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JAMES FREDERICK McCURDY: CHRISTIAN HUMANIST

by

John S. Moir

In the past century Canadian biblical scholars have earned for themselves, both at home and abroad, an enviable reputation. Their academic training and abilities, their teaching experience and their publications have established Canadian biblical studies in no mean place among biblical scholars of the world. Much of the credit for this happy situation belongs to one man, James Frederick McCurdy, who deserves to be remembered as the father of biblical studies in Canada. The fact that McCurdy was a Presbyterian had much to do with the course of development of biblical studies in this country. Born in the Free Church manse at Chatham, New Brunswick, in 1847, McCurdy received most of his early education at home, but a year preparatory to university entrance was spent at a newly established "Presbyterian Academy" in Chatham, operated by William Cockett who later became New Brunswick's superintendent of education. McCurdy entered the University of New Brunswick in 1863 at the head of his class, and three years later graduated with high honours in Classics. Soon after he took charge of the grammar school at Dalhousie on the Baie des Chaleurs, and fifteen months later his pupils swept all the first prizes and most of the second in the provincial examinations. [1]

Despite his obvious success as a teacher, McCurdy had decided to pursue further studies and in September, 1868, he

enrolled at Princeton Seminary. There, under the conservative biblical scholar W.H. Green, McCurdy began his lifelong study of Hebrew and its cognate languages. When he graduated in 1871 he was immediately hired as Green's assistant. During the next eleven years that he spent in that position he took charge of the linguistic programme of the seminary, was assistant librarian, and learned Sanskrit which he then taught in Princeton University. [2] In 1878, on the initiative of President McCosh, McCurdy received an honorary Ph.D. from Princeton in recognition of his researches and publications in biblical studies. McCurdy felt a more honorific degree was desirable "as an encouragement to continue honest work for solid results"--but he did accept the Ph.D. when nothing prestigious was offered. [3]

In 1881 McCurdy married Isabel Russell, daughter of the Presbyterian minister at Dalhousie--presumably the two had met when McCurdy taught there fifteen years earlier--and he also published his research in linguistics under the title "Aryo-Semitic Speech", a book still cited by scholars half a century later. [4] His promising academic career received, however, what at first seemed to be a serious setback the following year. In 1882, soon after the death of Darwin, McCurdy spoke at Johns Hopkins University and publicly stated his acceptance of Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis. His conservative colleagues at the Seminary were harshly critical of such modernism, and although Green urged him to stay another

year, McCurdy resigned at once.[5]

The next two or three years the McCurdys spent in Göttingen and Leipzig--the latter university was a magnet for many young Canadian biblical scholars at that period. Most important among McCurdy's teachers there was Franz Delitzsch, a conservative higher critic who set the tone of biblical studies for most Canadian scholars and for most Canadian Presbyterians. By the summer of 1885 McCurdy was back in Canada and living in Toronto. His reasons for coming to Toronto are not clear, but there is a possibility that an aunt, or a sister, was married to William Fraser, the Presbyterian minister at Bond Head whose son taught modern languages at Upper Canada College and had close connections with the University of Toronto.[6] At the University of Toronto, in University College, the teaching institution, Hebrew and the cognate languages had been offered as an option for the past forty years by Jacob Meier Hirschfelder, a Jewish convert to Anglicanism who was now approaching retirement age. The intellectual climate and the faculty needs of the University seemed ripe for the employment of a younger but established scholar trained in higher criticism at the most renowned German centre of biblical studies.

McCurdy was in fact hired by the University of Toronto within months of his arrival in Toronto. Almost immediately he began to put roots into the local Presbyterian and academic communities. After his graduation in theology from Princeton

seminary he had been ordained as an evangelist by the Presbytery of New Jersey.[7] Now in 1886 he applied for membership in Toronto Presbytery and his name appears on the Appendix to the Roll for the next twenty-one years. With his wife (and later his family of three daughters and one son) he began to attend the services of St. Andrew's congregation in its magnificent new structure on King Street. There he met a kindred soul in its minister, Daniel J. Macdonnell, himself a son of the manse in Bathurst, New Brunswick, midway between McCurdy's home at Chatham and his first teaching job in Dalhousie. A brilliant preacher and profound theologian, Macdonnell like McCurdy had studied in Germany and was only four years McCurdy's senior. Within the preceding decade Macdonnell had successfully defended himself against charges of heresy brought by conservative Presbyterian clergy. McCurdy's admiration for Macdonnell's qualities and talents is evident in the biography of Macdonnell which McCurdy wrote after his friend, pastor and fellow New Brunswickian died prematurely at the age of fifty-three.[8]

A connecting link between McCurdy's progressive Presbyterianism, his friend Macdonnell, and his academic employment was George Paxton Young, one of Canada's foremost teachers and deservedly most famous philosophers. Young, who was Professor of Philosophy at University College, had designed Ontario's secondary school system in the 1860's, after quitting his teaching post at Knox College because of

his intellectual differences with Principal Michael Willis, whose rigid and reactionary views had brought the reputation of Knox College to its lowest ebb. Young was about a quarter century older than MacCurdy and Macdonnell but his ideals and his charitable Christianity were a nexus for the two younger men. All three had one common trait--intellectual honesty. Young's support for Macdonnell's position during the latter's heresy trial had led Young to demit from the Presbyterian ministry and to his decision to join Macdonnell's congregation.

At University College McCurdy's career progressed rapidly. Hirschfelder was retired as expected in 1888 and McCurdy, as professor and head of the Oriental Languages Department now had a free hand to develop the field of biblical studies along modern lines of research and interests. Thanks to the educational philosophy of the Free Church in Canada (which believed nontheological education should be the preserve of the state), over forty per cent of the students at the University of Toronto were Presbyterian and probably a similar if not higher proportion of McCurdy's pupils belonged to that church.[9] Hirschfelder, and after him McCurdy, were sure of a pool of students for courses in Orientals at a time when public approval of University College (the "godless" institution) and of the elitist and expensive University of Toronto was noticeably scarce. University College had no denominational affiliation, it was true, but ironically this very neutrality allowed McCurdy to develop Orientals as a viable and respectable

undergraduate discipline, a situation unique in North America since in the United States such studies seemed to contravene the separation of church and state and in "Christian" Canada such separation was generally deemed to be destructive of faith.

McCurdy was determined that biblical studies must be more than a service course for future clergymen. He believed that cynicisim and even skepticism about the authenticity and value of the higher religions was unthinkable to a Christian university professor--and McCurdy was both a Christian and a humanist. For him education could not be value-free--such was a contradiction in terms--but a Christian education was an honest, respectful and enquiring education, freely pursuing the truth without the interference of denominational or creedal blinkers. Under McCurdy's guidance the Department of Orientals began in 1888 to offer an honours course which included Arabic and Assyrian as well as Hebrew. A Ph.D. programme, already mooted before his arrival, was postponed until 1897 by the University's governors.

McCurdy was now lecturing seventeen hours per week to nearly one hundred students, and when a committee examining course offerings and teaching loads recommended an additional nine hours of classes in Orientals, McCurdy obviously could not carry on single-handed.[10] David William McGee, a Presbyterian and former student of McCurdy who had been studying at Leipzig, was hired to help but just four months after receiving his

doctorate from Breslau he was drowned in Hamilton Bay at the age of twenty-three. His successor was Ross George Murison, a Scottish orphan who had worked his way through the University of Toronto and the Knox College certificate in theology by working as a railway navvy. Murison, whose study habits earned him the nickname "rabbi", had won a University entrance scholarship by learning Greek in only six days! He too had studied in Germany and had earned a Knox B.D. at the same time, and in 1902 he received the first Ph.D. in Orientals granted by the University of Toronto. After only a decade of teaching and writing at the University of Toronto Murison too died, a victim of typhoid fever.

