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In the sixties a charismatic figure began to emerge in the Brahmo movement in the person of Keshub Chunder Sen. But very soon tensions between this progressive young leader and the more conservative 'old Brahmo' Debendranath Tagore began to show itself, and in 1865 came the great split within the Brahmo movement. A large number of the young Brahmos gave their allegiance to Keshub Chunder Sen while the majority of the older and more conservative members remained with Debendranath Tagore's old party, now called the 'Adi Brahmo Samaj', or 'the original Samaj'. And Keshub Chunder Sen's group claimed the title the 'Brahmo Samaj of India'.

From the sixties onwards the Adi Brahmo Samaj began to claim openly that 'Brahmoism is both Universal Religion and a form of Hindooism', which sought to 'preach the *catholic* sentiments of *Brahma Dharma* in a *national* form'.[12] However, the balance between 'catholicism' and 'nationalism' was difficult to maintain. In the end the stress was on the national, or Hindu side; and a strong affinity was maintained between the new creed and traditional Hinduism. On the other hand, Keshub Chunder Sen appeared to be more and more 'pro-Christian' in some of his public pronouncements about Jesus Christ. At the same time the former *bhakta* became very much preoccupied with the idea of the 'direct perception' of the Deity and considered his Brahmoism as a 'living religion'. Sen's thought found its ultimate expression in his 'New Dispensation' in 1880.

THE APOLOGETICS OF BANERJEA AND GOREH

The apologetic works of Banerjea and Goreh from the early sixties till the eighties are the main concern of the third part of the study: Banerjea in search of a meaningful dialogue with the Aryan religious tradition; while Goreh was mainly concerned with his critique of natural religion, or Theism, and sought to present Christianity as the revealed religion.

Some of the major issues in the debate are recapitulated in the last part of the study with special reference to St. Paul's teaching on the religions of the nations based on the exegesis of Acts 14, 17, Romans 1 and 2. The concluding chapter attempts to give a summary of the salient points of the study.

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Christian Missions and the Western Guilt Complex

Lamin Sanneh

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[12] *Brahmic Questions of the Day*, by An Old Brahmo (Calcutta, 1869), pp. 4, 8.

When at the age of 18 I approached a Methodist church in the Gambia with a request for baptism, thus signalling my conversion to Christianity from Islam, the resident senior minister, an English missionary, responded by inviting me to reconsider my decision. And, while I was at it, he said, I should also consider joining the Catholic Church. My conversion obviously caused him acute embarassment, and I was mortified on account of it.

However, his imaginative solution of my linking up with the Catholic Church did not work out; after a year of vain attempts I returned to the English missionary. Afer assuring me that the baptism of the Methodists was recognized by the Catholics, he agreed in principle to receive me into the church.

At that stage of my life I would have joined the church on almost any condition, for I had this absurd idea that the gospel had marked me out for something, whether for reward, rebuke or ridicule I did not know; whatever it was, I felt inexorably driven toward it. On the night of my baptism I was overcome with emotion, finding it hard to believe that my wish was being fulfilled. Not even the thousand tongues of Methodist hymnody could have given utterance to the avalanche of thoughts and feelings that erupted in me.

I make this extended autobiographical introduction to indicate how in the liberal Methodist tradition I first encountered the guilt complex about missions which I have since come to know so well after living more than two decades in the West. I have found Western Christians to be very embarrassed about meeting converts from Asia or Africa, but when I have repeated for them my personal obstacles in joining the church, making it clear that I was in no way pressured into doing so, they have seemed gratefully unburdened of a sense of guilt. Furthermore, when I have pointed out that missionaries actually made comparatively few converts, my Western friends have reacted with obvious relief, though with another part of their p. 394 minds, they insist that missionaries have regularly used their superior cultural advantage to instil a sense of inferiority in natives.

It seems that for my Western Christian friends, if missionaries did not justify by their field labours the guilt the West carries about the mischief of the white race in the rest of the world, then other missionaries would have to be invented to justify that guilt.

It should provide food for thought that the church has succeeded in importing this guilt complex into Africa. I found the church there to be self-conscious about matters religious—especially matters involving God, death, judgement, the virgin birth and miracles—which presumably the Enlightenment banished from rational debate. Consequently, the church was wary of embracing members tainted with the brush of conversion, for such new members would not have acquired the reservation deemed appropriate to religious subjects.

The church took further precautions against religious enthusiasm: for my catechism I was introduced to New Testament form criticism and to Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, John Macmurray, John A. T. Robinson, Vincent Taylor, Oliver Chase Quick and other 'sensible' writers. On my own initiative I discovered the works of C. S. Lewis, whose brand of commonsense Christianity encouraged me no end. Nevertheless, the liberal strand was the dominant theme in my formation, hallowed with the refined ministration of writers like Bertrand Russell and Harold Nicolson.

The church's hesitant attitude about religious conversation in turn surprised, frustrated, dismayed, saddened and confused me. Also, given the prominent place religion occupies in Africa, I was baffled by the apparent determination of my church superiors to keep religious subjects from all 'decent' and 'culture' conversation. I realize now that this attitude is deep-rooted in Western liberal culture. However, before I left Africa for Europe I had no way of understanding it, for it had no analogue in my society, and, more important for me, it appeared to skirt the declared aims of a missionary church.

My business in this article is not to linger on Memory Lane but to confront directly the guilt complex about missions that so often prevails in liberal counsels. I believe that the liberal claim to openmindedness about missions would be strengthened by a closer examination of what actually happened—and may still be happening—in the encounter between Western missionaries and non-Christian peoples.

Much of the standard Western scholarship on Christian missions proceeds by looking at the motives of individual missionaries and concludes by faulting the entire missionary enterprise as being part of the machinery of Western cultural imperialism. But missions in the modem era has been far more, and far less, than the argument about motives customarily portrays.

