intellectual historian is the period of directed culture change under the aegis of a missionary, teacher or government agent whose efforts were, and indeed still are, directed towards inducing significant social and cultural change among the various aboriginal groups.

In the nineteenth century in Canada, the missionary was probably the most important agent of acculturation and, although individually he has begun to receive some attention from students of Canadian history, his collective cultural impact has not yet been discussed.

Among the Indians and Eskimos of the Canadian Northwest and British Columbia, the Church Missionary Society, the evangelical arm of the Church of England played a particularly important role.[1] These

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[1] The evangelical revival in England had given rise to the foundation of various missionary societies. The Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1792, while the Methodists' London Missionary Society was established in 1796. In 1799, the Society for Missions to Africa and the East was organized by some lay members of the Clapham Sect and several evangelical clergymen. In 1812, this became known as the Church Missionary Society and was the first Anglican society devoted exclusively to the evangelisation of the heathen.

Among the society's earliest undertakings was the support of the mission of the Rev. John West at Red River, and by the mid-nineteenth century the C.M.S. did not consider that there was "a portion of the earth of which man is the inhabitant which lies beyond our limits". In 1920, after a century of work in Canada the C.M.S. withdrew, having supported over two hundred missionaries and lay workers, established schools, hospitals, chapels and cathedrals among the Indians and Eskimos, contributed to the formation of eight of the western dioceses of the Anglican Church and counted several of the most active and vigorous Bishops such as Horden and Bompas as its adherents. The society and its missionaries also played a significant role in the industrial and boarding schools established on Indian reserves in the latter part of the nineteenth century and, by their transcription and translation work, the C.M.S. men contributed materially to our understanding of Indian and Eskimo languages.

missionaries who played such a large part in the contact history of Canadian aborigines were not merely earnest Victorians on the frontier, benevolent religious preachers anxious to save the souls of thousands. Rather were they determined young men, agents of a world-wide organisation which was experienced in dealing with exotic cultures and in handling large and small scale adoptions of Christianity, an organisation based on the support of substantial numbers of Englishmen, many in positions of responsibility in government and business.[2] An understanding of the theoretical framework, the teleological viewpoint and the philosophical attitudes of the Church Missionary Society and its missionaries is important to a comprehension of the ethnohistory of the period of directed culture change in northern and western Canada.

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A man who offered himself to the C.M.S. as a missionary became part of a large army of evangelists striving to bring the Gospel to the heathen of the world.[3] His work, like that of so many missionaries, would be undertaken alone and in isolated places. The C.M.S. undoubtedly understood the difficulties of these situations, and as far as was technologically possible in the first half of the nineteenth century, the society kept in close contact with the men and women it supported. In addition to continual correspondence on particular issues, annual letters from the secretaries of the society were sent to each field worker, often dealing with very specific problems as well as containing general directives for all missions. For those missionaries in isolated areas with few, if any, other

[2] The C.M.S. developed one of the most efficient and extensive home organisations of the century, themselves becoming the model *par excellence* for later societies. Their two major functions were lay rather than clerical. They collected the home revenue and disbursed it appropriately to their field workers and, acting through their small committee of lay and clerical secretaries, concerned themselves with the selection and education of missionary candidates.

By the mid-nineteenth century there were few parishes in England where the parishioners, if not actually supporting the C.M.S. with annual collections, sales of work, missionary boxes or sales of magazines and literature, were not visited by C.M.S. lecturers and preachers. Indeed the number of parishes supporting the C.M.S. was "the one almost infallible barometer of Evangelical influence in the Church of England". See Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work* (London: The Church Missionary Society, 1899), Vols. I and II.

[3] By the mid-nineteenth century missions had been established to Hindus and Moslems in India, to the Maoris in New Zealand, to the North American Indians at Red River and to various tribes in West and East Africa, as well as workers sent to Smyrna, China and Palestine. The C.M.S. was, in fact, an experienced organisation, supporting many missionaries, and dealing with large numbers of converts in various stages and forms of civilisation in many different physical and cultural environments.

non-natives near, this contact was of great importance, both practically in terms of the considered advice given for their problems, and spiritually in the encouragement and personal sense of worth imparted to them. "The link with a base in Britain enhanced the missionary's feelings that he was an emissary with a specific task, a representative of a religious society whose moral and spiritual values it was his function to spread." [4]

The C.M.S. also published several magazines which served similar functions for the missionaries. [5] Most missionaries in the field received regular monthly copies of the most important of these, the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*. The *Intelligencer*, founded in 1849, and designed as a medium of communication "among the elite of the movement", [6] contained extracts from the journals and letters of missionaries, reviews and past histories of missions, discussions of contemporary religious disputes, scriptural commentaries, travellers' accounts of prospective mission fields, reviews of publications and explanatory articles on C.M.S. policy. For the society's supporters at home, its function was to stimulate the interest in missions, solicit funds and personnel, and to provide a forum for the opinions of the Evangelicals within the Church on both social and political affairs. At its inception the editor, the Reverend Joseph Ridgeway, [7] offered the *Intelligencer* to the public as "commending itself to the attention of intelligent and thinking minds, and admitted as a welcome visitant to the drawing room and library table, pleads with happy influence the claims of the Missionary cause". [8]

For the missionaries in the field, the *Intelligencer* strengthened their link with home and gave them a sense of the vitality of the evangelical party and a faith in the inevitable success of their work. They were

4 H. A. C. CAIRNS, *The Clash of Cultures. Early Race Relations in Central Africa* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 54.

5 Besides the *Intelligencer*, the society published the *Church Missionary Society Record* and the *Church Missionary Gleaner*. The *Record* was designed for the general public and concentrated on publishing the journals and diaries of the various missionaries. It also contained lists of donations from parishes and individuals and demands for the needs of various missions. It later amalgamated with the *CMI*, which then became *Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record*.

The *Gleaner* was designed for use in Sunday schools. It contained many pictures and published children's prayers and stories of the conversion of children in other lands.

6 Philip CURTIN, *The Image of Africa : British Ideas and Action* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 325.