McCurdy was deeply and lastingly touched by these losses. He had worked hard to build the reputation of his department and was convinced that it stood on a level with Harvard, Johns Hopkins and the University of Chicago. This last named institution was by the turn of the century outshining even German universities as an attraction for budding young biblical scholars. At Toronto McCurdy always emphasized language studies as the bed-rock of biblical research, and that is a tradition which has persisted to this day. McCurdy's justification for this emphasis was the success abroad of so many of his graduates, at least one of whom won a scholarship to a German university against competitors from several countries. McCurdy also believed that biblical studies should form part of a liberal education; this was undoubtedly part of

his own Presbyterian heritage. The study of the Bible itself, he informed one president of the University of Toronto, "should form part of the curriculum of every college." [11]

McCurdy's choice to replace Murison was one of Murison's classmates, Richard Davidson, another Knox graduate who received his Toronto Ph.D. in biblical studies the same year as Murison. Davidson, however, was teaching at Presbyterian College the year Murison died, so the interval was filled by yet another Knox graduate, Thomas Eakin, who had also done a Toronto Ph.D. in Orientals under McCurdy in 1905 and whom McCurdy once described as the best teacher in this field in Canada. Assisting McCurdy and Eakin was yet another Knox graduate with German training, Calvin Alexander McRae. McCurdy's influence was not confined to the University of Toronto--in 1898 he had been instrumental in obtaining the appointment to Knox College of James Edgar McFadyen. McFadyen, the top-ranking theological student in Scotland in his graduating year, had studied in Germany and married a talented German woman. During his twelve years of teaching at Knox he published no less than nine books, four of them in the field of Old Testament studies. When McFadyen returned to Scotland, Knox hired Davidson in his place, and again McCurdy rehired Eakin and McRae.

For McCurdy this task of recruiting faculty and improving his department was undoubtedly made easier by the sympathy and support of the University's new president since

1907, Robert Alexander Falconer, New Testament scholar and former principal of Pine Hill, the Presbyterian theological college in Halifax. Falconer's support was soon to be particularly valuable to McCurdy when the work of his Department of Orientals came under attack in an unexpected way but from a not unexpected source. Behind the misleading front of a "secular" college, McCurdy had for a generation been promoting Christian humanism through biblical studies in the traditions of higher criticism. McCurdy's personal piety and sincerity was beyond question, and the same could be said of McFadyen whose writing and teaching at Knox had apparently been opposed by a few Presbyterians. General Presbyterian acceptance of sensible and sensitive teaching of higher criticism did not, however, guarantee that such an approach was welcome in a state-supported university.

In 1906 a new University of Toronto Act empowered University College to teach Oriental languages, but not theology. Within two years the quixotic but determined Samuel H. Blake, a founder of Wycliffe College and brother of the jurist-statesman Edward Blake, charged that University College professors were undermining the faith of students by teaching religion.[12] Of course Blake meant that higher criticism was being taught--the virgin birth had been discussed in one class--and conservative students, Blake claimed, were quitting the biblical courses because of the heterodoxy that supposedly tinged the teaching. The University authorities replied that any university worth

its salt "should take cognizance of literature which is ranked with the most important any nation has given to man." [13] Blake insisted that religion was the business of denominational colleges--University College must only teach value-free languages and not shake "men's confidence in the Bible as being the Word of the living God." [14] Among the books he wanted banned from class use were titles by McFadyen. A committee appointed by the University reported, not surprisingly, that Blake's charges were "not well founded." [15] McCurdy's philosophy seemed to be upheld--(at that moment President Falconer was representing the University at the Darwin centennial celebrations in Cambridge!).

McCurdy was now a man in his sixties, an acknowledged scholar and author of a three-volume work History, Prophecy and the Monuments that had won him critical acclaim and an LL.D. from his alma mater, the University of New Brunswick. A further honour arrived in 1911 when he was appointed Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. Unfortunately McCurdy's sight was failing, and he announced to Falconer his wish to retire soon. En route to the Holy Land he discussed the matter by letter with the President. In the quarter-century since his arrival at the University of Toronto the curriculum in Orientals had broadened "in conformity with the widening conception of the relations of the Bible to human history." [16] Studies related to Israel had occupied over half the teaching time of the Department. The Department's primary purpose might be to

serve the theological colleges but biblical studies were a desideratum for any liberal education in arts and sciences. The best teacher for Canadians would be another Canadian, because European scholars would find Canadian students immature.

Falconer digested these opinions and then approached William Robert Taylor to fill in for the year McCurdy was away. Taylor, another graduate of Toronto and Knox, was a most promising scholar but he had just agreed to go to the new Presbyterian institution, Westminster Hall, in Vancouver. McCurdy wanted Taylor at Toronto permanently--Falconer was already reluctant to hire yet another Presbyterian for the Department.[17] As an alternative Falconer proposed Cambridge-educated Herbert Loewe but McCurdy who had just met Loewe in Jerusalem, disagreed. Loewe was a Jew and so would be unacceptable as head of the Department at University College--(Loewe believed the New Testament was in the same category as the Koran and even worse he was a Zionist). Falconer bowed to McCurdy's opinion and added, "Perhaps you may have found someone during your visit abroad who will appeal to you as likely to fill the chair."

McCurdy had indeed found a candidate as his successor. That person was Immanuel G.A. Benzinger, aged forty-six, acknowledged scholar and former faculty member of the University of Berlin, now teaching Hebrew and German in a Jerusalem high school and operating tours of Egypt and the Holy Land. Benzinger had responded positively when McCurdy asked if he would be

interested in an appointment at the University of Toronto. Falconer, however, now on holiday in London, reported he had heard criticisms of Benzinger's scholarship. McCurdy denied that Benzinger was guilty of extremism in biblical interpretation, and his German training would be "a good example for those of Canadian training who in educational matters are apt to take principles and methods for granted." [18] Falconer was suspicious that McCurdy had exceeded his authority in approaching Benzinger but McCurdy and his protegé, Richard Davidson, who was with him at the time, insisted Benzinger would "adorn our department among North American Universities." [19]

Confirming Falconer's suspicions, McCurdy announced that Benzinger was disposing of his travel agency and could be in Toronto by the opening of the autumn term--Benzinger should be compensated if he did not now get the appointment. Benzinger was, he insisted "a veritable Godsend." [20] Falconer must have realized he was being manipulated and he retorted with the opinions of six international scholars who felt Benzinger's opinions would be too "advanced" for Canada and the University of Toronto. Besides, Falconer asked, what of the rumours regarding Benzinger's removal from the University of Berlin? [21] McCurdy was ready with an answer to this last query--Benzinger had been the innocent hypotenus in a domestic triangle, and the University of Berlin had exonerated him of any complicity. [22] Falconer capitulated--Benzinger got the job as a professor and chairman-designate of the Department of Orientals in 1912.

With Benzinger on staff (and Taylor too since he had agreed to leave Westminster Hall in 1913 for more money at University College) McCurdy resigned at the end of term in 1914. Immediately Benzinger became chairman and Taylor leapt from lecturer to professor. All seemed well that summer of 1914, until two weeks later the guns of August heralded World War I and the armageddon of western European civilization. McCurdy could not believe that the German or British people wanted war. The debacle in Europe was the work of power-hungry national leaders. Benzinger, who was visiting Germany, escaped through the Netherlands in time to resume classes in early October. He was however, like three other professors at the University of Toronto, a German citizen and in the face of violent anti-German emotions in Canada he felt compelled to resign from the University of Toronto at the end of 1914. Falconer and the University's Board of Governors tried in vain to protect Benzinger and his fellow Germans which only earned the University further abuse from the Canadian press and public. The University of Toronto and its president were publicly condemned for being pro-German, especially after they gave the four professors leave of absence with pay for the rest of the academic year.

McCurdy, Christian humanist and rationalist, was disturbed, confused, distraught and angry by the forces of irrationality unleashed on all sides by the war. In an emotional declaration of his personal belief he refused to

stand when "God Save the King" was sung during the Sunday service at St. Andrew's. At that moment Immanuel Benzinger, scholar and much displaced person, was a house guest of the McCurdys.[23] For Benzinger worse was still to come. His son was wounded on the Russian front and he himself only escaped internment in Canada when Falconer and other friends got permission for him to leave Canada within twelve days. He found temporary refuge at Princeton and after the war settled at the University of Riga. The events of 1914 not only closed the Canadian career of Benzinger--they almost marked the end of McCurdy's public life too. Indeed he apparently made only one more foray into the limelight before his death, and that occasion was another celebrated incident in the history of his Department and of the University of Toronto.

