**Martyria: Baptist discourses of missionary sacrifice in the mid-nineteenth century**

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**ABSTRACT**

If one were to characterise William Carey’s understanding and practice of missionary service (1793 to 1834) as a paradigm for later evangelical missionary service, one might expect to find continuities of discourse and practice. It is more accurate however, to refer to both continuity and discontinuity when one surveys later evangelical narratives of mission service in the attempt to locate them in succession to the mission of Carey.

The continuities and discontinuities come into especially sharp relief when one makes this comparison with the theme of ‘sacrifice’ in mind. Understanding the emergence of the discourse of ‘missionary sacrifice’ within later missionary narratives, from the mid-1850s onwards, is key to a more critically nuanced reading of the letters and reports from Carey in his context.

Understanding some of the reasons for this development of ‘missionary sacrifice’ discourse involves new line of research within the history of mission and will continue to be relevant to the contemporary practice of discerning and mobilising for the missionary vocation.

1. AN EMERGING EVANGELICAL DISCOURSE OF SACRIFICE

a. A mother’s advice to Edith

In an article written for the 1848 edition of the ‘The Juvenile Missionary Herald’, we are introduced to Edith. Edith is the young daughter of a British Baptist minister and she has begun entertaining notions of missionary service. Her mother feels compelled to offer parlour-room advice to her young charge, essentially a contemporary exposition of Luke 14:25-33, ‘Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost…?’

The article, titled ‘The Missionary’s Sacrifice’, is an imaginary conversation between mother and daughter. My much less prosaic version is a bullet-point list of several factors that were understood in the mid nineteenth century as ‘missionary sacrifice’. These included:

- Leaving one’s country of birth
- A diminished prospect of marriage
- The likelihood that marriage would be short or distant
- The hazards of nineteenth century travel
- The challenge of language-learning and the frustrations of inadequate communication of the gospel
- Living in an environment of idolatry or heresy
- Isolation from Christian support
- Persecution, opposition, or death
- The loss of a child or separation from children for many years.

The impact on young Edith is immediate, ‘Edith’s tears flowed as she exclaimed, “O mamma, such trials are enough to make people regret becoming missionaries!”’ Unperturbed by what she obviously

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1 Concluding the quotation at ‘cost’ serves the purpose of the imagined conversation. The cost of missionary service are the potential sacrifices it will entail. This exposition heightens the cost of missionary service, extended to the possibility of giving one’s life.
considers mere inconveniences, Edith’s mamma returns to Luke 14 and encourages her daughter with the claim that she knows of no missionary who has ever ‘repented of the steps he had taken’. Such stoicism might be a gospel virtue but it’s hard not to also see it as a reflection of confidence in an age when Victoria ruled a kingdom as well as a rapidly expanding Empire. Imperial expansion extracted its own particular cost and this tended to breed a stoical, even heroic, attitude to hardship and misery, common to missionary and non-missionary alike. Indeed, these were common currency for any European in foreign service during the mid to late nineteenth century.

The deprivations associated with missionary service continue to have resonance for the contemporary, evangelical cross-cultural Christian worker. Ed Gross, in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission* describes missionary sacrifice as an abandonment of self, a giving up of life and possessions, acceptance of suffering, handing over of self-mastery, acknowledgement of divine ownership, and joyous service, in obedience to Christ. He writes,

> ‘Sacrifice... should be a hallmark of Christian missionaries. On behalf of the gospel, they are often called to forsake many things that are otherwise biblically allowable: cherished relationships, life-long dreams, comfortable living conditions, personal goals and plans, homeland cultures and models of ministry, relative anonymity, financial security, and many personal possessions. They do this willingly while understanding that such sacrifice may not be appreciated even by those whom the Lord has called them to serve. Why endure such things? The worth of souls, the sanctification of sinners, and the example and glory of Christ are the reasons...’

Of course, it must be reiterated, that hardship and misery were a part of the missionary experience of the early and mid-nineteenth century. The *Juvenile Missionary Herald* article refers to the deaths of LMS missionaries in the South Pacific. Following Edith’s story is a short report of missionary news that makes reference to the loss at sea of a missionary couple, the murder of two missionaries in Borneo, and disturbances in Haiti. It might not be surprising that a feature of this period, obvious in this 1848 article, was the use of the discourse of ‘sacrifice’ to characterise the experience of Christian missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century.