7 The Reverend Joseph Ridgeway, M.A. (Trinity College, Dublin), was the incumbent of Christ Church, Tunbridge Wells, and the zealous evangelical editor of the *Intelligencer* from 1849 to 1870.

8 *CMI*, 1849, p. 2.

provided with an intimate picture of the workings of other missions, a practice which served to give them a consciousness of community, a feeling of being part of a larger movement. In the journals of other missionaries they were able to identify the same feelings of loneliness, frustration, isolation and doubt that they themselves experienced. In reporting the continual progress and success of various missionaries, the *Intelligencer* also served as an agent of mutual support and edification for field workers. They were constantly reminded, too, that their mission was divinely ordained, and could not but succeed in the fullness of time.

The C.M.S. believed that "history repeats itself. It does so indeed in a manner truly remarkable, and hence the value of the past. Old experiences become available for present use." [9] In this framework, the *Intelligencer*, by presenting frequent reviews of the history of various missions, fulfilled the vital function of making the old experiences available to those who felt they could currently make use of them. The society hoped, by providing a forum for the sum of mission activity, to search for the general principles involved in their work. By the late 1850s these evangelical missionaries were far less the romantic idealists who longed only to preach the Gospel to the heathen. They had themselves become a national institution, organised on a vast network throughout England and supervising agents throughout the unconverted world. They had had years of experience in dealing with non-Christian peoples and by mid-century approached their mission in a systematic, scientific manner. The *Intelligencer* records this maturing process.

> We desire to ascertain with more accuracy the principles which govern the growth of Missions, and to understand better their cultivation... In the commencement of this work there must have been much of inexperience, but now we have results before us in great variety, and it will be our own fault if, from a consideration of these, we do not derive much of valuable instruction. Missionary action is an inductive science and must be dealt with accordingly. [10]

The Church Missionary Society's publications provided the Victorian public with much of their information about aboriginal peoples and their social environment. The colourful accounts of heroism and stories of exotic cultures captured the popular imagination, and missionary literature

[9] *CMI*, 1866, p. 67.
[10] *CMI*, 1855, p. 274.

of all kinds enjoyed a great popularity in Victorian homes.[11] The *Intelligencer* accepted that part of its function was to provide factual accounts of the comparatively unknown regions of the world in which its missionaries worked. "Christian ethnography; the scattered portions of the great human family; the places of their habitation; the condition to which sin has reduced them; or the benefits which they have received from the ameliorating influence of Christian Missions — this is our subject."[12] Perhaps more importantly, the *Intelligencer* also gave formal expression to the attitudes towards native peoples which provided the underlying basis for the policies of the Church Missionary Society. These Christian, humanitarian attitudes not only impressed themselves on a large segment of the Victorian public, but more specifically provided the C.M.S. missionaries with a philosophical framework for their mission.

The basic ideal underlying missionary attitude to aborigines was a belief in the unity of the human family. The *Intelligencer* stated categorically that mankind was "one species, derived from one common parentage, yet, under the varying influences of climate, habits of life, etc., presenting itself under a variety of modification".[13] God had made of one blood all nations of men and, for the Evangelical, each man represented in some part the Divine image. The observed differences in the condition of man were seen as partly due to the circumstances of his environment and partly to his ignorance of the Gospel. In the eyes of these Victorians, the degradation of the aborigines was due only "to a prolonged condition of isolation and ignorance".[14]

This was an optimistic outlook on other cultures and one which opened up the way to development by the external agency of the missionary. Isolation from western civilisation and ignorance of the Christian Gospel were seen to be the problems facing native peoples. If only the missionary could lay the knowledge of these ways before them they could enter the mainstream of civilised life. The C.M.S. saw every reason to look forward confidently "to the day when under humanizing influences

11 The *Intelligencer* pointed out that "works on Missions now constitute an important branch of our literature: our knowledge of foreign lands, and the habits and manners of distant nations has been amazingly increased by the researches of Missionaries. Works of this description, combining as they do, the agreeable and the instructive, and therefore peculiarly fitted for family reading, need only to be more known to be more sought after." *CMI*, 1849, p. 3.

12 *CMI*, 1863, p. 33.

13 *CMI*, 1855, p. 243.

14 *CMI*, 1869, p. 57.

and more especially under the regenerating power of the Gospel or the grace of God, the African will no longer be a byword and outcast from civilisation".[15]

Although the missionaries emphasised the role the physical environment played in determining the condition of aboriginal people, they had no romantic view of the simple innocence of the people themselves. Men of the nineteenth century prided themselves on knowing more accurately the condition of these natives. "Old books... may describe the simple pastoral life of the North American Indian... But we *know* that, on more accurate inspection, these pleasant imaginations shift into dark and horrible realities; and cruelty and cannibalism, and human sacrifice tell us too plainly that Heathenism is everywhere and always the same accursed thing."[16] As Professor Cairns has noted, the missionary who subscribed to the idea of the African or aborigine as a noble savage would have immediately opened himself to sharp criticism for spoiling such a simple, happy natural life.[17]

Almost universally, the missionaries saw the native as childlike. This analogy provided them with the explanation for much of the emotional, extravagant, impulsive behaviour they observed. And just as the child can be brought to civilisation under the firm guidance of a benevolent parent, so could these aborigines be brought to civilisation under the stewardship of paternal missionaries. Such beliefs obviously prepared the way for paternalism, and put the native in a position of inferiority, "thus justifying any enterprise in which he was to be treated as an object".[18] But, most significantly, it was a philosophy of progress, which held out the possibility of development to the native peoples.