When Benzinger left, James Alexander Craig, aged sixty-one and currently teaching at McGill, had been hired to fill the teaching gap at Toronto. Craig had been a student with McCurdy in those far-off days in Leipzig but had developed into a "hopeless paranoic".[24] His major hates were university administrators and junior colleagues, and especially junior colleagues who had not had postgraduate training in Germany. When Craig was retired at age sixty-five he brought suit for $50,000 damages for wrongful dismissal, and announced to delighted reporters that Falconer was useless as a university president and all the younger faculty in the Orientals Department were incompetent. McCurdy hastened to the defence

of his department and his former students with an open letter proclaiming the academic excellence of the teachers, and Falconer thanked him for this timely intervention. McCurdy acknowledged the President's letter in turn with what proved to be his swan-song--a nine-page typed epistle that took him two days to write.

After commenting on Craig's paranoia--"when I knew him best [in Leipzig, 1883-4] he was one of the most attractive and estimable of younger men whom we met anywhere in Europe," but "his mental and moral lapse . . . is the most melancholy I have known"--McCurdy continued for another eight pages with a history of the development of his department and a statement of his own matured philosophy as an educator and Christian. While he had been chairman he had realized "the spiritualizing forces . . . which have proved themselves recreative or reconstructive in human society." He agreed with Falconer's dictum that religion should pervade "the conduct of university affairs." Like Falconer, McCurdy felt that the world war had marked the dissolution of all that was best in western civilization. Christianity, "as practised", was "a comparative failure" and now writers and thinkers were proclaiming that science and religion must be reconciled so that religion could be reconstructed. "In all the discussions I have seen," McCurdy continued, "the Bible, the ostensible basis of Christianity, has been almost entirely left out of consideration."

His department and its programme, McCurdy continued, had been created to provide religious education--Principals Caven of Knox and Sheraton of Wycliffe had first proposed the measure. "The basal fact that religion is the mainstay of humanity, and that the Hebraistic religion of the Old and New Testament has been the chief humanizing and principal cultural influence in the history of our race, implies that the intelligent study and teaching of the essential Bible should be a function of every university." In future, "we humanists and antimaterialists" must unite with spiritually minded scientists to deliver mankind from "age-long bondage to inherited idolatries and superstitions, ..." "After all it is the Bible that has supplied the richest perennial currents of spiritual influence . . . which it is the part of the privileged educationalists to keep pure and to direct aright, ..."

Unfortunately, in McCurdy's view, the study of the Bible seemed in decline in the brave new postwar world, partly because in past the Bible had been made "a rule of faith" rather than "a way of life," and partly because its "conventional grotesque arrangement", and by the inclusion of "much material unspiritual or irrelevant to its main divinely human purport and message, culminating in the revelation of the world's one and only Saviour, its light is obscured and its appeal to man's better nature impaired in quality and forcefulness. A sane and tactful course of Bible teaching, . . . would do much to give

college young men and women the right direction, and a sense of relative spiritual values is the most valuable single portion of their education." McCurdy firmly believed it was the proper task of every Orientals department "to present aright, directly or indirectly, by instructive comparison, the real essential Bible." The teachers of that department require, more than most of their academic colleagues, to cultivate communicative tact, and a sense of proportion and perspective . . . ." Sadly McCurdy added his regrets that besides the neglect of the Bible scholars were depreciating the Old Testament as "a competent guide and standard", and others were making "little of the life of Christ with its sacrificial significance and efficacy."

In sum, this long letter stands as an apologia for McCurdy's life and faith, but as he told Falconer, it was the rambling apologia of an old man. Gone was the energy that had made McCurdy a respected scholar and revered teacher. Gone too was the energy that had sustained the interest in missions that he shared with his wife, and also his consuming passion for amateur sports. For twenty-eight years he had been honorary president of the University's athletic association and he still played football with the Knox College students when he was fifty years old.[25] Already McCurdy had receded into the shadows, but darkness did not fall for another thirteen years. Death came to James Frederick McCurdy on 30 March 1935. Ironically, in view of McCurdy's pacifist convictions, that

very month the Nazis had march unopposed into the Saarland in the first expansionist move of the Third Reich, and Adolf Hitler had announced that Germany would now rearm in defiance of the Treaty that had ended the "war to end all wars."

At McCurdy's funeral service, conducted by three of his former students, William Taylor of University College, Thomas Eakin of Knox, and Richard Davidson of Emmanuel, it fell to Taylor to pronounce the eulogy. James Frederick McCurdy, had been, in Taylor's words, "in every department of life . . . steadily and consistently Christian, [and] his broad interests so raised him above narrow conceptions of religion that there was nothing in the concerns of men that was foreign to him." "If we were to attempt to define a person so manysided as Doctor McCurdy we could not do better than to designate him a Christian humanist." [26]

NOTES

1. [W.R. Taylor], "The Founder of Oriental Studies in the University of Toronto: Professor James Frederick McCurdy, M.A., Ph.D., LL.D., 1847-1935", University of Toronto Monthly, October, 1935, 12.

2. Ibid.

3. Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, J.F. McCurdy to Dr. McCosh, Princeton, 21 May 1878.

4. Taylor, loc. cit.

5. Ibid.

6. William Henry Fraser, born at Bond Head, 1853, son of William Fraser and Nancy McCurdy, master at Upper Canada College, 1880-7, lecturer in Italian and Spanish, University of Toronto, 1887-1916, co-author of two popular textbooks, The High School French Grammar (1891) and The High School German Grammar, (n.d.).

7. H.J. Morgan, ed., The Canadian Men and Women of the Time, 2nd ed., Toronto, 1912, p. 759.

8. J.F. McCurdy, ed., Life and Work of D.J. Macdonnell, . . . , Toronto, 1897.

9. In 1893-4 Presbyterians accounted for forty-six per cent of regular students at University College--a decade later that proportion was the same. See H.H. Langton, ed., The University of Toronto and its Colleges, 1827-1906, [Toronto, 1906], p. 123.

10. University of Toronto and University College. Revenue Requirements. Report of a Committee appointed by the Senate of the University of Toronto, and also by the Board of Trustees, April 13th, 1891, pp. 58-9, 89-92.

11. University of Toronto Archives, Loudon Papers, M25, J.F. McCurdy to James Loudon, undated.

12. Wycliffe College Archives, O'Meara Papers, S.H. Blake to John Hoskin, 22 December 1908.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., S.H. Blake to Nathaniel Burwash, 11 February 1909.

15. Report of Special Committee to the Board of Governors, the University of Toronto, adopted 20th December, 1909, Toronto, n.d., pp. 14, 8.

16. University of Toronto Archives, Falconer Papers, Box 20, J.F. McCurdy to Sir R.A. Falconer, 10 June 1912.

17. Ibid., Box 19, Sir R.A. Falconer to J.F. McCurdy, 19 September 1911.

18. Ibid., Box 26, Richard Davidson to Sir R.A. Falconer, 18 July 1912; Box 24, J.F. McCurdy to Sir R.A. Falconer, 17 July 1912.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., Box 24, J.F. McCurdy to Sir R.A. Falconer, 24 July 1912.

21. Ibid., Sir R.A. Falconer to J.F. McCurdy, 29 July 1912, copy.

22. Ibid., J.F. McCurdy to Sir R.A. Falconer, 1 August 1912.

23. Telegram, 21 December 1914.

24. University of Toronto Archives, Falconer Papers, Box 78, J.F. McCurdy to Sir R.A. Falconer, 4 September 1922.

25. Taylor, op. cit., 13.

26. United Church Archives, Printed Order of Service for the funeral of J.F. McCurdy, unpaged.

"'For Christ's Kingdom and Crown': The Evangelical Party in the Church of Scotland and the Problem of Church-State Relations, 1829-1843"

by

Richard W. Vaudry

The Ten Years' Conflict which beset the Church of Scotland from the passage of the Veto and Chapels Acts in the General Assembly of 1834, until the Disruption of 1843, not only pitted churchman against churchman, lawyer against lawyer and judge against judge, but also brought into juxtaposition two fundamentally inconsistent views of Scottish church history, the constitution of the Church of Scotland, and the right relationship between church and state. Though these three may perhaps be separated for analysis, in reality they constituted but different facets of the same position, for the Evangelical's views on church-state relations were grounded in the conviction that the rights they were defending were fixed in the history and constitution of the Church of Scotland. However, in order to understand this ideological conflict it is necessary to outline briefly the course of that dispute.

