

MISSIONARY WRITING AND EMPIRE, 1800–1860

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CHAPTER ONE

The British Empire, colonialism, and missionary activity

Christian missionary activity was central to the work of European colonialism, providing British missionaries and their supporters with a sense of justice and moral authority. Throughout the history of imperial expansion, missionary proselytising offered the British public a model of ‘civilised’ expansionism and colonial community management, transforming imperial projects into moral allegories.¹ Missionary activity was, however, unavoidably implicated in either covert or explicit cultural change. It sought to transform indigenous communities into imperial archetypes of civility and modernity by remodelling the individual, the community, and the state through western, Christian philosophies. In the British Empire, and particularly in what is historically known as the ‘second’ era of British imperialism (approximately 1784–1867), missionary activity was frequently involved with the initial steps of imperial expansion. A heightened sense of religiosity in Britain at this time ensured that Christianisation was seen as a crucial part of the colonising and civilising projects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Jamie Scott notes, ‘by the middle of the nineteenth century, under the double aegis of “the bible and the flag”, governments, merchants, explorers, and other adventurers were exploiting the aura of ethical responsibility lent by religion to every effort to carry British civilisation to a benighted world’.²

Whilst earlier European empires (such as the Spanish and Portuguese) had spread Catholicism, Protestant churches had traditionally been too deeply divided to make any commitment to overseas missions. Indeed, the historically strong regional church in German-based Protestantism ensured that mission activity prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was barely an issue. As Stephen Neill says, ‘It is hardly possible for a Church so confined within the boundaries of a given geographical area ever to become missionary in any real sense of the term.’³ The rise of Protestantism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a unified and less persecuted religious movement only benefited from imperial expansion into new

territories: 'In reality, it is only when the Dutch and the English began to push their commercial ventures to the ends of the earth that Protestantism begins to breathe a freer missionary air' (190).

The evangelical Protestant revival in Britain in the late eighteenth century provided the religious fervour and missionary impulse to ensure religious involvement in colonial projects. This revival coincided with complex social and economic changes, as well as more general philosophical shifts post-Enlightenment. Church historians of the time explained the rise of foreign missions as a direct response to anti-Christian public sentiment at home. The historian of the Baptist Missionary Society blames the disastrous effects of the French Revolution, where 'infidelity eclipsed the glory of truth, and spread its pestilential atmosphere amidst the moral darkness and confusion. The nation became warm in politics and cold in religion.'⁴ C. Silvester Horne's stridently celebratory history of the LMS declares that 'Christianity itself had been challenged; the new missionary policy was a bold and trumpet-toned acceptance of that challenge.'⁵

The evangelical revival, with its roots firmly in the lower to middle social orders, was also a response to the growing industrialisation of British society and the resultant rise in power and status of the middle class. Individual denominations invested differently in various social communities – Baptists, for example, had a strongly artisanal constituency – but overwhelmingly the new Protestant churches were interested in ministering to 'the people', rather than the aristocracy. This is not to say that higher ranks were entirely absent from these congregations, but rather that they were emphatically not the focus of activity, nor did they constitute the congregations of most of these church groups.

The philanthropic impulse at the base of foreign mission societies had its roots in benevolent organisations which arose during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the idea of charity, ministering primarily to the poor and disadvantaged in Britain, became energised as an important social force. B. Kirkman Gray describes how early seventeenth-century philanthropy was based on a philosophy of individual benevolence, primarily in the form of financial contributions to those individuals or organisations who were committed to working with the poor.⁶ The system of philanthropy was intrinsically tied in with a system of stratified class relations, where the wealthy were obliged to donate some of their time or money to support those less fortunate than themselves. As Gray notes, philanthropy became an integral part of upper-class success and self-image: 'The inducement is two-fold, in this world and the next. In the first place charity is a good investment . . . It is only by charity that rich men can cover their sins,

escape oblivion, and gain immortality' (98). Economically sustained by the wealthy, charitable work became a respectable pastime for the middle class and for middle-class women in particular. However, as F. K. Prochaska also notes, whilst women were deemed to have a rightful and important place in the charitable world, the nature of their service was dictated by male leaders of the philanthropic societies. Foreign mission societies arose as an extension of these home missions when religious bodies began to encourage charitable organisations to extend their activities further afield. It is their subsequent expansion into the new colonial zones of the British Empire that is crucial for my study.

From the end of the eighteenth century, Protestant congregations began to establish missionary societies. Many of the earliest societies were established as inter-denominational (or nondenominational) institutions and thus demanded religious co-operation. As Stephen Neill describes it, this establishment of voluntary, inter-denominational societies was a peculiarly nineteenth-century phenomenon, caused by the Protestant churches' inability or unwillingness to take up the cause of missions institutionally (214). It was also a decision based on economics. Missionary societies were very expensive and relied heavily upon donations from British congregations, so nascent mission societies appear to have assessed the difficulties of competing for funds as well as souls. Prior to the late 1700s, only two British missionary societies existed – the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK, established 1698) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG, established 1701). However, as Jean Woolmington notes, 'these societies had concentrated largely on the dissemination of the Scriptures [in Britain] and on providing clergy for white settlers in colonial outposts, although the SPG sent missionaries to minister to Indians and Negroes in North America and the West Indies'.⁷ The evangelical revival led to the establishment of the main Protestant missionary societies around the turn of the eighteenth century: the Baptist Missionary Society (1792); the LMS (1795); the Church Missionary Society (1799); and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (1813). These societies were established to intervene directly in the lives of native 'heathens' of the world – particularly those in the British colonies, where some level of colonial governmental support could be assumed.