These developmental ideas of the evangelical missionaries had much in common with the cultural evolution school of the early anthropologists of the Ethnological Society.[19] Cultural evolution belongs to the same

15 *Ibid.*
16 *CMI*, 1849, p. 76.
17 CAIRNS, 93.
18 *Ibid.*, 235.
19 The Ethnological Society was in part an offshoot of the Aborigines Protection Society, and was founded in London in 1848. In 1863 the society divided and one group formed the Anthropological Society which, deriving many of its ideas from the physical anthropologists, became more hysterically racialist and tended to be extremely critical of missionaries and their work. For a valuable account of the ideas of the two societies see J. W. BURROW, *Evolution and Society: A Study of Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

intellectual climate as Darwinism, but is itself an independent development, and its proponents had begun their work before 1859. Edward Tylor, the progenitor of English anthropology, was inspired by the theories of cultural evolution. In his *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* first published in 1865, he pointed out that "the facts collected seem to favour the view that the wide differences in the civilisation and mental state of the various races of mankind are rather differences of development than of origin, rather of degree than of kind".[20] The cultural evolutionists saw culture as developing in a progressive manner through time, and following the same developmental sequential stages wherever it was found. This form of evolutionary theory enabled the aborigines, in whatever particular stage of savagery or barbarism they were found, to be viewed as potential Europeans, or conversely as contemporary ancestors of Englishmen.[21] As Tylor suggested, "there is reason to suppose that our ancestors in remote times made fire with a machine much like that of the modern Eskimaux [*sic*]".[22] The attraction of evolutionary social theories for missionaries was that it accorded with their own belief in the unity of mankind, gave them a framework in which to fit the barbarism that they encountered, and held out the possibility of success for their own work.

"Mankind was not one because it was everywhere the same, but because the differences represented different stages in essentially the same process, and by agreeing to call the process, progress, one could convert the social theory into a moral and political one."[23] Progress was indeed the essence of the attitudes of the missionaries and the cultural evolutionists. Their theories of development implicitly assumed that the highest stage for a civilisation to reach was that of protestant, Victorian England. The *Intelligencer* in fact believed quite explicitly that "there is to be found in England a more advanced social organization than, perhaps is to be met in any quarter of the globe".[24] Progress, too, was the keynote of the Victorian age itself, epitomised by the Great Exhibition of 1851 and

[20] E. B. TYLOR, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, edited and abridged, with an Introduction by Paul BOHANNAN (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 232.
[21] CAIRNS, 235.
[22] TYLOR, 232.
[23] J. W. BURROW, "Evolution and Anthropology in the 1860's: The Anthropological Society of London, 1863-1871", *Victorian Studies, VII* (December, 1963), 154.
[24] *CMI*, 1852, p. 5.

its display of the progress made by England in material culture. Progress was also claimed by the C.M.S. as the law of Christianity, for not to advance in its name could only be regarded as a retreat. The secular faith in progress of the Victorian missionary supported his religious faith in the inevitable success of the Gospel, while his belief in the unity of mankind convinced him of the innate ability of primitive men to absorb western civilisation and Christianity. These basic theories of development that he shared with the cultural evolutionists provided him with the teleological structure for his endeavour.

The fact that "uncivilised" people were capable of progressing to the heights of Victorian civilisation was not enough, however. The C.M.S. and, indeed, most nineteenth-century protestant churches believed that England's eminent position in the world entailed upon her a moral duty to aid the process of development of these more primitive societies. Divine Providence in fact had specifically equipped the English for such a role. England's world wide commercial contacts, her colonies and her influence in the world all afforded "astonishing facilities for the wider dissemination of Gospel truth".[25] Europe was still overshadowed with the errors of Roman Catholicism and, more immediately, revolutions had forced Europeans to concentrate their energies at home. Internal peace had been imposed on England for a Divine purpose, to enable her to fulfil her function as the emissary of the Lord to the heathen. The *Intelligencer* asked,

> Is it for nothing that tranquility has been imposed on us? ... If our age is the era for Missions, no less plainly is our own country the messenger people to the whole earth. The Heathen cry and they cry to us — to us Englishmen of the nineteenth century.[26]

It was this cry which John West of Red River, William Duncan of Metlakatla, Bishop Bompas of the Mackenzie and many other young Evangelicals had answered when they dedicated their lives to their Lord and offered their services to the Church Missionary Society.

For England not to answer the call of the heathen would have grave effects on her position. The C.M.S. at mid-century believed that God gave Empires only for the good of the governed, not of the rulers. Where the good of the governed was not steadfastly and earnestly pursued, such

[25] *CMI*, 1849, p. 3.
[26] *CMI*, 1849, p. 76.

a kingdom carried within itself "the sure seed and element of decay".[27] To the Church Missionary Society, the extent of the missionary movement was a symbol of the vitality of the Church at home. The basis of England's greatness was the protestant Christianity she espoused, and thus the missionary represented the strength of British institutions. Just as a non-missionary church was a contradiction in terms, so was the fruitfulness and the promise of all blessing on the Empire suspended "on the fulfilment of the duty of evangelising the world".[28] In essence, the support of missionary work by the Victorians not only reaffirmed their values, but guaranteed to them the continued health of their own institutions.

These mid-Victorian Englishmen optimistically felt that the world could be evangelised during their own generation, and indeed felt an extreme urgency to realise this goal as quickly as possible. They were seized with the idea that native peoples were becoming increasingly more sinful in their own time. The *Intelligencer*'s jeremiads were clear on the subject. "For generations sin has been increasing in its intensity of action amongst the heathen, until at length it has attained a degree of virulence of the most deadly and destructive character."[29] For true Evangelicals, such a situation was intolerable. Men deep in sin must be elevated, for the C.M.S. believed that "to refrain from setting him right, when he is wrong on matters of eternal import, is not, as some would persuade themselves, a becoming deference to the individual freedom of the man... but the unkindly act of one who, finding a man in bonds is content to leave him so".[30] Nor did religious relativism enter into the considerations of the society. Their mission was urgent, divinely ordained, inevitably successful and involved no kind of self-doubt on the part of the missionary. The *Intelligencer* stated firmly, "It is not merely that it (Protestant Christianity) is the superior religion so that there are others which are true, although this is more true; but that it is the truth exclusively."[31]

The Victorians, in particular the evangelical missionaries, conceived of the Christianity they took to distant lands as involving far more than a set of personal beliefs about a divine figure. Christianity, for them, was

27 *CMI*, 1849, p. 51.
28 *Ibid.*
29 *CMI*, 1852, p. 136.
30 *CMI*, 1852, p. 137.
31 *Ibid.*

conceived of as a way of life, based upon certain moral and ethical values and which, while allowing for small variations, corresponded closely to the ideal of Victorian England. The British felt they owed their greatness as a people to the influence of pure Christianity on the national character and conduct, and the idea that civilisation and Christianity were inextricably entwined was fully accepted by most Victorians.