Any discussion of Evangelical principles must begin with an examination of the Voluntary or Church Establishment con-

troversy. Prompted, at least in part, by fears that the granting of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 would lead to the establishment of Roman Catholicism in Ireland, Scottish voluntaries attacked "a compulsory support of religious institutions . . . [as] inconsistent with the nature of religion, the spirit of the gospel, the express appointment of Jesus Christ, and the civil rights of men."[1]

In response to such attacks, members of both the Moderate and Evangelical parties rallied to defend the establishment principle in general and the establishment of the Church of Scotland in particular.[2] The Moderates, using as their mouthpiece, the short-lived Church Review declared that:

> There has . . . of late arisen a numerous class of men . . . who have gone forth against our Zion as if it was the cause of God to overthrow her bulwarks, labouring to accomplish their object by reasoning against all Establishments as corrupting the purity and destroying the sanctifying operation of the Gospel. Deeply convinced of the danger and sophistry of such opinion, and believing that they may be effectively exposed, the conductors of the 'Church Review' will embrace every proper opportunity of assailing them, or detecting their fallacy, under whatsoever form it may appear, and of laying down those general principles by which an Established Church may be defended, and it may be shewn that it is the sacred duty of every wise and paternal government to uphold it.[3]

Evangelical counter-attacks against the voluntaries were launched by such notables as William Cunningham and Robert Smith Candlish, both of whom were later Principals of New College, Edinburgh; and by Alexander Dunlop, Andrew Gray, and perhaps to a lesser extent by that most famous of nineteenth-

century Scottish churchmen, Thomas Chalmers. Although for the most part Chalmers remained detached from the church establishment controversy[4], in the spring of 1838 he entered into one aspect of it with all of his characteristic determination and enthusiasm.[5] Between April 25 and May 12 in London's Hanover Square Rooms, he delivered a series of six lectures on "The Establishment and Extension of National Churches". In his opening lecture Chalmers dismissed the objection that an establishment was a mere human device for spreading Christianity and thus somehow inconsistent with an implicit belief in God's grace and sovereignty. He then proceeded to expose the shortcomings of what was termed the system of free trade in Christianity, under which the dissemination of Christian instruction was to be left to operate according to the laws of supply and demand. He further argued that true voluntaryism[6] was inadequate to provide Christian ministrations for untold millions in Britain, and went on to insist that it was the right and duty of the government to be concerned with the religious interests of its citizens. Moreover, he regarded an establishment as of great utility in helping to eliminate both crime and pauperism. As well, Chalmers defended both the right of Protestantism to be established, even in a situation such as that of Ireland where the majority of the population was Roman Catholic and a government's decision in establishing only one evangelical Protestant denomination

in a given country. Yet not only did Chalmers defend the principle of church establishments, but he was a determined supporter of so-called territorial establishments - in essence a parochial system in which each clergyman of the established church would be given responsibility for a particular geographical region.[7]

Thus the Evangelicals asserted that an ecclesiastical establishment was both proper and expedient - that it was the responsibility of civil authorities, in the words of Robert Buchanan of the Tron Church, Glasgow, when they "have been called to the knowledge and belief of that word which was given for the light and life of men . . . [to] publicly . . . profess their allegiance to the great God and Saviour whom it reveals; and it is their duty officially to use their power and influence to bring their people also to know, and to acknowledge, and to obey, the same Divine Redeemer."[8] They also argued that such a connection between the church and the state did not, of necessity, involve a sacrifice of the church's spiritual independence.

Though the church establishment controversy and the Ten Years' Conflict were in one sense distinct disputes, they did intersect and influence each other at various points. As we have seen, the Evangelicals insisted that a formal connection between the church and the state was not necessarily an erastian connection. Indeed, they declared to the voluntaries that the Scottish church was "that very institution which you

describe as an impossibility - a church supported by the state, and yet in all matters spiritual, free from state control."[9] Yet this argument about the Church of Scotland was marred by the fact of an uncontrolled lay patronage. Hence Buchanan wrote that "if a patron could compel the church courts to thrust his obnoxious presentee upon a reclaiming congregation, it would not be easy to show wherein this differed from the erastian subjection of the church to the civil power."[10] Therefore, until the Kirk began to put into practice the "spiritual powers" which she asserted belonged to her, the insistence on a spiritually independent establishment was stripped of much of its force. Undoubtedly such considerations prompted the Evangelical party to increase its plans for reform in anticipation of the General Assembly of 1834.[11] Indeed, one commentator has argued that "the non-intrusion movement began . . . as an attempt to defend the Church of Scotland against the menace of Voluntaryism."[12]

The Ten Years' Conflict which began in 1834 had two phases to it. The first, concerned with the issue of non-intrusion, began when the General Assembly declared in its so-called Veto Act "that it is a fundamental law of this Church, that no pastor shall be intruded on any congregation contrary to the will of the people"[13] and provided for a veto by a majority of the male heads of families in a congregation to be exercised over any presentation. This in itself

might not have sparked a conflict - had it gone unchallenged.[14] However, a series of disputed presentations led to cases being brought before Scotland's civil court, the Court of Session. These cases ultimately challenged the legality of this piece of legislation and transformed the dispute from one concerning non-intrusion to a more fundamental one concerning the church's spiritual independence.[15] This transformation occurred because the decisions brought down by, for example, the majority of the judges in the Auchterarder Case, placed a construction on the terms of the church's establishment which Evangelical churchmen rejected.[16] Furthermore, the decisions in this and other cases demanded that church courts perform functions which the Evangelicals regarded as spiritual ones and thus outside of the purview of the civil authorities.

On these two issues of non-intrusion and spiritual independence Evangelicals and Moderates parted company. Though there were Moderates who claimed to oppose intrusion, their definition of it was substantially different from that of the Evangelicals. James Paull of Tullynessle and W.R. Pirie of Dyce, for example, opposed "the intrusion of any man upon a parish against who literature, life, doctrine, prudence, or fitness for the particular charge, any objection can be substantiated." Parishioners, they thus argued, were capable of stating their objections to a particular presentee; an inan inability to do so indicating a lack of competency to judge any man's qualifications.[17] The Evangelicals, on the

other hand, defended the notion of 'dissent without reasons' on the grounds that the members of a congregation might have good and just reasons for opposing a particular settlement but, at the same time, might have difficulty expressing such reasons and an even greater difficulty defending them before one of the church courts.[18] As James Bannerman put it, "in questions that concern spiritual feelings, there are convictions and impressions that are laid deep in the human heart, which no words could fully express, and no evidence formally substantiate, but which, nevertheless, are both real and rightly founded; and to disregard such is to do violence to the rights and the nature of the human conscience."[19]

Accordingly, the Evangelicals understood the non-intrusion principle to mean that "no person be intruded into the office of the ministry contrary to the will of the congregation to whom he is to be appointed."[20] Emphasis was placed upon the word "will".[21] It was further asserted that this was one of the Church of Scotland's "fundamental principles"; one which it had ever adhered to, though embodied in different forms at various times[22] - the Veto legislation of 1834 being only one such form. Such an assertion was also in contrast to the views held by the Moderates, who regarded the Veto Act as an innovation.[23] Their Memorandum for the Solicitor-General for Scotland put it this way: "the Committee understand the existing law, and the constitution of the Church, as estab-

lished, to distinctly exclusive of what is called the Non-Intrusion Principle, as their opponents have explained it."[24]