British Protestant missions are especially interesting for a number of other reasons. Firstly, the historical conjunction of the evangelical revival and the second British Empire suggests certain cultural, intellectual, and ideological relations between the two. Secondly, evangelical Protestants operated the most successful and aggressive of British missions, and as

such the relationships between Britain and her colonies, as well as the relations between missionaries, colonists, and indigenous populations, were complex and multi-faceted. Thirdly, my close readings of Indian, Polynesian, and Australian mission archives demonstrate that Protestant missions exhibited localised and specific examples of mutual imbrication in different places. They did so, in part, because Protestantism provided missionaries with rather more room for relative local autonomy than did Catholicism. Fourthly, Protestant missions were usually staffed by married couples and families, whereas Catholic and Anglican missions predominantly sent out single, sex-segregated religious personnel (nuns or priests). As the hopeful (but unsuccessful) missionary candidate G. H. Poole argued in 1835, 'My great distinction between the Popish and Protestant Churches is that of a married ministry, and it is easy to conceive that the usefulness [*sic*] of a missionary must greatly depend on his character standing above suspicion. Besides if such a help be needful for men in ordinary life how much more so in the case supposed.'⁸ Protestant missions thus offer complex arenas for my investigations of gender relations and colonialism.

Part one discusses British missionary activities broadly, but with a particular focus on the LMS. The society was established with a specific charter, 'to spread the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations'.⁹ My decision to focus on a single society has been made for reasons of scope and comprehensiveness, as the sheer volume of missionary publications is overwhelming. I focus on the LMS because of its particularly inter-denominational character, too.¹⁰ This means that its history is mostly free from the domestic strictures of a single home church, unlike the Church Missionary Society, for example, which was closely bound by the politics of the Church of England and its role in British society.¹¹ The LMS was also, as Anne McClintock wryly describes it, 'the largest evangelical institution peddling its spiritual wares in the arena of empire'.¹² Part one, then, provides a general perspective on colonial mission work during the period 1800 to 1860, with a particular focus on the LMS, as an introduction to the specific cultural and textual practices of the society which are analysed in detail in the rest of the book.

Class relationships within missionary societies mirror those of their philanthropic predecessors. Brian Holmes notes that one-third of the members of the inaugural Church Missionary Society committee were merchants, bankers, and brokers.¹³ In contrast, the majority of early missionaries were of working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds, particularly in the LMS. These class distinctions came to cause significant trouble between the societies and their representatives and ensured that missionaries were

profoundly conscious of class relations. Like the philanthropists, missionaries sought to 'raise up' those less fortunate – and both economic and religious upraising involved expectations of manners, labour, and gender relations. Early mission activity tended not to attract the highly educated or ambitious: indeed, many missionary societies deliberately recruited artisans and gave them theological training. LMS candidates' application papers reveal a prevalence of drapers or drapers' assistants amongst the expectant missionary candidates of this period (one wonders whether the literal 'men of the cloth' had a specific partiality for transforming their trade into the metaphysical realm).¹⁴ Despite the lower-middle- and working-class background of some missionaries, middle-class expectations were integral to Protestant evangelising. For many missionaries, colonial service provided a substantially higher position in society than they ever could have aspired to in Britain because they were invested with the cultural authority of predominantly middle-class and prosperous mission societies. Upwardly mobile religious personnel often caused considerable friction between other members of white colonial communities and missionaries, who were regarded as acting 'above their station' and thus despised for their social aspirations. These class conflicts only contributed to the marginal position of missionaries in colonial communities, exacerbated by their willingness to criticise the behaviour and policies of white elites. Missionaries were acutely aware of class relations, both between themselves and their native populations, between mission communities and the surrounding white society, and between evangelical 'workers' in the field and the home society. They sought to consolidate and codify new, local social structures.

Different colonial enterprises, of course, entailed different levels of missionary involvement, but the centrality of religion in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ensured that religious personnel were usually provided for white colonists and frequently for colonised 'heathen' as well. Imperial expansion into America and other early locations of British colonial culture sparked the British public's interest in 'savage races' and foreign climes. Early imperial ideas about the 'noble savage' and the 'childlike' nature of the colonised races justified the posting of missionary personnel to those areas where native peoples were believed capable of 'raising up' to a civil, Christianised state. Colonial experience challenged many primarily theoretical imperial ideas about other races and their cultural practices, and, with the influence of more explicitly economic colonial interests, changed many of these philosophies. Missionary work was highly influential in altering nineteenth-century theories of race, as Robert Burns' sermon argued earlier.