When one considers the disasters, calamities, and hindrances with which young Edith is confronted, one has to ask whether the attempt was intended to extinguish her passion. Of course, the drama of the story is intended to precisely ignite the passions. This point is precisely the issue at stake for the many evangelical publishers of the mid-nineteenth century who made it their personal mission to stimulate evangelical prayer and financial support through their re-telling of stories in which missionary sacrifice was frequently central. Francis Cox writes, in 1844, ‘Surely the missionary press might be made a kind of beating heart, throwing out the life-blood, with a strong and constant stroke, through every arterial channel, to the farthest extremities of the church?’

### b. Early examples

The *Missionary Speakers Manual: A Handbook for Deputation and workers*, published in 1901, makes reference to the story of a Wesleyan missionary, Rev G Warren, who had died ninety years earlier, in Sierra Leone in 1811, and who, after one year of service, had written with an awareness of his

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2 E.W.P. ‘The Missionary’s Sacrifice’ in *The Juvenile Missionary Herald* (London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1848) 155-160. Clearly, the BMS writer and editor preferred to avoid reference to the many missionaries who abandoned their calling, often mentioned by William Carey in his letters, including two of Carey’s sons, Jonathan and Felix.

3 Gross, ‘Sacrifice’, 2000, 846

4 Cox, F. ‘The Missionary Age’ in *The Missionary Eclectic*, 1844, viii – ix

immanent death, ‘I do not at all regret the sacrifices which I have made, being in the way of Providence.’

When James Calvert (1813-1892) went out as an LMS missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the ship captain tried to turn him back, saying, “You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages.” To that, Calvert replied, “We died before we came here.”

Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) and his family left for the mission field on February 19, 1812. He was a Congregationalist with paedobaptist views who changed this view on the long journey to India. On arrival, he was baptised and subsequently petitioned Baptists in the USA to form a missionary society to support his activity. Judson wrote of his theological struggles, memorialised them in his hymnody, and in doing so, opens a window into the deep sense of shame and pain experienced on the loss of former friends and colleagues in the Congregational mission. His story is remarkable for the personal suffering he would go on to face in Malaysia.

Writing of their new theological convictions in a letter to a friend, Judson’s wife writes on September 7th, 1812, the following,

‘We have endeavoured to count the cost, and be prepared for the many severe trials resulting from this change of sentiment. We anticipate the loss of reputation, and of the affection and esteem of many of our American friends.’

Writing to her parents on February 14th, 1813, Mrs Judson writes a year later,

‘We thought it probable the commissioners would refuse to support us; and, what was more distressing than anything, we knew we must be separated from our missionary associates, and go alone to some heathen land. These things were trying for us and caused our hearts to bleed for anguish. We felt we had no home in this world, and no friend but each other.’

One is left to wonder whether the sense of loss and shame they felt following their theological conversion found its reflection in Judson’s later letters which suggest that his missionary service had become best understood as ‘sacrifice’. Judson’s enduring legacy was not only his missionary service and example, but the baptismal hymn he composed which regularly featured in between 10-15% of all hymnals printed from the 1830s onwards. Thus, the missionary spirituality of suffering, shame, and joyful embrace of the cross, on which the Saviour had been slain, became an integral part of the evangelical liturgical canon.

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6 Judson’s hymn is still widely sung. The text is as follows, ‘1. Come, Holy Spirit, Dove divine / on these baptismal waters shine / and teach our hearts, in highest strain / to praise the Lamb for sinners slain.

2. We love Your name, we love Your laws / and joyfully embrace Your cause / We love Your cross, the shame, the pain / O Lamb of God, for sinners slain.

3. We sink beneath the water's face / and thank You for Your saving grace / we die to sin and seek a grave with You /beneath the yielding wave.

4. And as we rise with You to live / O let the Holy Spirit give / the sealing blessing from above / the joy of life, the fire of love.

7 Wayland, A memoir and life, Vol 1, 106.

8 Wayland, A memoir and life, Vol 1, 108
Judson is famously quoted as having said toward the end of his life, ‘If you succeed without sacrifice, it is because someone has suffered before you. If you sacrifice without success it is because someone will succeed after.’ [Ref. needed]

c. Mid-nineteenth century examples

Rev Thomas Green, Principal of the CMS Missionary College, Islington, England, addressed the 1860 Mission Conference in Liverpool on the subject of missionary candidate recruitment. Like the Apostle Paul he hoped for men(sic!) who would count

‘all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified; loving Christ, living Christ, ready and willing, if need be, to die for Christ.’