Yet as understood by the Evangelicals this non-intrusion principle was subject to certain qualifications. It could only be exercised by a Christian congregation and not by a "rude or promiscuous populace" nor could it be exercised by congregations which were "heretical", "schismatical" or factious when it came to the matter of appointing a minister. Granting this, it was still asserted "that it is not lawful for the Church to settle a minister, as a pastor over a religious and orthodox congregation, solemnly expressing their will to the contrary, in an orderly and becoming manner."[25]

Moreover, the Evangelicals did not regard the non-intrusion principle and the rights of patronage as mutually exclusive. They regarded the two as compatible: the ministerial appointment becoming the joint product of the initiatory will of the patron and the concurrent will of the people.[26]

As well, it was argued that the Church, by applying the non-intrusion principle did not give up her right to judge the qualifications of presentees. She judged them whether the presentee was acceptable or not. What the non-intrusion principle ensured was that a qualified presentee would also be an acceptable presentee.[27] James Buchanan thus argued that the office-bearers of the Church must, on the one hand, be those who judged a minister's qualifications, while at the

same time it was the responsibility of an individual parishioner "to try the spirits so as to determine whether he can safely and sonscientiously place himself and his family under their pastoral care."[28] For this reason he regarded the act of intrusion as an example of the "lordly authority . . . of Popery, whose tyranny is based on the assumption that the private judgment of church members is to be superseded or overruled by the public judgment of the Church in things against the word of God, or beside it, in matters of faith and worship."[29]

Besides their views on non-intrusion, the other major principle which distinguished the Evangelicals from the Moderates was their assertion of the Church's independent jurisdiction in spiritual matters, especially those which pertained to the "appointment and deprivation of ministers". As it was expressed in a Memorial presented to the British Government in September of 1841:

> It is a fundamental principle of the political Constitution of Scotland, incorporated with the Revolution Settlement, and forming an unalterable condition of the Union with England, - that the whole internal government of the Church, and her entire discipline over her members, belongs, inherently, and of divine right, to the Church, as a body distinct from the State, - to be exercised freely by her, to the absolute exclusion of all secular control. It is at the same time - in accordance with the principles of the Church - not less a fundamental principle of the Scottish Constitution (as it is or ought to be of every civilized society) that, in all secular matters, that is, those touching the person and property of the subjects, whether

> Churchmen or laymen, the power of government belongs absolutely to the State, to the total and unqualified exclusion of all ecclesiastical interference.[30]

Such a statement pointed to a number of Evangelical tenets. In the first place they drew a clear distinction between the nature and functions of the Church as opposed to those of the State. William Nixon of St. John's parish, Montrose, for example, outlined the differences between "civil" and "spiritual" government in a sermon preached on the text "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's". In his view, the distinction encompassed matters of "origin", "natures", "spheres of action", "instruments of operation", and "objects and ends". Civil government, he argued, originated in God's "natural dominion over creation", was concerned with the physical and material well-being of all those who live within its political boundaries, and utilized as its principal means of operation, "the sword of outward power." Spiritual government, on the other hand, originated in God's "sovereignty as the God of grace and salvation", applied only to those who were followers of Christ, and was especially concerned with man's moral and spiritual well-being. Its principal means of operation was the Word of God.[31]

Despite these differences of method and purpose, however, a legitimate connection might still be made between Church and State. Indeed it was argued by W.M. Hetherington that it was precisely because of these differences that an alliance could

and should be entered into by the Church and the State. The State, in order to realize its main purpose, namely the well-being of its citizens, needed the moral influence of the Church. The Church on the other hand, would greatly benefit from the support which the State could give her in disseminating religious instruction throughout the land. However, because of the essential differences between the two, the State being tainted with worldliness, the Church opposed to such worldliness, any connection between them must not interfere with the Church's spirituality.[32] For this reason Heatherington insisted "that the Church must not interfere with things purely secular, lest she contract a vitiated character"[33] and further, "that the Church must not permit the interference of the State, or of any thing purely secular, with its principles, laws, and functional arrangements, lest she admit a vitiating influence, and therefore sacrifice her own character, lose her power of doing good, and violate her allegiance to Christ, her only Head and King."[34] In short, "neither Church nor State ought to interfere with the internal organization of the other, because they cannot do so without inflicting and sustaining mutual and reciprocal injury."[35]

The formation of such a connection between the Church and the State; in other words, the erection of an established church, in no way implied the creation of that body. Andrew Gray thus distinguished between an Established Church and the establishment of a church. For example, when the British

Legislature established the Court of Session it also created that judicial body. It gave the court its existence. On the other hand, when a church came to be established, it came as a body already in existence, in fact as a divine institution, possessing particular rights given to it by Jesus Christ, as its Head. To establish a church in this sense, then, meant that the State ratified and gave civil sanction to it.[36] The State, then, had no power or right to interfere with the Church's doctrine, discipline, or government, rather, its powers were limited to "the giving or withholding of . . . [its] formal approbation, the appending or not appending of the civil sanction, and civil effects, to the laws and actings of the Church; and the affording or not affording of those temporal means which may contribute to the efficiency and success of her operations."[37]

As so established the Church exercised co-ordinate jurisdiction with the State. In asserting this the Evangelicals expressly rejected the views on Church-State relations held by Voluntaries, Roman Catholics, and Erastians. Against the Voluntaries they argued for the legitimacy of a connection between the Church and the State. As far as the rightfulness of such a union was concerned they were in agreement with both Erastians and Roman Catholics. However, in their view, both of these latter groups were in error, but at opposite extremes. On the one hand, the Roman Catholics, resting their principle on a claim to infallibility, made the civil author-

ities subservient to those of the church. The Erastians, on the other hand, ostensibly assuming that the State was infallible, placed the church in complete subjection to it. Professing to avoid all of these mistakes, the Evangelicals argued that "the Scottish doctrine . . . regarding neither the Church nor State as infallible, pronounces the powers co-ordinate in their respective spheres, and denies to either the right of absolutely defining the duty of the other, or of enforcing what it may conceive that duty to be."[38]

One of the arguments put forth by the Moderates against this concept of co-ordinate jurisdiction was that it involved the "absurdity of an imperium in imperio".[39] This reasoning was met by William Cunningham who insisted that this notion was in direct contrast to the idea upheld by Andrew Melville "that there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland" and to the Confession of Faith's assertion that "the Lord Jesus Christ, as king and head of His church, hath therein appointed a government in the hands of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate." He further argued that if indeed civil government was one of God's ordinances, and,

> if it be also true that Christ hath appointed in his Church a distinct government in the hand of church officers, then it follows as a matter of course, that in every country where there is a Church of Christ, there must of necessity be two distinct and independent jurisdictions, and to say that this, although true abstractly, cannot apply to a Church established by law, is virtually to deny that an Established Church is a Church of Christ.[40]

Though the Evangelicals insisted that the Church and the State exercised co-ordinate jurisdiction, they denied that the Church had put forth any claim to judge civil matters or had attempted to order the functions of the civil courts; in short, that they had asserted as Dean of Faculty Hope had put it, an "intolerant and overbearing assumption of superiority over all other authority". However, as Alexander Dunlop argued, they had insisted that the State acknowledge the character of the church courts as courts. These courts, then, possessed a particular jurisdiction exclusive of all others and were as independent of the authority of the Court of Session as that court was of the Court of Exchequer. As far as their jurisdiction was concerned, they were subject only to the Church of Scotland's General Assembly, in the same way that the Court of Session was subject only to the House of Lords.

At the same time the Church acknowledged that its "civil privileges" and the "emoluments of its ministers" were given to it by the State and thus that the settlement of any questions regarding these rested exclusively with the civil courts. Nonetheless, it maintained "that the power to admit to the functions of the holy ministry, and confer the pastoral charge of a congregation, together with the whole spiritual government of the Church, flows, not from the State, but from the Divine Head of the Church, and that it exclusively and ab-

solutely belongs to the office-bearers of the Church." These rights, so Dunlop insisted, had been acknowledged by the State, particularly by the Act 1592 and when the Confession of Faith was ratified.