Unfortunately for the missionaries, attitudes towards evangelising colonised people also changed during the nineteenth century. Events such as the Indian Mutiny (1857) and the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) troubled earlier assumptions about the potential for the colonised to be 'civilised'. With the waning of religious zeal in the latter part of the century, smaller, more focussed missionary societies began to emerge. As a result of the sometimes violent resistance exhibited by potential (native) converts, the British public as a whole started to doubt the efficacy of evangelising them. Jeffrey Richards argues that 'as the evangelical impulse faltered, the religious thrust became secularised. Many of the feelings of crusading and commitment were transferred to the Empire, increasingly depicted as a vehicle for service and self-fulfilment. The army, with its image newly refurbished, became central to the myths and rituals of empire.'¹⁵ Mission projects gradually became less theologically driven and more interested in 'good works' directed towards specific communities or problems.

Missionary involvement in British colonial policy and administration varied according to the impetus, funding, and intent of individual colonial projects. Early British involvement in India through the East India Company, for example, specifically prohibited the evangelising of the Indian public until the early 1800s, in line with the company's policy of cultural non-interference to facilitate commerce.¹⁶ After this time missionaries flooded into many Indian provinces. Relations between the East India Company or British Army officials and missionaries were often troubled, primarily because the groups had profoundly different goals for the Indian public, as well as for the expatriate British role in the colonial community. Missionaries from Australia were proselytising to Maoris long before the official white colonisation of New Zealand; indeed many missionaries there resisted the incursion of white settlers because of their doubts about the success of a bi-racial community. In Australia, on the other hand, missionaries specifically contracted to evangelise Aborigines were not sent until 1821, after a considerable period of white settlement. On arrival, missionaries aggressively attempted to stop sexual relationships between white men and black women, which they believed degraded both parties. Unsurprisingly, such interventions were rarely welcomed by settlers or the colonial administration. In Polynesia, many missionaries formed a (semi-) permanent white population on islands which had previously been only periodically visited by European explorers, whalers, and traders. They frequently opposed any further contact between other, 'corrupting', Europeans and their potential converts.

Missionaries thus negotiated quite complex relations with colonial administrations and settlers: in different places they were in collusion, conflict, or strategic co-operation with various colonial structures. It is, of course, almost impossible to generalise about missionaries across the wide range of colonial environments, but it is possible to argue that, despite the missionary societies' sometimes good intentions, the processes of evangelisation inevitably assisted the subjugation and subjection of indigenous peoples and the consolidation of white institutions of colonial control.

MISSIONARY FICTIONS

Throughout different evangelical endeavours, the image of the missionary out in the colonial field functioned importantly (although differentially) for the British public. Public interest in missionaries was intense, particularly in the early nineteenth century, with many missionaries on furlough (or in retirement) undertaking extensive speaking tours; publishing a wide range of best-selling memoirs, histories, and other testimonies; and contributing to popular journals and newspapers. As Patrick Brantlinger notes of the popularity of LMS missionary David Livingstone's African writings,

although such accounts of African explorations do not figure in standard histories of Victorian literature, they exerted an incalculable influence on British culture and the course of modern history. It would be difficult to find a clearer example of the Foucauldian concept of discourse as power, as 'a violence that we do to things'.¹⁷

The religious British public saw missionaries as representatives of their own religiosity and philanthropy and followed missionary 'adventures' with avid interest. Fictional texts, from novels to children's literature, included missionary characters and situations, particularly in the genre of adventure novels which took great interest in exotic corners of the empire.

Stuart Hannabuss analyses the numerous missionary characters in R. M. Ballantyne's novels, arguing that they figured largely in his 'message of Empire'.¹⁸ In *Jarwin and Cuffy* (1878) the hero meets John Williams, the prominent LMS missionary. A missionary father and his (angelic) daughter are crucial figures in *Gascoyne, the Sandal-Wood Trader: A Tale of the Pacific* (1873), and missionaries also appear in *Man on the Ocean* (1863) and *The Ocean and its Wonders* (1874). Ballantyne's best-known novel, *The Coral Island* (1857), uses Reverend Michael Russell's *Polynesia: A History of the South Sea* (1842) as reference material, and graphically illustrates pagan and cannibal rites in Fiji. As Martin Green notes, we 'are told that only

Christianised natives are to be trusted in trade, and a pirate admits that anyone can see what Christianity does “for these black critters”. When this pirate begins to repent his sins, Ralph consoles him with the evangelical texts, “Though your sins be red like crimson, they shall be white as snow”, and “Only believe”.¹⁹ Ballantyne’s *Black Ivory* (1875) also acknowledges the assistance of Edward Hutchison, Lay Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, and *The Fugitives, or, The Tyrant Queen of Madagascar* (1887) is a novel about the persecution of Christian converts in Madagascar following missionary involvement there. As Hannabuss argues, ‘commerce, Christianity and civilisation, concepts often conjoined at the time, come together recurringly as a latent polemic underpinning his stories. Humanitarianism and evangelicalism were horses in the same stable: Ballantyne was one of many to work these issues and causes together and engage in political debate’ (66).