The C.M.S. never satisfactorily solved the question of whether civilisation or Christianity should be sought first by missionaries in the field. It was certainly a difficult problem they faced. Believing as they did that barbarism was due to the free operation of original sin, they could not conceive of a civilised man who was not Christian, nor could they envisage an uncivilised Christian. In practice, the problem of whether an aborigine could become Christian before he became civilised was usually avoided and, during the early and mid-Victorian periods, the society's missionaries tended to teach both the Gospel and the arts of civilisation simultaneously.

Theoretically at least, the *Intelligencer* maintained that the Gospel itself was the "grand element of amelioration, so that, where this precedes, civilization follows",[32] and tried to impress upon prospective converts that "improved habits belong not to race, but to Christianity".[33] The responsibility lay upon the individual to apprehend his state of natural sin in the eyes of God and, by studying His word, to accept individually the sacrifice of Christ. To the spiritual life of an Evangelical, the Bible, particularly the New Testament and the Acts of the Apostles, was central. Few questions could not be answered or few life problems could not be solved by prayer and appeals to the Gospel contained in the Bible. Missionaries demanded close attention to the study of the Scriptures, for not only did they provide the true Evangelical with the inspiration for his daily life, but knowledge of the word of God was essential to the understanding of the revealed Trinity. The comprehension of the Divine enabled the individual to approach God in prayer, and it was this faith in the power of prayer and the apprehension of the revealed will which were central to evangelical theology.

32 *CMI*, 1855, p. 133.
33 *CMI*, 1866, p. 17.

To those who felt that England's prime mission should be a civilising one, the *Intelligencer* pointed out that "we cannot civilize the heathen in that true sense which is comprehensive of the domestic relations, except by the evangelising process".[34] If the Gospel was not an integral part of the civilising process, the society felt that they were thus "precluding the possibility of their being employed by God as instruments of his work". In that case, "we act as independent agents, and attempt on our own strength and by our own wisdom, to accomplish results which require the interference of Almighty power".[35] And, further, to exclude the Gospel from the civilising institutions entailed grave consequences for the future of England and her Empire. In India, such a policy would result in Deism and insubordination and "the young men educated in those governmental institutions from whence has been excluded that gospel to which England owes its grandeur and its greatness, will become the troublesome revolutionists of our Empire".[36]

The Victorian missionary's idea of civilisation, then, had a religious basis; but, more than that, it was decidedly ethnocentric and generally meant all that he considered best in his own way of life. The great Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, termed by the Prince Consort a festival of the civilisation of mankind, gives some indication of what the Victorians considered were the elements of civilisation. Here were presented, in vast array, the products of all parts of the world, and particularly of Britain and her Empire. Fascinated by their own progress in industry and technology, Britons tended to judge other nations in terms of their material culture. Commenting on the Exhibition, the *Intelligencer* spoke of the "specimens of the fertility of various lands, and manufactured articles, presenting accurate indices of the limit to which civilization had attained in them respectively".[37] More than that, the Exhibition appeared to show to Victorians how incomplete each nation was without the other and, to the C.M.S. at least, showed how the "families of the earth have been providentially placed in a position of mutual dependence on each other".[38] H.A.C. Cairns has commented that, at times, civilisation meant no more than the buying and selling

34 *CMI*, 1852, p. 138.
35 *Ibid.*
36 *CMI*, 1855, p. 122.
37 *CMI*, 1852, p. 5.
38 *Ibid.*

of the market place, an attitude based on the "elementary assumption that civilization consisted of the material goods diffused by commercial transactions".[39] Commerce, for Victorian England, was not only the means of exchange of goods, but entailed the understanding of ethical principles, a commitment to free trade and its concomitants, peace and brotherhood. This wide view of the importance of commercial life was in fact basic to the attitude of the society and mid-Victorian missionaries, and played no small part in their concept of their civilising mission.

Other elements of great importance were also involved in the civilising mission that the society enjoined upon its agents. "Sound moral principle is certainly the first element in true civilization",[40] emphasised the Venerable Archdeacon Maunsell. Maunsell, a C.M.S. missionary in New Zealand, defined civilisation as improvement in the social state. "It implies an organized society in which the condition of the human species is mentally, morally, and physically elevated. It is intimately connected with the increase of knowledge. It leads to the acquisition of wealth. It humanizes the man, softens the manners and gradually surrounds us with every kind of earthly comfort."[41] The civilising mission involved, then, not only the encouragement of the production of material goods and their distribution through commercial intercourse, but entailed provision for education and law and for inculcation of the particular values in the individual that would motivate him to desire the trappings of a civilised life and also enable him to produce them.

The most important of such values to the Victorians, and one which was of prime concern to all the missionaries, was that of work. Just as Samuel Smiles stressed the necessity for the workingman to cultivate industrious habits, so did the C.M.S. value such habits as the most desirable attributes of a Christian man. In Sierra Leone, it was felt that Christianity could not tolerate those habits of indolence in the prospective converts; that "state of savageness in which they only cared for eating, drinking and sleeping. To diligence and industry they had to be roused by the efforts of the Missionaries."[42] Work as a value was not only important because of the contribution it could make to material wealth, but

39 CAIRNS, 222.
40 *CMI*, 1862, p. 62.
41 *Ibid.*
42 *CMI*, 1855, p. 60.

was, as Max Weber has indicated, "a self-contained moral virtue independent of its productive implications".[43]

The C.M.S. believed that their self-imposed dual mission played a vital Imperial role. On the one hand, they felt that, together, the Christianity and civilisation brought by the society anticipated the movements of colonisation and prepared the aboriginal races in the best way possible for the coming of the White man. From the point of view of the aborigine, the society saw his future as doomed if he came into immediate and direct contact with Europeans. In reference to New Zealand, the *Intelligencer* asked,

> Is it possible that two distinct portions of the human race, in the opposite conditions of civilization and barbarism, can be brought into immediate contact without the destruction of the uncivilized race? We believe it to be quite possible, if only Christianity in its purity and power be on the spot.[44]

The role of the missionary and the civilisation he established in the wilderness were indispensable not only to the progress of the Gospel, but to the peaceful and honourable expansion of Greater Britain.