Moreover, it was argued that the Church Courts, in acting upon the principles set forth in the Veto Act:

> are acting only within the jurisdiction inherently belonging and recognized by the State to belong to them as Church Courts, in a matter falling within that 'government' of the Church declared by the Confession of Faith (which is ratified by statute) to flow from the Head of the Church, and to be 'distinct' from the civil government; and she cannot acknowledge that the circumstance of the State having attached a civil consequence to their spiritual character, any more than the attaching the civil consequence of the loss of a benefice, to deposition from the office of the ministry, for heresy or immorality, can alter the spiritual character of that act.
>
> She also believes that the Court of Session, in prescribing to them their duty in the exercise of their spiritual jurisdiction, has gone beyond the civil province within which alone it has any authority, and has encroached upon the jurisdiction of the judicatories of the Church as recognized by the State.

The Evangelicals thus conceded to the State the right to take away from the Church all of its civil privileges and to the Court of Session to decide who was to obtain any benefice - even to the point of awarding it to a different person from that admitted to the pastoral charge by the Church. However, they denied to the civil authorities any right to "coerce" the Church courts "in the execution of the spiritual powers of ordaining and admitting to the pastoral charge, or

of any of the spiritual powers derived from her Divine Head".

Accordingly, the Church of Scotland had refused in the Auchterarder Case, to take Mr. Young on trials and to ordain him in response to an order from the Court of Session and in the Lethendy Case had ordained and admitted Mr. Kessen contrary to an order from that same court, though not "pretending to give him any right to the emoluments of the benefice".

In short, then, Dunlop asserted that the extent of the Church of Scotland's jurisdictional claims in this regard was to enjoy "freedom from the control of civil tribunals in the exercise of her spiritual powers now in question, of ordaining to the holy office of a minister of Christ's Gospel, and conferring the pastoral charge over a portion of Christ's flock."[41]

Such views of the nature of church establishment and the relation of church to state stood in marked contrast to those put forward by various Moderate churchmen and Court of Session judges.[42] Though there were differences evident both within and between each of these groups, they both rejected Evangelical claims. Thus the Moderates rejected the idea that the Church of Scotland's courts exercised co-ordinate jurisdiction with Scotland's civil courts. Although they saw clear limits to the power of the civil authorities in relation to the church, they none the less asserted that the civil magistrate could act either to restrain the ecclesiastical authorities from over-stepping their bounds, or else to compel them to perform duties which the statutes imposed on them. Accordingly the

Moderates argued that it was within the legitimate purview of the civil courts to ensure:

> that the terms of the agreement be faithfully observed by the other contracting party . . . that the Church take no step which involve a formal denial of its Confession of Faith, a fundamental change in its constitutional forms of government, or an overt transgression of the limits of its jurisdiction in the process of induction into the pastoral office.[43]

As we have seen, many of those who argued against the position espoused by the Evangelicals maintained that as an establishment the Church of Scotland was under the control (though admittedly there were differences as to what amount of control) of the civil authorities. However, for the Evangelicals, any control by these civil authorities extended only to the church's civil privileges. Any spiritual matters lay beyond the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate. Clearly, it was this insistence, in the face of what they regarded as overt encroachments on their particular spiritual province, and the failure to find a legislative settlement to the resulting difficulties, which led to the Disruption.[44] As they expressed in the 1838 "Resolution anent the Independent Jurisdiction of the Church of Scotland":

> this spiritual jurisdiction, and the supremacy and sole Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, on which it depends, they will assert and at all hazards defend, by the help and blessing of that Great God, who in the days of old, enabled their fathers, amid manifold persecutions, to maintain a testimony, even to the death, for Christ's kingdom and crown . . .[45]

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[2] Not all of those outside the Church of Scotland were voluntaries - both the Original Burgher Synod and the Reformed Church (Cameronians) supported the principle of church establishments. Montgomery, "Voluntary Controversy", p. 2.

[3] Ibid., pp. 66,67.

[4] J.H.S. Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland, (London, 1960), p. 326.

[5] cf. W. Forbes Gray, "Chalmers and Gladstone: An Unrecorded Episode" Records of the Scottish Church History Society, X (1950), p. 14.

[6] For Chalmers' distinction between ab intra and ab extra voluntaryism see his "Lectures on the Establishment and Extension of National Churches" Works, XVII, pp. 255-6.

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[19] James Bannerman, Letter to the Most Noble The Marquis of Tweeddale, in Reply to the Speeches delivered at the Intrusion Meeting at Haddington, on the 28th February 1840, (2nd ed., Edinburgh, 1840), p. 13.

[20] Memorial Addressed to the Members of Her Majesty's Government by Robert Gordon, D.D. Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and others, Commissioners, appointed by the Church, September 1841, (Edinburgh, n.d.) p. 2. Hereafter cited as Memorial Sept. 1841 italics theirs.

[21] Statement Respecting the Non-Intrusion Principle of the Church of Scotland, and the Modes of its Legislative Recognition; - Respectfully Submitted to The Members of Her Majesty's Government; by The Non-Intrusion Committee Appointed by the General Assembly of the Church, December, 1841, (Edinburgh, n.d.), p. 4. italics theirs. Hereafter cited as Statement Respecting Non-Intrusion Principle.

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[23] Memorial Submitted to Her Majesty;s Government by a Committee, appointed at a meeting of ministers, elders, and others, members of the Church of Scotland, Held at Edinburgh, 12th August, 1840, (Edinburgh and London, 1842), p. 7. Hereafter cited as Memorial February 1842.

[24] Memorandum for the Solicitor-General for Scotland, By a Deputation From the Constitutional Church Committee Appointed to wait on Him, and Represent the Views of the Members of Last General Assembly. (Edinburgh and London, 1842), p. 3. Hereafter cited as Memorandum for the Solicitor-General

[25] Statement Respecting Non-Intrusion Principle, pp. 4-7.

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[28] James Buchanan, The Scriptural Argument for Non-Intrusion Considered, with reference to Letters by Dr. Muir and Mr. Tait, (2nd ed., Edinburgh, 1840), p. 18.

[29] Ibid., p. 13. For a further discussion of the non-intrusion principle see Statement Respecting Non-Intrusion Principle, pp. 23-6.

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[31] William Nixon, Civil and Spiritual Jurisdiction: A Sermon, Preached on Tuesday, April 28, 1840. Before the Synod of Angus and Mearns, (Edinburgh, 1840), p. 24. For a more comprehensive and elaborate treatment of these distinctions see W.M. Hetherington, Thoughts on the Connexion Between Church and State applied to the Present Position of the Church of Scotland. (Edinburgh, 1840), pp. 10-27. Hereafter cited as Thoughts on the Connexion Between Church and State.

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Salvation Yesterday

Three Studies in Conversion

Geoffrey Johnston

I began with degrees in history and theology. But, and this is of equal significance, in the course of my first two degrees I spent better than a year in Europe. I appeared as a misssionary candidate quite prepared to accept the validity of another cultural experience. Six months of missionary training sharpened the analysis. In January 1959 I got off the plane in Nigeria quite prepared to assume that Nigerians were not simply objects of evangelism, but actors in their own ecclesiastical history.

Precisely what that meant, however, in what sense Nigerians were actors in their own history, nobody knew, for Nigerian historiography in 1959 was barely alive. I had very little by way of tradition to guide me. There were missionary memoirs, a few pieces of missionary propaganda and an assiduous Anglican chronicler named Epelle. The rest was silence. It is difficult to teach church history without sources, but a chance encounter suggested where I might find some. One of my colleagues, Nwachuku Eme, remarked in my hearing that the church in his village had been started by elders from the next clan to the west. If it had happened in Igberre, why not elsewhere? My first

foray in church history was to send out my students on assignment, to write the history of their own congregations from oral tradition.

From that exercise came the first of my questions. Most churches in southern Nigeria were founded within twenty years of the British conquest. Establishing the when I had to ask the why, how, and finally, to what were they converted? With these questions I have dealt in my other paper. Suffice it to say here that they are not, as far as I am aware, the kind of questions that are normally raised in the course of Canadian theological education. But they are questions I had to ask, and questions which I continue to ask. I would be curious to know what the people to whom I offer the oracles of God really believe.