Ballantyne was by no means the only author to be inspired by missionaries, though he was one of the few to be so congratulatory. The widespread interest in evangelical activity ensured that representations of their work were quite common. The colonial writings of Robert Louis Stevenson, Somerset Maugham, Charlotte Brontë, Herman Melville, Charles Kingsley, John Buchan, and Rider Haggard, to name only the most prominent, include missionary characters or scenes. Charles Dickens’ criticism of colonial evangelism was indicative of increasingly cynical views of missionaries later in the nineteenth century. *Bleak House* (1853) famously condemns the foreign missionary enterprise for its neglect of urgent domestic need, typified by Mrs Jellyby’s involvement in charitable missionary works in Africa which prevent her from carrying out her duties as a mother in London.²⁰ Dickens regarded missionaries as ‘perfect nuisances who leave every place worse than they find it’. “Believe it, African Civilisation, Church of England Missionary, and all other Missionary Societies! . . . The work at home must be completed thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad.”²¹ Whether missionary work was regarded with approbation or opprobrium, it is undeniable that it was central to the representation of imperial expansion.

Whilst imperial narratives of evangelical activity may have revolved around the heroic male missionary figure, missionary women were also seen to play a crucial, if secondary, role. Missionary wives were the *only* Protestant missionary women during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Societies refused to employ single women until after the middle of the nineteenth century. These missionary wives, too, carried the burden of intense public interest. Although official histories and records paid women little attention, British belief in the supposedly natural piety of

evangelical women and the assumed delicacy of women in general meant that sympathetic communities at home and abroad were very interested in missionary wives. The assumed harshness and potential danger of colonial environments (a danger embodied in both the landscape and the local population) was seen as a threat to the Englishwoman overseas, and the religious, self-sacrificing nature of the work of colonial missions enhanced the emotive appeal of the missionary wife to a British public eager for accounts of 'civilised' life on the 'uncivilised' frontier.

The important evangelical labour that these wives performed in colonial mission fields – notably their work with indigenous women – gradually convinced the societies that their initial policy of employing only men should be amended. First, though, women had to overcome prejudice about their capacity for, and commitment to, missionary work. Commentators in this early period fulminated about single women's tendency to marry male missionaries soon after arriving at their colonial postings, therefore technically leaving the employ of the societies. The Society for Promoting Female Education in the East (established 1834) was accused of being a 'Batchelor's [*sic*] Aid' society, given the number of women missionaries who married soon after being posted to India. The SPFEE then introduced clauses in their employment contracts requiring recompense of passage fares and initial support funds if women married within a specified time of their arrival.²² Of course, the assumption that these religious women ceased evangelical work after marriage to a missionary was profoundly fallacious and based in conservative discourses on women's work. It also contradicted both the missionary societies' expectations that wives would be active partners of their husbands and the direct proof that they continually received of missionary wives' achievements. After the 1850s individual mission societies were established to proselytise directly to, for instance, Indian women in the *zenanas*, and women missionaries were finally considered suitable candidates for overseas service. From about 1860, the established societies began to send out female missionaries in their own right. The rise of the modern women's movement in the late nineteenth century ensured that British women demanded a field of service appropriate to their sex. Whilst there remained some controversy about the propriety of appointing single women missionaries, the success of women's proselytising meant that by the final thirty years of the nineteenth century, as Jane Haggis reminds us, 'what had been primarily a labour conducted by ordained men became one in which women predominated'.²³ The missionary experience of gender relations in the first part of century which led up to this significant change in policy will be traced throughout this book.

Questions of gender and colonial evangelism are discussed in further detail in chapter 2.

MISSIONARIES IN THE ACADEMY

Scholars in anthropology, history, comparative missiology, and women's studies have recently analysed missionary activity in the colonies. Until the early 1990s, most analyses tended to be historically recuperative rather than analytic. Niel Gunson's *Messengers of Grace* (1978) is a notable and exemplary exception. Gunson's meticulous historical work and evocative analyses have provided much of the impetus for my own thinking, and I am indebted to his work on missions in Polynesia and Australia. Recent work within women's studies, and particularly that which analyses 'Britishness' or imperial discourses in conjunction with studies of gender, provides me with material to support some of the foundational assumptions in this study. My focus on the changes wrought by colonial activity on the imperial state and citizenry follows the lead taken by those scholars, such as Simon Gikandi, Catherine Hall, and Homi Bhabha, whose work in part seeks to illuminate the effects of imperial policies and colonial experience on the British public.

Area studies of missions, such as T. O. Beidelman's *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*, Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, and Leon de Kock's *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa*, provide key analytical models, and it is interesting that most work has been done on African missions. Central to my analysis is a consideration of both the congruence and the discontinuity between different mission locations, and so I will draw on these African studies but also distinguish my analysis from them at different, strategic points. Brian Stanley's *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* is an historical study which addresses a similar time period in conjunction with the history of colonialism, though its Christian perspective ensures that it remains sympathetic to missionary ideology. Specific studies of evangelical activities in India, Polynesia, and Australia exist, but these accounts, such as Tony Swain and Deborah Bird Rose's *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies* (1988), are often more interested in the later implications of missionary evangelism for colonial populations, particularly in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, than in the initial establishment of missions.