Green goes on to list the various ways in which his students had been encouraged to offer for training and missionary service. Chief among these were the missionary sermon, missionary meeting, and Sunday School. Furnishing material for each of these was the goal of a volume such as the Missionary Speakers Manual, and periodicals such as Littell’s Living Age, The Missionary Eclectic, The Christian Ladies’ Magazine, Ladies Repository, The Mother’s Magazine, The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle, and the Missionary Herald. These, and other resources, were published to meet the demand of preachers, mission meeting speakers, and Sunday School teachers, for illustrations and stories that would inspire missionary enthusiasm.

Francis Cox, in 1844, writes ‘Why may not the spirit of missionary sacrifice, the true life-blood of the church, be made to circulate in the same way, and thus re-animate the mystical body of our Lord, renew her energies, and perpetuate her vigor?’

Daniel Corrie, the first Bishop of Madras, write in 1848 of Henry Martyn that

‘It was while listening to a sermon by Mr Simeon… that his thoughts had leaped up to embrace the grand idea of a missionary sacrifice… He saw before him mighty victories to be achieved over ignorance and superstition — but he saw with equal distinctness the cost at which they must be purchased… The severance of ties which bound him to own native England. The sacrifice was great, but he was prepared to make it, prepared to leave his family, his friends, his betrothed; and, perhaps, for ever.’

Addressing the CMS Committee in 1876, the youngest of a missionary party of five, is reported as follows,

“I want to remind the Committee that within six months they will probably hear that one of us is dead.” The words were startling, and there was a silence that might be felt. Then he went on- “Yes, is it at all likely that eight Englishmen should start for Central Africa, and all be alive six months later? When that news comes, send some one else immediately to take the vacant place.”

In the enduring search for a means of inspiring missionary passions, evangelicals began to deploy the discourse of ‘missionary sacrifice’ to characterise the missionary endeavour. This would bring a mixed blessing of fresh recruits, unintended consequence, and generate some degree of resistance on the part of some within the missionary community.

12 Buckland & Mullins, Missionary Speaker’s Manual, 159.
Buried among the many mid-nineteenth century accounts of missionary acts of heroism, whether learning to eat rats, living in bush huts, loneliness, braving the Arctic cold, battling tropical cyclones, or succumbing to malaria, one finds the occasional reminder that attachment to the discourse of ‘missionary sacrifice’ was, at least in the opinion of some, a ‘recent fashion’. Bishop Bompas was stationed in NW Canada from 1865 until 1905, becoming bishop of Athabasca in 1874. He commented during the 1890s, after becoming the Bishop of Selkirk, Yukon, that it ‘…is fashionable to enlarge on the hardships and privations and endurance and exertion of a missionary.’ Bompas, echoing David Livingstone, is somewhat concerned with the growing fashion of valorising the sacrifices of missionaries.

In a paper written about ‘Missionary Sacrifices’ Livingstone (1813-1873) would reiterate his sense that ‘there is the never-ending talk and wringing of hands over missionary “sacrifices”.’ He adds, ‘Our talk of sacrifices is ungenerous and heathenish…..’ Elsewhere he is reported as saying, ‘If a commission by an earthy king is considered an honour, how can a commission by a Heavenly King be considered a sacrifice?’

At the end of Chapter One, in Livingstone’s *Missionary Travels And Researches In South Africa* (1857) he has a section titled ‘Duties of a missionary’. One may assume that for some of Livingstone’s contemporaries, ‘duties’ are now understood as missionary task rather than missionary character. For those criticised by Livingstone, the primary missionary quality was that of a willingness to sacrifice, for Carey (and for Dr Livingstone, we presume?) the primary missionary quality was a readiness to carry out one’s duty as a servant of Christ.

Stephen Neill’s assessment of Livingstone’s speech at Cambridge University on the 4th December 1857 is that it reveals Livingstone’s motivation to be focused around the impending closure of various African regions to the British authorities, rather than it being focused upon a robust call to sacrifice. Be that as it may, Livingstone’s resistance to the discourse of ‘missionary sacrifice’ and Bishop Bombas’s description of it as ‘lately fashionable’ suggests a growing usage that was becoming irksome to those who had perhaps been accustomed to an earlier, and less heroic forms of missionary discourse.