One of the earliest C.M.S. ventures in the civilising of native peoples was in granting aid to the Reverend Samuel Marsden in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Marsden, an Anglican chaplain in New South Wales, made several visits to the Maoris of New Zealand and, in 1808, urged the C.M.S. to begin a mission to these people. Like his successors, Marsden had an optimistic developmental attitude to the potential future of the Maoris. He saw their minds as a "rich soil that had never been cultivated, and only wanted the proper means of improvement to render them entitled to be ranked among civilized nations".[45] Marsden, however, viewed the proper means of improvement as largely secular ones, and asked the C.M.S. to provide him with a carpenter, a blacksmith, and a twinespinner. In his opinion the introduction of the arts of civilisation and the Gospel must come simultaneously. "The arts [of civilisation] and religion should go together. The attention of the Heathen can be gained and their vagrant habits corrected only by the arts. Till their attention is gained, and moral and industrial habits are induced, little

[43] CAIRNS, 79.
[44] *CMI*, 1860, p. 2.
[45] S. M. JOHNSTONE, *Samuel Marsden, A Pioneer of Civilization in the South Seas* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Ltd., 1932), p. 69.

or no progress can be made in teaching them the gospel."[46] Here is the earliest indication of the concern the society was to have in later years with the problems of civilisation and Christianity, and of their conviction that religious change necessitated economic and social development. Marsden's mechanics were the first of many practical Christians sent by the C.M.S. to various parts of the mission field. In the middle years of the century, under the aegis of Henry Venn, the C.M.S. became strongly committed to the idea of a dual role of evangelising and civilising the heathen.

Henry Venn, energetic and vigorous, dominated the committee of the C.M.S. and originated the ideas and established the policies which guided a generation of evangelical missionaries.[47] For many Victorians, the society itself had become identified with Venn, "so completely had he transfused his soul into it, and become the life-blood as well as the exponent of its principles".[48] His biographer and friend, the Reverend W. Knight, feels that Venn saw his greatest contribution here, and would have ranked the Native Church Policy he developed for the society's missions as the chief work of his official life. Not only did Venn plan the grand strategies of the society, but he found time to maintain a close and intimate contact with his missionaries in the field. The C.M.S. evangelists, by their connection with the society, were already committed to carrying out his policies and ideals, but, in addition, many of them developed almost a personal allegiance to Venn which gave them an added commitment to the Native Church Policy. In his lifetime, Venn was revered. At his death in 1873 there were many who, like William Duncan, mourned, "what loss to the world ! and how powerfully solemn the event speaks to all engaged in Mission work... How many have wept and still weep (some like myself alone) and while in thought we follow him to heaven, how many of us are crying My father ! My father !"[49]

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Henry Venn, the son of John Venn of Clapham, was descended from a long line of Cambridgemen and clergymen, and was born into the centre of the second wave of the evangelical revival. Venn's meticulous attention to detail, his passion for systematic treatment of problems, his energy and conscientiousness, his wide interest in all aspects of the evangelical cause and of mission work, and his well placed family and social connections combined to make him a formidable but benevolent director of mission work.

[48] *CMI*, 1873, p. 129.

[49] William Duncan Papers, microfilm PAC, hereafter referred to as WD/C2148 W. Duncan to C.M.S., Metlakatla, May 3, 1873.

As a true evangelical, Venn was of course primarily concerned with the salvation of the individual; but as the *de facto* director of the society's missions, he was also charged with forming the policy that could best achieve these ends with the means at his disposal. He realised that the heathen world could not possibly be evangelised solely by European and American missionaries, for, as he pointed out, "transplant the whole clergy of England into China, place them as they are placed here, so many clergymen to so many people, and what would be the consequence ? You would have supplied just one twentieth part of the population China." [50]

Venn took the work of the Apostle Paul as his ideal. St. Paul's main work as a missionary "was the gathering and forming of local churches ... He thus in each place put in requisition the power of association, organization and combination of a self-governed Christian community." [51] Venn emphasised that the true function of the missionary was to evangelise and convert the heathen, and to form a congregation of believers. His guiding principle was that missions must always be treated as if in a transition state. The role of the missionary was to establish self-supporting congregations of Native Christians and, when this had been effected, the mission would have "attained its *euthanasia* and the Mission agency can be transferred to the regions beyond". [52]

To Venn, England was the new centre of world Christianity, and one more influential than Rome had been. Yet, he noted, "it was so not by conquest, but by commerce and colonization". [53] However, this did not mean that England's Church must establish herself throughout the heathen world. The object before the society was "not only to induce a few individuals of every nation to flock into the Christian Church, but that all nations should gradually adopt the Christian religion as their national profession of faith, and thus fill the universal Church by the accession of national churches". The C.M.S. under Venn aimed to make Christianity indigenous and not exotic, with many centres instead of one.

50 H. VENN, *Retrospect and Prospect of the Operations of the Church Missionary Society* (London: C.M.S. House, 1865), p. 4.
51 Rufus ANDERSON, *Foreign Missions : Their Relations and Claims* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), p. 47.
52 Eugene STOCK, *The History of the Church Missionary Society. Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), II, 83.
53 H. VENN, *On Nationality*, cited in KNIGHT, 282.

The church established in these centres was consciously to assume a national character as far as was commensurate with the principles of evangelical Christianity.