My second question arose from the time at which I became a missionary. 1960 was the year of independence in West Africa, and also the year in which the Church of Scotland mission wound up its affaires and handed over the management of the church's life of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. Church and mission structure was topical, and had to be dealt with.

Missionaries have been organizationally inventive. They have developed new forms of church government all over the world while strenuously denying that they were doing anything of the sort. But when I came at their work, after the fact, I was impressed by the way they invented a diocesan system which they insisted was Presbyterian. Because this diocesan system depended on lay preachers I became even more sceptical about traditional formulations of the doctrine of the ministry. I have seen a diocesan system without bishops and a

ministry without ministers. Hence traditional discussions of church government and by extension of the ecumenical movement in its classical form appear to me at best dilletantish and at worst a bore. The current argument about the ordination of women is significant only as an indicator of the sexual hang ups of Canadian society. It is significant in apologetics, not order.

My third range of questions had to do with this kind of question apologetic, or the public face of the kirk. Here I would like to take up, and in this case illustrate, Professor Powles' fourth thesis about the colonial experience.

Presbyterians first arrived in Nigeria in 1846, thirty eight years before the establishment of the Protectorate on the coast, and fifty-four years before the conquest of the interior. My study of the Presbyterian Church ended with the civil war in 1966, six years after independence and forty years into the nationalist period. The church's dealing with the civil power break down into three stages. Before the coming of the British the church was an active and often creative agent of social reform. During the colonial period, say, from 1900 to 1940, it was quiescent. As the nationalist movement gathered steam the church, while not questioning the principal of Nigerian independence, became increasingly restive about certain aspects of the new country, obvious things like corruption and scalawags in politics. But because that generation of church leaders, black and white alike had grown up in the colonial period, nobody had the tools for effective social analysis, and for the most part they didn't care to learn them. Reviving the prophetic tradition has proved to be a slow process, but it has begun.

The point therefore is that in the imperial period the missionary leadership

of the church was at home, and it trained a generation or so in its a-political theology. Before and after the imperial period the church was not at home, and consequently developed a much more active public ministry.

My experience in the West Indies makes the same point in a different way. By the time I got there in 1969 independence had come and gone without, as far as I know ruffling the pietistic calm of the churches in the least. It was the Rastas in Jamaica who first drew attention to the injustice of the class/colour stratifications of Jamaica society. Their argument was taken up and made immensely sophisticated by the academic left. That thrust, plus a rather hasty espousal of liberation theology from both north and south almost made a species of the social gospel the dominant orthodoxy in the Caribbean.

I argued in my other paper that the conversion of the West Indies happened because Christianity suddenly became an idea whose time had come. The same is true of radical public Christianity. Marcus Garvey, the grandfather of the movement, returned to Jamaica in 1927. Haile Selassie, Ras Tafari, was crowned in 1930. The impetus from those two events gestated for almost forty years until, suddenly, the Rasta analysis made sense. A significant section of the West Indian ecclesiastical leadership found itself no longer at home in the cafe au lait, colonial society, which had seemed so self-evident a few years before.

The colonial experience therefore is decisive both for the external conditions of the church's life, and for varieties of belief and proclamation.

But I did not have to take all this seriously. I could have spent my time poking about in eighteens century baptismal records trying to piece together

ministry without ministers. Hence traditional discussions of church government and by extension of the ecumenical movement in its classical form appear to me at best dilletantish and at worst a bore. The current argument about the ordination of women is significant only as an indicator of the sexual hang ups of Canadian society. It is significant in apologetics, not order.

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the origins of the Diocese of Jamaica. But my own interests directed me elsewhere. The study of Third World Christianity does not of necessity lead to a commitment to social justice. It may shape that commitment, but it does not create it.

But, on the other hand, the study of the Third World Christianity did raise for me questions about the church's life which are with me yet, questions which were not raised in my student years, and which, as far as I know are still not being raised, or not being taken very seriously. If I am right, then the questions the church insists on asking are the wrong ones; they are not where its at.

Let me state my theisis at the outset; conversion, as measured by significant additions to the Christian church is a consequence of changes in society profound enough to require a major revision of the world view.

By restricting the discussion to cases where there is a significant movement into the Christian faith I am excluding individual or family conversions such as occur in North India, Japan or China. Rather I want to look at three cases where statistically significant additions to the Christian faith occured, Jamaica, Trinidad and Nigeria.

1. Jamaica.

The Presbyterian presence in Jamaica dates from 1800, but the first effort petered out, and serious work did not begin again until the arrival of George Blyth in 1824. Christianity, of course, had been formally present in the West Indies since 1492, and its evangelical variety since the appearance of the Moravians in 1732. The arrival of American Baptists in Kingston in 1782 marks the beginning of evangelical Christianity in Jamaica, but it was not until after 1800, and especially after 1815 that ecclesiastical statistics indicate that people were taking the preachers seriously.

Thus 1834, the Presbyterians counted 850 members, in 1846 2500, in 1850 3800, and in 1870 5188 (1). Between 1824 and 1850 the church went from nothing to 3800, but from 1850 to 1870 they only added another 1400. Why did the church grow so much more rapidly before 1850 than after?

The instinctive response would be that emacipation came in 1838 and the missionaries, who were believed to have won that momentous reform, were reaping the benefits of their cautious liberalism. But membership statistics from evangelical churches which had been longer in the West Indies indicate that the movement into Christianity began in the Leewards in 1790 and around 1815 in Jamaica. I would be inclined to argue that the success of emancipation, the fact that the islands did not lapse into barbarism as the conservatives had feared, is a consequence of the same forces as church growth, not the cause.

The clue to what was happening may lie in the Christmas festivities, the one time in the year the slaves were free to do what they liked. They liked processions. In 1774 the central figure of the Christmas show was a masquerader called Jonkonnu, dressed up like a boar. The author of this report suggests that he was a memorial to a celebrated cabocero in Ghana, but at any rate he was a recognizeably African figure. By 1815 this character had become

> a Merry Andrew in a striped doublet bearing upon his head a kind of pasteboard house-boat, filled with puppets representing, some sailors, others soldiers, others again slaves at work on a plantation.

At the same time pride of place in the procession was falling away from Jonkonnu, in whatever form, to a series of young ladies dressed 'pin for pin' alike, the ladies of the red and blue sets. The origins of these companies is uncertain, but they certainly did not spring from the West African forest[2].

In other words slave society was becoming creolized. Out of the welter of tribal survivals and ad hoc arrangements that had marked slaves society in the eighteenth century a new kind of world was beginning to form, a world that took its cue from Europe rather than Africa.

At the same time the message was changing. Before the appearance of the evangelicals the only systematic attempt at presenting the gospel took place on the Codrington estates in Barbados. Even here the effort was not consistent, but from time to time the management would hire a catechist to instruct the slaves in the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed and for the advanced, the Anglican catechism. It was an attempt to transfer into slave society the methodology of Christendom, and naturally, it failed. For the slaves the whole exercise was pointless; what was learned was forgotten as quickly as we have forgotten trigonomety and Hebrew.

The evangelicals, on the other hand, started with the assumption that the slaves knew something about God, but that they did not know that Christ came to save sinners. The evangelicals hammered away at that point for sixty years in the Leewards and thirty in Jamaica before significant numbers began to believe them. But when the penny dropped, it fell with reasonable accuracy.

Unfortunately the Presbyterians did not tell conversion stories, but their sober missionary letters are consistent with an instance like the following, recounted by a Baptist, which illustrates what was going on.

> There are many persons who profess to be teachers, but are as

> ignorant of the gospel as a Hindoo or a Hottentot. They preach to, and live upon the people, and tell them tales that are as ridiculous as they are irreligious. One woman...is looked up to with the greatest reverence. She calls herself Mammy Faith. She pretends to forgive sins to all she pleases, and many negroes are so weak as to fall down before her to obtain pardon[3].