William Arthur, Secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, writing in 1862, lamented the undue emphasis on missionary sacrifice, which was no different too foreign service, before speaking to the relatively recent martyrdoms in Madagascar,

‘Strong advocate as I am of missions, I have often sat with real pain on the missionary platform and heard men talk... of what they call sacrifices, when all their sacrifices

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14 In a speech to students at Cambridge University, David Livingstone offered the following advice, “People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger now and then with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk, when we remember the great sacrifice which HE made who left his Father’s throne on high to give himself for us.” Speech to students at Cambridge University (4 December 1857) See J.E. Chambliss, *The Life and Labors of David Livingstone, covering his entire career in Southern and Central Africa* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros, 1875) 313-314.

amounted to giving up a son or a daughter to go out... to some bad climate to do the
work of a missionary.’

Of course, it must be said that, despite these protests, the theme of missionary sacrifice continued to
be a dominant theme within the Faith Missions, such as WEC, founded by C.T. Studd (1860-1931) in
1913 as an interdenominational mission society. If an appeal to denominational loyalty could not be
made, in such instances there was little recourse to anything other than a form of mobilisation of
resources that took the listener to the heart of God’s dealings with humanity on the cross. According
to Studd, ‘If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make
for Him.’

What this observation does is simply underline the fact that there are two characteristic ways of
understanding the nature of missionary service – as either duty or sacrifice – that characterise the
nineteenth century in its entirety and that the emergence of the discourse of ‘missionary sacrifice’
can be traced with a degree of reliability to the mid-1800s.

Figure 2: Incidences of ‘missionary sacrifice’ in literature of the period 1800-2000, archived by Google Books, and collated
with the Google Ngram viewer.

2. MISSIONARY DUTY IN THE EARLY TO MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

a. The influence of William Carey’s Enquiry upon the English-speaking world

Carey’s Enquiry was first published in Leicester in 1792 and sold for one shilling and sixpence. In Payne’s
(1961, i) foreword to the 1961 edition, he notes the absence of the Enquiry in literary histories of the
period and suggests that it probably sold relatively few copies, despite being stocked by booksellers in
Leicester (several), London (three), and Sheffield (one). Payne (1961, xv) quotes from the minutes of a
BMS committee meeting on the 20th March 1793, which record the poor sales of the book in clear
terms; ‘...many of them are yet unsold.’ News of the re-printing of the Enquiry in 1818 was not
welcomed by John Ryland, who wrote to the BMS committee that he questioned ‘whether it would be
expedient to reprint Dr. Carey’s pamphlet NOW, or whether it would add at all to his reputation to do
so.’ (Cited in Payne, 1961, xvii). Announcing the formation of the London Missionary Society, in 1795,
reference was made to the Enquiry being particularly valuable as a consequence of its author ‘becoming
a missionary himself, and is now a preacher on the banks of the Ganges.’ (George Burder, cited in Payne,

Irrespective of whether Rylands saw Carey's *Enquiry* as significant, between 1800 and 1807 the total overseas donations to Carey’s work of Bible translation amounted to £6,726 (Carey, 1808, p64), estimated at between £6.06 million to £25.1 million pounds in today’s worth.\(^17\) His skills of language acquisition, outlined in the *Enquiry*, were clearly bearing fruit, in both literary and financial terms. In 1843, writing after Carey’s death, W. Herbert notes the favour with which Carey was viewed at that time in both Britain and America. Carey and his colleagues, Joshua Marshman and John Ward, had ‘secured the right of every section of the Christian Church to preach the everlasting gospel throughout the length and breadth of India’ (Herbert, 1843, x).\(^18\)

It is relatively easy to portray Carey as a rather obsessed and driven individual. Smith (1992b, pp4-5) describes him functioning

‘as a metropolitan official who never traveled beyond the twelve-mile stretch between Serampore and Calcutta after 1799. For more than thirty years, one of his major tasks was to earn huge amounts of money and to secure printing contracts from the government for the Serampore Mission Press.’

It is hard to deny that this is one aspect of Carey’s story, however it can hardly be an adequate explanation for the long-lasting impact of Carey’s legacy within mission history and within the Indian context that framed his life.