A prime responsibility for the society's missionaries was to place Scriptures written in the vernacular in the hands of the heathen. Missionaries were further directed to study the national character of the people among whom they laboured, and to learn to understand their ways of thinking. Venn realised that it was difficult for Englishmen to show respect for national peculiarities which differed from their own, but emphasised to the society's agents that they must make a concerted effort to overcome this problem. From their first arrival in the new country, the missionaries were to study and respect the national habits "till it becomes a habit with you to do so and a second nature". [54]

By integrating the Christian Church into the mainstream of national life, Venn hoped the converts would never have to choose between nationality and religion. He believed Christianity was designed for all nations and that, in organising the native church as a national institution, each church member would feel himself doubly bound to his country, both through his religious community and through his secular associations. Native peoples often saw Christianity as a White man's religion and refused to accept it on those grounds. Venn aimed to make this reason untenable by placing Christianity in the natives' own setting and presenting it to them as a part of their own way of life. He hoped, too, that the native church as a national institution would eventually attract all the Christians of the nation and would "ultimately supersede the denominational distinctions which are now introduced by Foreign Missionary Societies", [55] and would thus approach Venn's ideal of the supremacy of the Invisible Church of believers.

The most important function of the missionary was to educate and to train the native pastors and evangelists. The man who, from the beginning, did not set himself the task of raising an indigenous ministry to replace himself was building on an insecure foundation. At all times the missionary was to hold clearly in mind the distinction between himself as a European evangelist to the heathen, and the pastor of a flock,

54 VENN, *On Nationality*, cited in KNIGHT, 282.
55 VENN, *On Nationality*, cited in KNIGHT, 286.

who should ideally be a native. Venn warned of the dangers involved in delaying the advent of a native ministry. When the missionary is of another and superior race, experience had taught the society that converts remained personally attached to their missionary and tended to stay too long in a dependent condition. "The same congregation under competent native pastors, would become more self-reliant, and their religion would be of a more manly, home character." [56]

Venn was less concerned in fact with the intellectual and academic qualification of the native ministers than with establishing the principle of a native pastorate as soon as possible in every appropriate mission. It was not even necessarily desirable that a native minister should have reached an approximation of a European standard of intellectual development. "This is not the material needed for the native pastorate", the *Intelligencer* advised in 1856. "It will not at all answer that they who hold that office should be too much in advance of their flock. If this be the case, there will be of necessity a want of sympathy. The pastor will be above his people: the people, made painfully conscious of their inferiority, will not identify themselves with one who is so far Anglicised as to be withdrawn from them." [57] The ideal native to minister to the new church was valued more for his personal qualities and potential abilities for ministry than for his academic qualifications. "If a man be a gracious man, well versed in his own vernacular scriptures, apt to teach, who, by service as a catechist, has purchased to himself a good degree, has obtained influence with the seriously minded members of the flock, and had a good report amongst the people generally, he is a proper person for admission to the native pastorate." [58] Such a man had distinct advantages over the European missionary, being one of the people, and not so far in advance of them to discourage them from feeling they could not reach his standard. Ideally, as the *Intelligencer* pointed out to its readers, "they see in their own pastor one from among themselves, in advance of them undoubtedly, as to Christian Character and influence; but they are encouraged to press forward, in the belief that what was possible for him, is attainable by them likewise; and thus pastor and people grow together." [59]

[56] H. Venn to the Bishop of Kingston, January, 1867, cited in KNIGHT, 216.
[57] *CMI*, 1856, p. 157.
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *CMI*, 1858, p. 37.

There was little hint of imperial domination in the attitudes behind the Native Church Policy of the Church Missionary Society. Venn's policy early put great responsibility upon the native. Partly, this was due to the fact that he always held in view his ambition to evangelise the world in one or two generations, a feat which could not be accomplished by Europeans alone. In tropical regions, particularly West Africa, the life expectancy of a European was often very short, and the early training of an indigenous pastorate was thus an important practical concern. Yet, for Venn, his policy was more than a pragmatic response to the practical problems of a missionary organisation. His ideal of a native Christian strongly resembled Samuel Smiles' ideal of the upright workingman. The values of self-help and independence that were important to Smiles were also to be important for native Christians in the society's missions.

Venn himself was greatly interested in setting his missions, the embryonic new churches, upon an independent economic basis. Again there were practical advantages to this policy, for to do so would certainly relieve the pressure upon the society's limited funds. But, for Venn, the encouragement of self-government and independence was of especial intrinsic importance. Unlike many later Victorians, he never doubted the ability of non-Europeans to attain independence or to govern themselves.

From the beginning, it was important that the missionary impress upon the converts that they were to be ultimately responsible for their own affairs, although the society would give as much help and advice as it thought expedient. As early as 1852, addressing the missionaries embarking for Sierra Leone and Abeokuta, Venn made this aspect of this policy particularly explicit.

> Keep in mind the importance of introducing, from the first the principles of *self-support* and *self-government* among the converts. Never let them imagine that the Society is to do all and pay all. Remind them daily and hourly that you only come among them to put them in the way of doing all for themselves. Their native benefit clubs, and their native idea of collective responsibility show that they are fully capable of appreciating at once the principles to which we have alluded. When Schools are to be established let the people build them themselves, and pay the teachers, with such assistance only as may be absolutely necessary. The Society must supply the Teachers; but let the parents pay for the education for their children; let them buy their own books; let them contribute to a church

> fund; let them manage their sick fund: you have abundant proof of their ability. [60]

The attitude of the missionary was of utmost importance to the success of this policy of ensuring the independence of the native converts. The technology and civilisation of the missionary would naturally tend to make him the leader and innovator in the group, and dependence upon such a person would easily follow. The C.M.S. was certainly aware of these sociological problems and forsesaw the disadvantages to the native society inherent in that situation. Converts would become dependent upon a foreign mission, rather than members of a native church. "There may be the individual spiritual life, but there is no *corporate life*, though the converts may amount to thousands in number they are powerless as a body. The principles of self-support, self-government and self-extension are wanting, on which depend the breath of life in a native church." [61]