Work by women's studies scholars has tended to concentrate on historical 'retrievals' of women's involvement in colonial relationships and policy, but some recent work here has tended to be unproblematically recuperative, particularly of white women's influence in colonial cultures. Such studies return white women's colonial experiences to the historical canon, but mostly without a critical assessment of the intricate negotiations of race, class, and gender in which their lives were enmeshed. As Haggis argues, 'the focus on the singular vision of white Women also confines and distorts the use of gender in . . . these studies, precisely through its eclipsing of colonialism, class, and race'.²⁴ Much of this recuperative feminism also fails to account for the entwined gender codes for both men and women, and in doing so provides only part of the complex picture that typifies colonial gender relations. Like Gillian Whitlock's *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography*, my interest in gender 'is not just [about] femininity; it is a discourse of femininity which is imagined in relation to a particular formulation of masculinity'.²⁵ A concentration on the negotiated codification of male and female gendered roles, both within white evangelical culture and between missionary and indigenous communities, allows a far greater understanding of the heterogeneity of colonial relations. Recent work on intersections of colonialism, race, and gender has critically influenced my thinking. Scholars such as Jane Haggis, Catherine Hall, and Ann Laura Stoler have produced much valuable work in this field, with an attention to specific colonial histories and cultural practices.

My analysis of the representation of missionary activity through mission narratives, histories, memoirs, reminiscences, and literary accounts brings to bear a close attention to the nexus of gender, colonialism, and representation. Three specific studies have been foundational to my thinking: Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (1991); Susan Thorne's *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (1999); and Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (2002). My analysis in this book enters into a conversation with each of these earlier studies: a slightly different kind of conversation with each, respectively, as I shall explain.

The Comaroffs' *Of Revelation and Revolution* is a foundational text in critical analysis of colonial missionaries and their effects on colonial cultures and imperial policy. Positioned as a 'study of the colonization of consciousness and the consciousness of colonization in South Africa', *Of Revelation and Revolution* is an historical anthropology 'of cultural confrontation – of domination and reaction, struggle and innovation'.²⁶ Focussing on the

period 1820–1920, it examines the interaction between Nonconformist missionaries (mostly the LMS, but also the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society) and the Southern Tswana, with a view to present-day concerns and to the experience of black South Africans more generally. Their study has in many respects brought about a rethinking of colonial contact and the complex forms of resistance and accommodation that missions engendered in colonised communities.

One of the many strengths of *Of Revelation and Revolution* is its focus on the struggle over symbolism, psychology, and social and individual subjectivity that characterised colonial evangelisation. This distinguishes their intervention into the vexed question ‘Whose side were the Christians really on?’ (7) by complicating and theorising this query. It is also this feature that is most useful for my analysis. Susan Thorne suggests that scholarly historical debate about the colonial expansion of British Protestantism has been split between ‘Historians of colonized or formerly colonized societies [who] have typically viewed foreign missions as an expression of the exigencies of colonial rule, a theologically and politically undifferentiated agency of the British colonial state’²⁷ on the one hand, and metropolitan historians who ‘have countered by emphasizing the metropolitan sources of missionary inspiration, among which theological developments figure prominently’ (25) on the other. If this is so, then perhaps we need to change the questions being asked about missions.²⁸ The old questions have led, as the Comaroffs note, to the reduction of ‘complex historical dynamics . . . to the crude calculus of interest and intention, and colonialism itself to a caricature’ (7). Instead, *Of Revelation and Revolution* intends to show

that the evangelical encounter took place on an ever expanding subcontinental stage; that it was to have profound, unanticipated effects on both colonizer and colonized; and that, just as colonialism itself was not a coherent monolith, so colonial evangelism was not a simple matter of raw mastery, of British churchmen instilling in passive black South Africans the culture of European modernity or the forms of industrial capitalism. (12–13)

Jean and John Comaroff have well described the generic nature of missionary texts, drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s work on travel writing:

The epic accounts of missionary ‘labours and scenes’ had, by the late nineteenth century, become an established European genre, taking its place beside popular travel and exploration writings, with which it shared features of intent and style . . . This was a literature of the imperial frontier, a colonizing discourse that titillated the Western imagination with glimpses of radical otherness which it similarly brought under intellectual control. (9)

Whilst this description of missionary texts is integral to my understanding of these colonial artefacts, this is also the point at which my study departs from the Comaroffs' model. As I discuss later, I do not read missionary texts for signs of indigenous agency: the Comaroffs do. They argue that subtexts disrupt colonial missionary texts, in which 'the voice of the silent other is audible through disconcerted accounts of his "irrational" behavior, his mockery, or his resistance. Thus, while we have relatively few examples of direct Tswana speech in the archives, we do have ample indirect evidence of their reaction and conversations with the mission' (37). The Comaroffs do concede that

In all these cases . . . the Tswana speak through the European text; to the extent that 'the other' is a construction of an imperializing imagination, s/he will always dwell in the shadows of its dominant discourse. In this sense we anthropologists are still explorers who tell ourselves stories about savagery and civilization. (38)

Because I am a literary scholar rather than an anthropologist, I want to tell a slightly different story here: one that focusses on the texts of missionary encounter, but which *because* of its detailed attention to the nature of these texts means that I am profoundly sceptical about their capacity to tell indigenous stories.

More recently, Susan Thorne's astute historical analysis of the LMS and its location in British culture has been published. *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (1999) has many connections with my book, but Thorne's focus is significantly different. Her precisely located reading of the LMS in its Congregationalist, class, and cultural contexts argues for a tight connection between home and foreign missions – by extension, she argues that foreign missions provided a crucial site through which working-class and middle-class Britons experienced Empire. Most importantly, Thorne argues that close missionary ties between the colonies and the imperial centre significantly contributed to the ways in which domestic social power was constructed, negotiated, and represented, particularly for the middle class. 'The missionary imperial project was', she argues, 'central to the construction of Victorian middle-class identity, or at least to one influential version of it' (56).