However, Carey seems to have struggled with an inner critic throughout most of his ministry. Writing of his general dissatisfaction with his difficulties, he wrote in 1794, ‘A Day of Wretchedness, in which my wickedness seemed to be let loose against me.’\(^19\)

Terry Carter introduces his collection of Carey’s letter with a reference to the difficulties and discouragements that Carey faced in his missionary work, setting this in the context of Carey’s ‘sense of Christian duty’.\(^20\) Themes of ‘labouring’ as a response of feeling ‘duty’ and ‘obligation’ permeate Carey’s letters from 1793 until 1833, the year before his death. In 1826, Carey wrote ‘...every person is under an indispensible obligation to serve God in promoting his work to the utmost of his ability and opportunity.’\(^21\)

Carey had embraced Fuller’s moderate Calvinism, but he remained a Calvinist nevertheless. In the face of calamity, Carey turned to silent contemplation of the works of a sovereign God, rather than elevating his own suffering and sacrifice, he rested in the comfort of as sovereign God. Carey seems to rely upon the diaries of David Brainerd (1718-1747) when reflecting on the deaths of his daughter-in-law and grandchildren (through his son Felix). In two separate letters, Carey writes ‘I am dumb with silence because God has done it.’ (letter to his son Jabez, 6th Oct 1815) and again, on the death of Felix, ‘It is our part to be dumb with silence because the Lord has done it.’ (to Jabez, 12th Nov 1822). Brainerd had earlier written, of his own experiences,

“In the silences I make in the midst of the turmoil of life I have appointments with God. From these silences I come forth with spirit refreshed, and with a renewed sense

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\(^{17}\) See [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com) for a reliable calculator that documents the manner in which the value of historic sums of money can be calculated in terms of today’s worth, according to the type of economic activity engaged in. The range of values indicated here are for the combined economic *project* cost of employment/opportunity (£6.06 million) and overall *economic* cost (£25 million).

\(^{18}\) Herbert’s anti-Establishment rhetoric (‘every section of the Christian church’) reflects an assessment made of Carey by others and is a point to which we will return below.


\(^{21}\) Carter, T.G., *Journal and Selected Letters*, 72.
of power. I hear a voice in the silences, and become increasingly aware that it is the voice of God.” [Attributed to David Brainerd (source?)]

Throughout his letters, Carey constantly notes, ‘The work is God’s’, and on one occasion declares himself unfit to be described as a missionary ‘I Alone am unfit to be called a missionary – and often doubt whether I am a Christian’. (letter to Ryland, 29-30th June, 1802) [Carter, 109]

The sentiments of Carey’s letters appear closer to those of David Brainerd (1718-1747), north American missionary to the First Nation peoples of America:

When you cease from labour, fill up your time in reading, meditation, and prayer: and while your hands are labouring, let your heart be employed, as much as possible, in divine thoughts.

Brainerd’s diaries are edited by the revivalist theologian and preacher, Jonathan Edwards, who records Brainerd as having written,

We should always look upon ourselves as God’s servants, placed in God’s world, to do his work; and accordingly labour faithfully for him; not with a design to grow rich and great, but to glorify God, and do all the good we possibly can.

Carey’s ‘Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God’ is relatively widely known and quoted. What is probably less well known is Carey’s preference for a form of epistolary discourse that reflects the theologically-shaped values of an earlier generation of missionaries, such as that of Brainerd (1718-1747), especially when portrayed through the lens of the puritan ideals of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Brainerd’s characteristic understanding of his missionary service is well captured in his journals,

‘Such fatigues and hardship as these serve to wean me more from the earth; and, I trust, will make heaven the sweeter. Formerly, when I was thus exposed to cold, rain, etc., I was ready to please myself with the thoughts of enjoying a comfortable house, a warm fire, and other outward comforts; but now these have less place in my heart (through the grace of God) and my eye is more to God for comfort. In this world I expect tribulation; and it does not now, as formerly, appear strange to me; I don’t in such seasons of difficulty flatter myself that it will be better hereafter; but rather think how much worse it might be; how much greater trials others of God’s children have endured; and how much greater are yet perhaps reserved for me.’

For Brainerd, the theme of sacrifice would have been an easy one to pick up at this point and integrate seamlessly into his journal entry. However, one may speculate that Brainerd chose not to do so for understandable reasons. He was possibly aware that to do so would elevate his own (heroic) contribution as a ‘sacrifice’ and that this would have been a denial of the overwhelming theological vision that was his motivation.