The role of the missionary was, then, from the beginning never to do for the converts what they could well do for themselves. Most affairs of the mission, Venn instructed, could be best handled by the people themselves. Venn recommended to the Reverend J. C. Taylor, an African missionary returning to the Niger Mission, that in matters such as "the management of affairs, the serving of tables, the exercise of discipline, the building of places of worship and schools, the extension of the Mission — [to] avoid putting [himself] before the people as a leader; rather stand behind them as a prompter and counsellor. Prompting to self-action is more important than inducing men to follow a leader." [62]

The missionary was to refrain from imposing himself on the new religious community. By so doing he would give the native church the opportunity to express itself in its own terms and to develop into a truly national institution. "Let all European habits, European tastes, European ideas be left behind you", [63] Venn advised Taylor. The C.M.S. under Venn was never interested in merely swelling the ranks of Anglican adherents, or of making Englishmen of Africans. They consistently held in view the ideal of establishing congregations of independent native

[60] H. VENN, *Dismissal of missionaries to Sierra Leone and Abeokuta, CMI*, 1852, p. 20.
[61] H. VENN, *The Dangers of Station Mission Work*, cited in KNIGHT, 309.
[62] H. VENN, *Dismissal of Missionaries, CMI*, 1860, p. 90.
[63] *Ibid.*

Christians, forming part of an indigenous national church, presided over by a native clergy and episcopate and expressing the aims and reflecting the attitudes of the people.

For Venn, a social reformer of great imagination, it was not enough merely to urge the virtues of independence. Recognising that in primitive economies the means to acquire the goods considered necessary for a Christian life were often non-existent, he constantly urged his missionaries to seek opportunities for native industry and trade.[64] Within the context of the Native Church Policy, it was imperative, too, that the converts be able to support their own teacher and pastor and, if possible, to demonstrate the vitality of their religion by supporting their own evangelists to the extant heathen.

Thus Venn, for a number of impelling reasons, repeatedly sought ways to utilise profitably the talents of the people and the produce of their region. Consistent with his aim of developing national churches as expressions of national character, Venn did not necessarily attempt to impose European industrial pursuits on native peoples, but as far as possible he sought to use already existing skills and inclinations. To the missionary proceeding to the Ojibway Indians in 1868, he reiterated his principles. "Live among them; respect their national peculiarities; ascertain the industrial pursuits which may be introduced amongst them with the best prospect of meeting their peculiar habits."[65]

Like Samuel Marsden, Venn saw the necessity to send out not only ordained clergymen, but schoolmasters and lay industrial agents, for these were the men who taught the mechanics of civilisation. Their work not only enabled the community to become self-supporting, but elevated the Christian native above his heathen counterpart. Thus, Dr. Edward Irving, the lay agent of the society at Abeokuta, was instructed to study the resources of the country and to encourage the new converts to develop them so that they might "rise in social position and influence while they are receiving Christian instruction and thus form themselves into a self-

[64] In West Africa, his especial concern, the search for employment for natives arose partly out of a desire to find a legitimate substitute for the slave trade. Like his friend Fowell Buxton, the anti-slavery writer and crusader, Venn believed that the slave trade would be abandoned more readily if alternative financial avenues were opened to the native traders.

[65] KNIGHT, 287.

supporting Christian Church and give practical proof that godliness hath promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come". [66]

To the C.M.S. civilisation and Christianity were to proceed together, and to this end they conceived of the education of their converts in the broadest possible way. Venn was particularly interested in encouraging industrial education. At Kissey Mission in Sierra Leone, the C.M.S. had established an industrial school where the children were taught tailoring, and where cotton was planted for export to Manchester. Industrial education was strongly advocated by Venn, for it encouraged desirable attitudes to work from an early age. He reminded the native schoolmaster in charge of Freetown Grammar School in 1853 that "England's social advancement... has all sprung from God's blessing upon her industry... I hope you interest yourself in the industrial employment... In India, New Zealand, and all our missions, an industrial department is being added to our schools." [67]

The C.M.S. in fact did not aim at producing a highly educated élite, but attempted to build self-supporting educational institutions by combining book learning and industrial labour. "The separation of scholastic life and manual labour is a refinement of advanced civilisation. It may be doubted whether even in this case it is desirable, but certainly it is not desirable in a mission school or according to the example of the Apostles to the Gentiles." [68]

As a true evangelical, Venn did not concern himself only with the children of a nation. In fact the conversion of an adult was of the utmost importance for the future of the mission, for here was evidence to his neighbours that Christianity came not merely by habit or force of education. The adult was aware, too, of the idolatry and native customs he must renounce, and not only was he often imbued with a missionary zeal himself, but "he has some idea of the obloquy and danger to which he is exposed". [69] There was no lost generation in the vision of the C.M.S.

[66] H. VENN, "*Final Instructions to Dr. E. Irving*", December 23, 1853, CMS/CA/2LI, cited in J. F. Ade AJAYI, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891. The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, Green & Co. Ltd., 1965), p. 81.

[67] H. Venn to James Quaker, November 29, 1853, p. 53.

[68] Instructions of the Parent Committee to W. Kirkham, Schoolmaster, January 29, 1856, C.M.S. CA/L2, cited in AJAYI, *Nigeria*, 144.

[69] H. VENN, *Memoir on the Character of the Reverend Edward Bickersteth*, cited in KNIGHT, 166.