Although Thorne is more ambivalent about the centrality of imperialism in understanding nineteenth-century missionary work than I am, she too states that 'Missionary propaganda claimed divine approval for the British colonial project' (38). Her interest is in reading foreign missionary work, and the work of its representation, back into British domestic concerns.

My analysis moves the other way: what happened to foreign missionary workers out in the field, who brought their ideological and religious assumptions out to the colonies? What happened, more particularly, to the modes of representation they brought with them? How did the language and form, both literal and metaphorical, of Protestant Britishness translate into new colonial environments and texts? Equally, how did the imperial environment inflect those colonial artefacts on their return to Britain?

Thorne provides important proof of an argument that runs throughout my book, albeit in a slightly different form: that colonial missionary experiences profoundly influenced parallel debates in Britain. My particular interest is in how gender and domesticity shifted the terms of representation, whilst Thorne's is more materially and politically based. Specifically, she is interested in the ways in which 'the imaginative relationship to empire encouraged by the missions contributed . . . to some of the central developments of British social history in this period: class formation, gender relations, the rise and demise of English liberalism, and the role of organized religion therein' (7). Thorne argues that 'The local and the imperial were not mutually exclusive or even discrete frames of reference' (56), which correlates with what I discuss as mutual imbrication. This manifests itself in Thorne's work in textual ways too, though these are not her main focus. Principally, she analyses the ways in which missionary discourse was used to question the values of the Anglican establishment (or those attributed to them by evangelical Dissenters). She notes that missions 'provided a vivid canvas, biblical in its scope and reference, on which the virtues of the middle class could be promoted in the very process of condemning the sins of their social betters' (73).

In its second half, *Congregational Missions* moves to the latter half of the nineteenth century, which it characterises as a period of 'the feminization of foreign missions' (92). Here Thorne focusses on the period when women missionaries were recruited and sent to colonial stations, which brought about a profound change in the nature of LMS work, its ideological underpinnings, and its representation. The gender shift in missionary personnel, she argues, paralleled and, by implication, was related to the hardening of imperial attitudes to race. Missionaries' increasing enthusiasm for colonial expansion was also fostered, she suggests, by their increasing emphasis on women and children: 'this gendered split of the colonized targets of missionary intervention helped to reconcile the contradictions between missionary and more coercive imperial visions' (96). This argument is one from which my study differentiates itself. Thorne does not draw a direct causal connection between 'feminization' and the growth of 'missionary

imperialism', but her argument has uncomfortable parallels with the kinds of claims made about British women's influence in India, for example, in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this 'mythology of empire',²⁹ race relations in India are seen as exemplary until white memsahibs arrived and, with their uptight Victorian morality, spoiled the natural, unaffected, intimate relationships that had flourished between the (homosocial) world of the colonial elite and Indians. Thus, as Hilary Callan tartly comments, 'may a post-colonial generation unload a little of its moral discomfort at the expense of its mothers and grandmothers'.³⁰ Hopefully such arguments are not taken seriously these days, based as they are on a sentimental, eroticised, boys-of-the-Raj imperial nostalgia,³¹ and it seems unfair even to mention them in connection with Thorne's scrupulous study. But as Catherine Hall notes in her review of *Congregational Missions*, Thorne's periodisation seems a little too neat. For Thorne, gender appears to operate in making British identities only in the second half of the nineteenth century with the feminization of missions. As Hall notes, 'There is a curious chronology here since the debates about sati and about slavery, key sites of the British domestic encounter with colonialism in the 1810s, 20s, and 30s, were saturated with gendered assumptions and language.'³² As my book will show, gender was in fact crucial to representation of LMS activity *throughout* the nineteenth century. My own argument about the hardening of racial attitudes within the LMS is somewhat different: that early missionary failures brought about this change, and that hardening attitudes to colonial women – when they were blamed for the resistance and recalcitrance of colonised cultures – specifically shifted the earlier missionary sympathy for their plight. Chapter 2 will discuss these issues in greater detail.

Catherine Hall's own comprehensive study of class, gender, and colonial missionary activity was published in 2002 as *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*. The recent publication date means that much of my reading of Hall's work has been through her earlier publication of this material. The new study, though, is adroit in its consideration of two different but linked sites of colonial culture: Jamaica, principally the Baptist missions there in the period 1830–67, and Birmingham, England, particularly its relation to both Jamaica and the empire. In doing so, Hall follows Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler's call for placing colonial and metropole jointly in the analytical frame. Her study is an exemplary model for this kind of historical work.