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24 Brainerd was an American missionary who served among the Delaware native Americans with the Scottish Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. He died from tuberculosis in 1747, a year after his diaries were published by SSPCK. However, his missionary endeavours were memorialised in Jonathan Edwards’s An Account of the Life of the Reverend David Brainerd, published in Boston in 1749. Alternative accounts by John Wesley and other evangelical leaders present a somewhat different portrait of Brainerd. See Grigg, J.A. The Lives of David Brainerd: The Making of an American Evangelical Icon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
‘There is nothing in the world worth living for but doing good and finishing God’s work, doing the work that Christ did. I see nothing else in the world that can yield any satisfaction besides living to God, pleasing Him, and doing his whole will.’

Carey’s famous quote must be read in the light of this reading from Brainerd as Carey’s early Journalling and his later letters were inspired and informed by Brainerd’s diaries, a fact mentioned in Carey’s Inquiry.

3. ACCOUNTING FOR THE TRANSITION FROM DUTY TO SACRIFICE

This is the central research question of my paper. I will introduce three possible explanations for this transition. They are not to be taken as strictly delineated or competing explanations. Rather, it is possible that they are best understood as complementary. I separate them here for the sake of the clarity of my developing argument and to provoke clearer lines of dialogue and debate. The first two develop lines of analysis embedded in the mission histories of several authors, namely Stephen Neill’s reference to the ‘Heyday of Colonialism’ and that of xxx’s references to William Carey as the culmination of a line of missionaries inspired, in part, by Puritan piety and example. The third represents my own attempt at a constructive historical account of missionary attrition and replacement.

a. Stephen Neill’s ‘Heyday of Colonialism’ thesis?

It might be overblown to describe the title of Chapter Ten of Neill’s A History of Christian Missions (1964) as the basis of a thesis. Nevertheless, in this chapter, Neill argues for the chronological delineation of 1858-1914 for what he calls the ‘Heyday of Colonialism’. In this chapter, Neill explores five key colonial moments that might offer an explanation for the emergence of a discourse of ‘missionary sacrifice’. He lists these as:

- British rule in India (1858)
- The Sino-European treaties (1858)
- The Second Evangelical Awakening (1859)
- The entry of Roman Catholic missionaries into Japan (1858)
- Publication of Livingstone’s Missionary Travels in Africa (1857)

Taken together, these factors highlight the many opportunities for evangelical missionaries with an interest and enthusiasm for taking the Gospel to the newly opened fields in India and China, and to continue expanding activities in those parts of Africa that remained open to European missionaries. If these can be described as the ‘pull’ factors, then it might be as accurate to describe the Evangelical Awakening and Livingstone’s accounts of his travels in Africa as the push factors; in other words, those factors that stimulated individuals into missionary service as an outworking of their whole-hearted commitment to Christian discipleship.

b. Christopher Smith’s Puritan-Holiness alternatives thesis?

Neill, as seen immediately above, draws attention to the importance of the Second Evangelical Awakening. Its significance, as with the Third Great Awakening, was that it inspired new forms of holiness spirituality and attendant practices, among which were a renewed emphasis on missionary service. Of course, the renewed forms of holiness tended to emphasise service through self-
abnegation and discourses of sacrifice were a common theme of these renewed forms of holiness piety.

Christopher Smith locates Carey in a continuum (albeit near to its origins), describing him as a ‘transitional figure’, having ‘more in common with Puritan missions in North America than with mainstream Victorian evangelization in Asia’. It is highly likely that it was Carey’s moderate Calvinism that prompted his frequent epistolary references to his ‘missionary labour’ and ‘missionary duty’ rather than ‘missionary sacrifice. Commending a fellow missionary in 1811, Carey writes,

‘Brother M. is a man whose whole heart is in the work of the Mission,... His labours are excessive. His body scarcely susceptible to fatigue, his religious feelings strong, his jealousy for God great, his regard to the feelings of others very little when the cause of God is in question.... In short his diligence reproaches the indolence of some.’

In fact, I have yet to find a single reference among Carey’s letters and diary entries to sacrifice, at least those that I have read. This is surprising, given that Carey was no stranger to personal tragedy, loss, struggle, deprivation, opposition, and hostility.

On wonders whether Carey’s non-use of the theme of sacrifice is due in no small part to his sense that this was only appropriately used of the Saviour. Writing to his father in 1805, Carey wrote, ‘...we often wonder how... persons... should... do so little for the Saviour who has done so much for us.’ In contrast to a Saviour who had given up so much for him, Carey appears unable to contemplate the notion that he had anything to offer of worth in return; nothing to sacrifice. A frequent characteristic of his letters are response such as this, where he writes, ‘I am unworthy to live or act on the earth.’

c. Attrition and replacement thesis?