It is significant that a free lance operator could survive calling herself Mammy Faith and offering forgiveness of sins. People had been making that offer for years, but only when the creolization of Jamaican society reached the point where it was intelligible did the church begin to grow.

2. Trinidad

My second example, that of the Indians in Trinidad, is much more complicated. The Indians first came to the island as contract labour for the sugar estates in 1845, but systematic missionary work among them did not begin until the arrival of John Morton in 1868. In 1869 the government began commuting return passages for land, making possible the development of a settled Indian peasantry in the island. The second event was as important as the first, for without it most of the mission's audience would have gone back to India.

The mission got off to a slow start, and it never became a numerically impressive church. By 1880 they numbered 135 members. In 1900 they were up to 812, but ten years later they had only reached 1271. Less than five hundred were added in the next decade to give 1705 in 1920. The big growth period then, such as it was, came between 1880 and 1900.

In the last years of the century the Indians found their feet in Trinidad. Beginning almost accidentally in 1869 the movement off the estates and into private farming established a series of specifically Indian communities in various parts of the island. At the same time others were going into business and a few into professions. As the Indians found their feet they moved away from their earliest form of self-expression, the strike, into more constructive activities, a panchayat to take John Morton to task, drawn from all over the island, and more significantly, the East Indian National Association and subsequently the East Indian National Congress. As they found their feet, they found they could live as Indians in Trinidad. Since they could survive as Indians, there seemed no compelling reason to depart from the faith of their fathers. As early as 1902 Morton noticed that the separation between Christian and non Christian was becoming more distinct. In 1913 Sarah Morton observed that she thought the chance of reaching the East Indians has passed. By 1917 evangelistic campaigns had to be organized. Growth no longer came automatically with the founding of a school, and in any case, by 1918, the network of schools had stopped growing(4).

Once people saw that it was possible to live as an Indian in Trinidad, then the pressure to change their world view diminished, and with it the attractiveness of Christianity.

But for those to whom the Christian alternative was convincing, it was convincing for eminently Hindu reasons. Like Christianity, Hinduism offers salvation, and salvation is what people found. Thus, to take but one

example out of many, a catechist known only as 'B' was found one Sunday morning on the steps of an empty school house, waiting for the congregation that did not come. When the citizens asked why, he replied,

> I am weeping for the hardness of your hearts, and I cannot help it. The blessed Jesus died to save you, and I came to tell you of his love, and you don't care for his love; only for your feast[5].

Salvation was not something to be grasped with the mind but understood with the heart. It therefore appeared as a form of bhakti, comparable to the religion of Tulsidas, whose Ramayana was the most popular of the Hindu epics in Trinidad. Further, because the missionaries expected a measure of change in life style, Presbyterianism became a form of dharma,religion, or by extension, a way of life. Presbyterianism was a bhakti cult with its own dharma, something other Indians recognized, respected, and left alone.

> The power which we all acknowledge...gave us our gods, our bidhi but to you Christ and his commandments. To break with our bidhi is evil; so we should not interfere with each other[6].

But life in the West Indies is never simple. One of the recurring themes in the life of Trinidad Presbyterians between the two world wars was the increasing sophistication of the Hindu and Muslim apologists. In the light of what has just been said one would expect that the Presbyterian response would have been to develop a specifically Indian form of Christianity. On the contrary, they pursued the further education of their ministers in

Canada. The Presbyterian Church in Trinidad was a thoroughly ambiguous entity, so completely and unconsciously bicultural that people didn't notice what was going on.

3. Nigeria

The first Presbyterian party appeared before Calabar in 1846, and for the first thirty four years of its life the mission was confined almost exclusively to the Efik communities in the firth of the Cross River and a few settlements further north. Between 1881 and 1888 they established four more stations, breaking out of the Efik communities for the first time. But the advance was largely on paper, an extension of mission stations, most of which were very hard to keep going. Real, solid advance did not begin until after the Arochuku expedition in 1901. That campaign, with subsequent expeditions, marked the beginning of British occupation in the interior.

The consequence of the conquest was not which mission propaganda has tended to assume. It is true that the British occupation made the movement of missionaries into the interior somewhat easier. But missionaries did not start the church. Ordinary people started it in ordinary ways. The church grew naturally, attracting interest along traditional commercial or cultural lines, and once a few people had become interested, they built up a party in the village that would ask for, and in part pay for, a resident teacher. The missionary function was to lead and organize, not initiate.

In the twenty years after the conquest they had all they could manage to keep up. In 1900 the church was a Calabar church of 834 members. In 1925 it was a network of churches and schools and both sides of the Cross River as far as the great bend and beyond, numbering 11,600 communicants. Since then membership has grown only slowly.

The experience of the Presbyterians was not unique, and in the recent years a number of attempts have been made to explain the sudden success of the missions in Southern Nigeria. We are not dealing with the odd invididual conversion, nor with a movement of the dispossessed. From 1846 to 1960 prominent members of society have supported the church, and when they did, it grew. Of course not everyone in Southern Nigeria became a Presbyterian or even a Christian, but the early years of this century saw the church rooted among the clans in a way that shows every likelihood of being permanent. Why did it happen?

It has been argued that people became Christian to gain the support of the missionaries against the exactions of the colonial government. It is not difficult to find stories that support this view, but the telling objection must be, as John Mbiti has repeatedly argued, that the secular and sacred cannot be separated in African thought. What appears to us a purely secular decision is also a theological one. Robin Horton recognized the significance of theology when he suggested that traditional African thought concentrates on the microcosm, the minor deities and ancestors whose impact on life is real and immediate. The Supreme Being, while acknowledged, is not very important. But the conquest forced Nigerians to think in terms of the macro-

century some people accepted education as technique, they "learned book in order to make trade". No doubt did the same in the twentieth century as well, but others took to education as a means to make themselves more manful, to live with the power that the Europeans showed. If this sounds like a secular motivation I would argue that in Nigeria it is not. Rather it is an effort to be fully human, a complete man or woman, and such a pursuit seems to me to be fundamentally religious.

The missionaries also offered a species of biblical monotheism. The apostolic tradition is fairly consistent. From the beginning the missionaries accepted the Efik word for God and argued that he could be found in Jesus Christ. People seem to have accepted the first part of the sentence and missed the significance of the last. In other words the achievement of the first wave of propaganda was to break through the traditions of traditional polytheism and establish people in a form of biblical monotheism. The concern with sin and salvation so characteristic of West Indian Christianity is not a central feature of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria.(9)

Let me sum up by repeating the thesis, Conversion, in the sense of addition of significant numbers to the Christian faith is a consequence of social changes important enough to require a major revision of the traditional world view. In Jamaica this happened as slave society became Creolized to the point where the evangelical message became intelligible. In Trinidad the church was established as Trinidadian Indians looked for ways to adjust themselves to the new world. In Nigeria Christianity was the response of the clans to pacification.

It is usually advisable to indicate what is not being said. This is not a functionalist, one dimensional approach to conversion. In the first place it does not deal at all with cases of individual conversion. More significantly this view assumes that people are not divisible. We are intergrated human beings, and usually intergrated around some kind of theology, however inarticulate, some kind of world view. When that world view is threatened people do not reply with cool and detached argument, they become very defensive. Their whole being is threatened. The argument of this paper is that in moments of major social change Christianity can become what it was before, a more intelligible explanation of reality, a more convincing statement of the truth than traditional thought. Conviction is not an entirely rational process.

Footnotes

1. G. Johnston, Coastlands and Islands, ms 1973, in Knox College library, page 271.

2. E. Brathwaite, The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, pages 229-230.

3. Johnston, op. cit., page 139.

4. G. Johnston, The Canadian Mission in Trinidad, DTh thesis, Toronto, 1976, page 36.

5. ibid, pages 36-41.

6. J. Morton in The Presbyterian Record, July 1900, cited in ibid page 49.

7. Mission Council of Trinidad, East Meets West, United Church of Canada, Toronto, 1934, cited in ibid, page 54.

8. For a fuller discussion of these questions see G. Johnston, Of God and Maxim Guns, unpublished ms 1977, page 67-72.

9. ibid, pages 324-328.