Hall provides astute readings of various aspects of missionary culture in Jamaica, asking, in particular, 'What part did nonconformists play in the making of empire?'³³ Her answers to this question lead to

an unravelling of a set of connected histories linking Jamaica with England, colonised with colonisers, enslaved men and women with Baptist missionaries, freed people with a wider public of abolitionists in the metropole. How did the 'embedded assumptions of racial language' work in the universalist speech of the missionaries and their supporters? (7–8)

The central argument of Hall's analysis is similar to that of Thorne's: 'that colony and metropole are terms which can be understood only in relation to each other, and that the identity of coloniser is a constitutive part of Englishness' (12). Hall's hypothesis here provides crucial buttressing of my argument about mutual imbrication in terms of missionary representation. Hall limits her focus to a particular moment in history, and to the ways in which a particular group of people, 'mainly Baptists and other varieties of nonconformists, constituted themselves as colonisers both in Jamaica and at home... I take the development of the missionary movement, one formative moment in the emergence of modern racial thinking, as my point of departure' (13). But she notes that this hypothesis could have been explored at many different sites, as I do here for India, Polynesia, and Australia. My argument focusses on texts across a geographical range, and it answers Hall's question 'Which forms of representation mattered?' (13)

Hall's work on Baptist missionaries in Jamaica has been highly influential. She is particularly interested in reading their texts as constituting a 'particular colonial discourse, not primarily to extricate the history of those "others" who the missionaries and their allies aimed to contain in their narrative strategies, but rather to investigate those English ethnicities which were in play'.³⁴ Nineteenth-century British national identity, she argues, was made up of interrelations between class, gender, and ethnicity as axes of power, and in the 1830s and 40s religion 'provided one of the key discursive terrains for the articulation of these axes and thus for the construction of a national identity' (241). Hall's perspicacious analyses of gender, family, race, and class in Jamaican Baptist missions will be referred to throughout this book.

All of these important studies, and other recent publications in the revitalised field of imperial history/colonial anthropology, make similar arguments to mine about mutual imbrication. Hall, through Frantz Fanon, seeks to explore 'the mutual constitution of coloniser and colonised',³⁵ so that she can trace 'how racial thinking was made and re-made across the span of colony and metropole' (27). Ann Laura Stoler, in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's 'History of Sexuality' and the Colonial Order of Things* (1995), argues that the 'sexual discourse of empire and of the

biopolitic state in Europe were mutually constitutive: their “targets” were broadly imperial, their regimes of power synthetically bound’.³⁶ Andrew Porter notes of missionary encounters between coloniser and colonised that ‘All parties engaged, consciously and unconsciously, in a constant process of mutual engagement and two-way translation, even while unqualified dislike, conservatism, and incomprehension could easily be found on all sides.’³⁷ Thorne argues that the

British public’s engagement with missionary intelligence about the empire helped to shape social relations and political identities every bit as much as social relations and political identities influenced the reading of missionary texts. This was a mutually constitutive dynamic... [The] affects of missionary propaganda were not felt at the expense of more domestically inclined social identities, including those of class, but as their very precondition.³⁸

It is at this juncture of missionary testimony, textuality, and the construction of the British reading public that my study enters. But it is also the point at which disciplinary differences come into play.³⁹ Historians such as Thorne and Hall, and anthropologists such as the Comaroffs, can make arguments about the material practices resulting from missionary colonialism. Literary critics like myself have to make more subtle, less directed arguments about texts and their relation to the social sphere. The strength of this kind of argumentation is that it draws much more detailed attention to the texts upon which other disciplinary studies have been drawing. Thus, despite the appeal of the idea of ‘mutual constitution’, I examine a different order of mutuality, one that Simon Gikandi has usefully called mutual imbrication.⁴⁰ Imbrication is a retreat from the larger (cross-disciplinary) claim about effectivity, but it is also a nuanced, specific reading of that argument. It implies inflection, influence, and effect. It also allows considerably more ‘room for maneuver’, in Ross Chambers’ evocative phrase.⁴¹ Unlike Chambers, though, I read for complicity in missionary narratives, rather than resistance. As I shall show, the discourses of gender/domesticity and evangelical missionary activity were co-dependent on each other. Missionary texts and the kinds of social relations they posited introduced a concentration on gender and domesticity ensuring that early imperial activity could be construed by the religious British public as an act of Christian generosity and aid, rather than aggressive annexation and commerce. It also provided a rationale for Christian missionary involvement in colonial states. Most importantly it introduced a particular kind of colonial discourse, one with strength and flexibility, and one continuing to inflect how we think about imperialism.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND MISSIONARY TEXTS

A 'paper empire'⁴²

My investigation of colonial missionary activity is situated within current theoretical debates in the field of postcolonial studies. Examining an historically bounded manifestation of colonialism facilitates an analysis heeding calls for a (re-)turn to specifically located historicism within postcolonial studies. This approach, as Stephen Slemon notes, complicates our understanding of colonial texts, and, as it does so, 'many of the usual pieties, and the obvious binaries, of the postcolonial master narrative become unglued. This in turn calls down the sense of obviousness over where the agents of colonial domination and anticolonialist resistance are to be found.'⁴³ The trend within postcolonial studies has been to respond to this call through detailed examination of precise historical 'moments', typified by some of Bhabha's articles, such as 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817' or 'By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in the Mid-Nineteenth Century'. As Helen Tiffin describes it,

there has also been a change in approach, with the 'marriage' between literary study and philosophy cooling a little in favour of a closer relationship with anthropology and history. This new liaison has helped to sharpen the trend towards located and specific studies, 'case-based' arguments that depend on detailed historical or anthropological research into particular periods and peoples.⁴⁴

This historically based analysis is not only a recent phenomenon. The work of critics in allied fields, such as Peter Hulme or the Subaltern Studies group, has often been very mindful of historical contexts. However, the call for literary and textual studies to be carefully located, with the relation between texts and their historical locus central to any investigation, attempts to instil an historical imperative into the field as a whole.