CMS and others suffered terrible losses earlier in the century (1810s onwards) in Sierra Leone and W. Africa. (Neil, p259) ‘CMS lost more than fifty men and women, yet recruits were always ready to take the places of those who had fallen.’

Missionary deaths in Madagascar, on the orders of the Queen, likely saw over 200 missionaries killed between 1835 and 1861 (Neill, 269)

In 1839, the Congregationalist LMS missionary, John Williams and three Samoan converts, were killed on the Island of Tanna (Vanuatu) and eaten by cannibals on the 20th November. Seven LMS ships were subsequently named for him between 1844-1968. [John Williams "Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands"]

1851 – Allen Gardiner died with six missionary colleagues in Patagonia. His death was noted by Charles Darwin. Neill (271) records Gardiner’s sentiments as they faced death – ‘Poor and weak as we are...’ and suggests that their words ‘echoed around the world’ like those of Scott’s ill-fated polar expedition, some 60 years later. (Maybe, but where is the evidence?)

Treaty of Nanking (1842) Within a few years of signing the treaty, nine English-speaking mission agencies had entered China under the favourable extra-territorial terms, to westerners, of the Treaty. By 1860, 214 male missionaries had been sent to China. Of these 44, just over 20%, had died of illness. (Neill, p240)

1865 – CIM founded by Hudson Taylor (11 years after he arrived there). Neill notes that CIM became the largest Protestant mission society of the period (after China opened up again after 2nd Treaty of Nanking)

27 Smith, 1992b, 7.
28 Carter, T.G. Journal and Selected Letters, 134.
30 Carter, T.G. Journal and Selected Letters, 68.
Neill mentions devastating Indian Mutiny of 1857, the heartland of British missionary endeavour (pp237ff). 38 missionaries and 20 Indian Christians were killed, possibly more. ‘For the Christian cause it was no more than an episode’ (Neill, 237) may be true in terms of the inexorable spread of the Gospel, but it might have left its stamp on missionary motivation and mobilisation in ways that have been hitherto unexamined.


1863 – Robert Moffat published Rivers of Water in a Dry Place, Being an Account of the Introduction of Christianity into South Africa and Mr. Moffat’s Missionary Labours

Missionary attrition naturally added momentum to the call for recruits. No new missionary recruit could be unaware of the many accounts of the dangers attendant upon the missionary endeavour. ‘Missionary Sacrifice’ was both a convenient and biblically-informed discourse that provided the new recruits with a way to theologically validate their self-abnegation.

4. DISCERNING AND MOBILISING MISSIONARY VOCATION

Our discussion above is certainly of importance in understanding the shifting currents of evangelical sentiment throughout the nineteenth century. However, they have some relevance for the way in which contemporary mission agencies discern and mobilise people into mission.

a. William Carey: missionary mobiliser

It is increasingly seen as somewhat inaccurate to describe Carey as the ‘father of the modern missionary movement’. The Enquiry did not launch a movement, rather it focused attention and galvanized activity in connection with a cluster of emerging mission themes and practices around which Carey wove a coherent and highly persuasive narrative. The Enquiry is far from being a theologically sophisticated tract. It is a pragmatic, motivational pamphlet. Carey’s work inspired many to contribute to the life of the Church and its mission in India, through the Enquiry and his regular reports and Memoirs. However, he seems unconcerned to develop a sustained missiological critique of the manner in which the gospel was being advanced and civilization was being progressed in India. We are left with an impression of Carey thoroughly committed to the cause of Christ in India yet unconcerned by the fact that this was being extended through an increasingly common cause with the imperial mission of Empire.

b. Understand contemporary evangelical ‘missionary sacrifice’ discourse for what it is

No more and no less than an attempt to say something of the self-abnegation that informs Christian discipleship. Moreover, a commitment to the notion is not a necessary corollary of a contemporary missionary vocation.

c. Acknowledge the contextual nature of ‘calling’ and ‘mobilising’ narratives

It might be true that India made Carey (Crockett, 2001, p5). If true, it suggests a missionary who must be located against his times. Carey was decidedly not in the mould of a contemporary church planting missionary but neither was he an individual Puritan missionary in the mould of David Brainerd (Carey, 1792, p36). Carey stands at a transitional point in the history of missions.

We can argue that many of Carey’s missionary calling and mobilising practices were highly contextual. Carey had no textbooks to guide him towards this happy point of arrival.
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