It was recognised that the development of a true Christianity would best come within the atmosphere of a Christian home. To this end Venn did not overlook the necessity of female education. The conscientious missionaries, such as those at Tinnevelly, established boarding schools for girls, where the European wives acted as teachers and guardians. Christian mothers were the basis of stability for the Christian Church, Venn pointed out to missionaries bound for Sierra Leone and Abeokuta. "God may give you a few illustrious instances of mature Christianity in your adult converts; but the mass will be far below that standard until you have a generation nursed in the lap of Christian mothers and taught to *lisp* the name of Christ." [70]

Venn's ability and imagination left an indelible mark on the character of the C.M.S. Nowhere was this more evident than in his insistence that his missionaries speak the native language. Although English was taught in some of the more advanced schools, C.M.S. missionaries were obliged to teach the native language in the primary school and as soon as possible to translate the Scriptures for the converts. Venn wanted all people to have access to the Bible. He felt that "few would be able to acquire other languages than the vernacular". [71] The C.M.S. in fact recognised the importance of a knowledge of the language, in understanding the attitudes and mentality of a group of people. The *Intelligencer* in 1855 spoke sympathetically of African culture, demonstrating that the missionaries' optimistic attitude towards the development of uncivilised peoples was based not only on theoretical grounds, but on a respect for and knowledge of the abilities of the people. "If one can understand them as they intelligently and good naturedly converse in their native tongues — if one sees the wit of their proverbs, comparisons and figures, and hears them rehearse their amusing fables, tales and romances — one cannot but wish such persons better informed who still speak of the negroes as a kind of chimpanzee, an intermediate step between the irrational creation and the rational European and American." [72]

Cairns has argued that missionary insistence on the learning of the native language was not necessarily an indication of their respect for the

[70] H. VENN, *Dismissal of Missionaries to Sierra Leone and Abeokuta, CMI*, 1852, p. 21.
[71] AJAYI, *Venn*, 340.
[72] *CMI*, 1855, p. 56.

society.[73] He points to the possibility that they might have been reluctant to spread the use of English, as he feels these were indications that they regarded an English-speaking native as a rogue. In the period of Henry Venn's secretaryship this cannot be said to apply to the C.M.S. No one was more insistent upon respect for the native societies than Venn, and his willingness to bring native students to England to train in various professions and trades demonstrates that he certainly did not intend to restrict native peoples purely to the use of their own language.

Missionaries were urged to keep journals and notebooks and to be continually aware of themselves and their environment. Every encouragement was given to field workers to observe all physical, and geographical phenomena. Venn advised men going to East Africa, "do not grudge the trouble of satisfying the curiosity of the scientific, by noting in your Journals observations upon the physical character of the country and its inhabitants, the courses of the rivers, the philological relations of the different languages and even the popular traditions of the Natives".[74] Knowledge of the people on their own terms would lead to sympathy, he felt. Only by learning their modes of thought and sympathising with their difficulties would the missionary win the hearts of the people.

By knowing the people intimately, the missionary could hope to use what was appropriate in the society for his own purposes. The social change that Venn desired was to be accomplished gradually and at all stages was to accommodate itself to the nature of the people themselves. When looking for natives to take medical training, Venn chose the native doctors and recognised their skill in discovering the healing powers of roots and herbs and minerals of their regions. As far as possible, the C.M.S. advocated that " the views and feelings and even the prejudices of the converts ... should be carefully consulted".[75]

In a reasonably sophisticated manner, Venn was able to see the main elements of various societies and to recognise their functional relationships. For Victorian missionaries, Christianity was not merely a set of beliefs, but involved also a certain way of life. The C.M.S. recognised their own role as social reformers and also knew the dangers inherent

[73] CAIRNS, 220.
[74] *CMI*, 1851, p. 43.
[75] *CMI*, 1878, p. 73.

in their positions as outsiders attempting what was little short of a revolution in native societies. Here Venn realised that the relations between the missionaries and the natives authorities were vitally important to the future of the missions. Europeans going to Yoruba in 1856 were to defer to the authority of the native chiefs, in spite of the fact that many of their modes of exercising authority might at first seem absurd to the eye of the European. "Nevertheless", Venn admonished, "they are the framework of society and till they are replaced by a more enlightened system, they must be respected."[76] If the governing powers were abolished, civil disorganisation might ensue. Venn instructed his missionaries to convince the chiefs that there was no intention to decrease their authority. The true Christian course, and a wise and politic one according to Venn, was to treat Chiefs and Kings with respect and deference. "Tribute to whom tribute is due, honour to whom honour, binds the Christian missionary in the heart of Africa."[77] It was indeed a paradox: a conservative philosophy to achieve a revolutionary end.

Respect was due to chiefs partly to prevent a breakdown of society, and partly because the power they wielded could be of value to the missionary. In some cases the missionaries were dependent upon the protection of the local authority to travel and teach in the region. The influence of the chiefs was also important to a European wanting to introduce a new set of beliefs to their people. St. Paul had followed such a policy in the development of the early churches, and Venn consciously adopted his example in his advice to missionaries. "Missionaries are only following the example of the Apostle Paul, when in attempting to evangelise a nation they address themselves at once to men of influence and to leaders of national thought."[78]

But in their attempt to gain the adherence of the leaders, there was to be no gift or bribe from the missionary. This policy was strictly followed in West Africa and was highly commended by Henry Venn. "You had for several years abstained from giving anything; and when at last you made them a present, you took care that it should be understood to be a mere tribute and payment for the protection you receive... and

[76] Instructions of the Parent Committee to those about to join the Yoruba Mission, October 21, 1856, CMS/CA2/L2, cited in AJAYI, *Nigeria*, 120.
[77] *CMI*, 1851, p. 43.
[78] Cited in KNIGHT, 430.

not a gift or a bribe." [79] Success was inevitable, they believed, and would be achieved solely by power of the Word. Moreover, once the people were accustomed to receiving gifts, their self-respect and independence might disappear, and the prospective members of a native church would become mere attendants on a foreign missionary.

The picture so often presented of an ethnocentric Englishman distributing Bibles with one hand and Victorian clothing with the other, to the uncivilised hordes, is far from the reality of the C.M.S. in the nineteenth century. Doubtless there were many blunders made in the field and certainly most missionaries were decidedly paternalistic, but the ideas and influence of Henry Venn are testimony to the respect some men of the nineteenth century had for large elements of other cultures, to their unflagging faith in what they saw as the "potential" of native people and to their concern for their independence and self-respect.

[79] *CMI*, 1852, p. 19.