Attention to missionary activity demands that a broad cultural dynamic be taken into account. My concern with the fashionable (re-)turn to colonial history within literary postcolonialism is that 'easy' historical points are sometimes made, without a fuller investigation of the cultural politics of the historical context. Missionaries are subject to numerous 'off-hand' asides and critiques throughout postcolonial discourses, be they fictional, historical, or theoretical. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* collection, for example, contains no less than seventeen references to missionaries.⁴⁵ Bhabha is here being used as a scapegoat, but he is by no means the only critic to refer cursorily to colonial missionary activity. Most of these critics fail to

contextualise missionary work in any meaningful way and instead rely on well-worn stereotypes. As Andrew Porter suggested in his 1985 article on commerce and Christianity, 'what is still required is an account of missionary expansion in the nineteenth century which will place it firmly within the context of both intellectual and material life'.⁴⁶

This book in no way intends to offer an apologia for colonial missionary activity,⁴⁷ but it does seek to investigate missionaries with rather more historical and theoretical rigour than is evident in 'off the cuff' post-colonial references to them. Missionaries certainly did introduce inappropriate policies and destroyed local cultural practices, seemingly oblivious to the injurious nature of their interventions. At the same time, particularly in settler colonies like Australia and South Africa, some missionaries attempted to stand between the excesses of colonial behaviour and the humanitarian interests of indigenous people. In South Africa, missionary discourses provided the basis for a narrative of civil rights which was one of a wide range of factors which eventually enabled a concerted opposition to apartheid.⁴⁸

Nicholas Thomas' *Colonialism's Culture* similarly argues against easy colonial stereotypes and simplistic binary constructions of colonial relations. As Thomas suggests, 'colonialism is not a unitary project but a fractured one, riddled with contradictions and exhausted as much by its own internal debates as by the resistance of the colonized'.⁴⁹ Missionary activity, whether at odds with more commercially minded forms of colonial intervention or in collusion with them, problematises simple hegemonic assumptions about colonial history and evangelisation. Colonial missionary activities do not constitute a singular evangelical project as opposed to other colonial projects, but *different kinds* of evangelical, colonial projects in each location they occurred. The complexity of colonial practices is made manifest in its representation in literary and historical discourses, as this book repeatedly demonstrates.

Thomas Richards' *The Imperial Archive* proposes that the nineteenth-century imperial imagination was obsessed with collating and controlling information about colonies. Much imperial history gives a fallacious impression of a unified British Empire, even though, as Richards suggests, 'most people during the nineteenth century were aware that their empire was something of a collective improvisation'.⁵⁰ A central tool for managing the often destabilising nature of colonial experience was this obsessive collation of information about the empire: 'they often could do little other than collect and collate information, for any exact civil control, of the kind possible in England, was out of the question' (3). Missionary textuality

was profoundly implicated in this information gathering in an attempt to 'know' and thus to 'manage' the colonial heathen.

Published missionary texts are curious artefacts. They produce profoundly hybrid genres incorporating ethnography, linguistics, and geographical description and surveys, as well as detailed descriptions of evangelical work and native religious customs. These published accounts were drawn from the copious writings of missionaries in the field – their letters, journals, reports, and memoirs formed raw material that was then transformed into published texts. They were produced in prodigious quantities by missionary societies, keen to promote the evangelical work of their colonial representatives, in order to justify their ongoing involvement in colonial projects and to ensure continued funding. As Haggis describes it,

Not only did every Society have its periodicals, each aimed at a different audience: adults, women, 'juveniles' and children; but a constant stream of pamphlets, leaflets and the like were distributed, often free or for only nominal charge, as well as the more substantial literature of books about the work in the various mission fields and lives of well-known missionaries.⁵¹

Missionaries were required to provide an annual account of their work. Mostly these annual reports were written up from their own journals, sometimes as a direct transcription but more frequently as 'edited highlights'. In the case of the LMS, these reports were recycled in the society's quarterly *Missionary Sketches*, the quarterly *Chronicle*, and later in the annual *Reports to the Directors*. Each of these periodicals had a different intended audience and use, even though material was frequently recycled between publications. *Missionary Sketches*, designed 'for the Use of the Weekly and Monthly Contributors to the London Missionary Society', were slim four-page leaflets with a detailed engraving on the front cover, mostly of 'heathen' gods, artefacts, or mission buildings.⁵² A sliding-subscription rate entitled individuals to different types of publication, in an economic structure typical of the LMS conflation of financial and spiritual value:

Each person who subscribes to the Missionary Society One Penny per week, or more, is entitled to one of the *Quarterly Sketches*, and each person who collects from his friends or neighbours the amount of One Shilling per week, or upwards, for the Society, is entitled to receive the *Quarterly Chronicle of the Society's Transactions*.⁵³

Texts, fund-raising, and missionary propaganda were thus integrally related in maintaining the LMS domestic support-base.

In any discussion of missionary textuality it is important to maintain a kind of sceptical double-vision about the texts under examination. It