Missionaries of course went out with all sorts of motives, and some of them were clearly unwholesome. Yet if we were to try to separate good from bad motives, I daresay we would not, after a mountain of labour, advance the subject much p. 395 beyond the molehill of stalemate. We might, for example, take a little out of the cultural imperialism bag and put it into the social-service category, and ascribe both phenomena to Western cultural conditioning. But that exercise would do little to further our understanding of the nature and consequences of crosscultural missions.

Instead of examining motives, I propose that we focus on the field setting of missions, where local feedback exerted an influence all its own. And what stands out in particular about the field setting is the emphasis missionaries gave to translating Scripture into vernacular languages. Most Protestant missionary agencies embarked on the immense enterprise of vernacular translation with the enthusiasm, urgency and commitment of first-timers, and they expended uncommon resources to make the vernacular dream come true. Today more than 1,800 languages have been involved in the worldwide translation movement. In Africa alone, the Bible has been translated into 522 vernacular languages, with texts in over 200 additional languages now under development. Catholic missions have been similarly committed to the transposition of the catechism into vernacular terms, with language study a crucial part of the enterprise. The importance of vernacular translation was that it brought the missionary into contact with the most intimate and intricate aspects of culture, yielding wide-ranging consequences for both missionary and native alike.

The translation enterprise had two major steps. One was the creation of a vernacular alphabet for societies that lacked a literary tradition. The other step was to shake the existing literary tradition free of its esoteric, elitist predilection by recasting it as a popular medium. Both steps simulated an indigenous response and encouraged the discovery of local resources for the appropriation of Christianity. Local believers acquired a new interest not only in the vernacular but also in recording their history and collecting accounts of indigenous wisdom. One missionary whose work sparked such response was J. G. Christaller, who came from Basel to the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Between 1871 and 1881 he produced a Bible translation, a dictionary and a grammar of the Twi language, crowning his labours with a compilation of 3,600 Twi proverbs and axioms. He also helped found the *Christian Messenger* in 1883, a paper devoted to the promotion of Akan life and culture. His *Twi Dictionary* has been acclaimed as an 'encyclopaedia of Akan civilization' by the modern generation of Ghanaian scholars.

Often the outcome of vernacular translation was that the missionary lost the position of being the expert. But the significance of translation went beyond that. Armed with a written vernacular Scripture, converts to Christianity invariably called into question the legitimacy of all schemes of foreign denomination—cultural, political and religious. Here was an acute paradox: the vernacular Scriptures and the wider cultural and linguistic enterprise on which translation rested provided the means and occasion for arousing a

sense of national pride, yet it was p. 396 the missionaries—foreign agents—who were the creators of that entire process. I am convinced that this paradox decisively undercuts the alleged connection often drawn between missions and colonialism. Colonial rule was irreparably damaged by the consequences of vernacular translation—and often by other activities of missionaries.

Because of its concern for translations that employ the speech of the common workaday world, Christian proclamation has had a populist element. In many traditional societies, religious language has tended to be confined to a small elite of professionals. In extreme cases, this language is shrouded under the forbidding sanctions of secret societies and shrines, access to which is through induced trances or a magical formula. The Christian approach to translatability strikes at the heart of such gnostic tendencies, first by contending that the greatest and most profound religious truths are compatible with everyday language, and second, by targeting ordinary men and women as worthy bearers of the religious message. This approach introduced a true democratic spirit into hitherto closed and elitist societies, with women in particular discovering an expanded role.

For example, after George Pilkington, the English lay missionary, translated the Bible in Uganda, some 2,000 men and 400 women acted as colporteurs operating as far as the forests of the Congo. Pilkington's translated Bible sold 1,100 copies in the first year of publication, with an additional 4,000 New Testaments, 13,500 single Gospels and 40,000 readers. Theodore Roosevelt, who visited Uganda in 1910, witnessed the scene and said it was nothing short of astounding.

The project of translation contains implications about the nature of culture itself. Translation destigmatizes culture—it denies that culture is 'profane'—and asserts that the sacred message may legitimately be entrusted to the forms of everyday life. Translation also relativizes culture by denying that there is only one normative expression of the gospel: it results in a pluralism in which God is the relativizing centre. The Christian insight into this phenomenon carries with it a profound ethical notion, for it opens culture up to the demand and need for change. A divinized, absolutized culture precludes the possibility of change.

The impact of the translation process is, indeed, incalculable. Suddenly hitherto illiterate populations were equipped with a written Scripture for the first time, and from the wonder and pride of possessing something new that is also strangely familiar, they burst upon the scene with confidence in the whos and whys of their existence. For example, the Luo tribesman Matthew Ajuoga was helping missionaries translate the Bible into his native language. He discovered that the missionaries translated the Greek word *philadelphia*, 'brotherly love', into Luo as hera, and this experience caused him to protest, saying that 'love' as the Bible explained it was absent from the missionaries' treatment of Africans. He subsequently founded an independent church, the Church of Christ in Africa, in 1957, which gained a considerable following across tribal divisions. Another p. 397 example is the Zulu Bible, which enabled Zulu converts to respond to missionary criticism of the Zulu way of dressing. The Zulus said that they found in Genesis 27:16 sanction for their custom of dressing in skins, a practice the missionaries had attacked. In the eyes of the Zulus, it was the missionaries who were flouting the dress code. Thus it was that, confronted with the bewildering fact of Western intrusion, local populations used the vernacular to avert ultimate disenchantment, in this way utilizing the gains of mission to offset the losses to colonialism.

The evidence of the importance of translation in Christian missions is remarkably consistent. From the 16th century when Francis Xavier decided to cast his lot with the East against his own Western culture, to the 19th century when Cristaller singlehandedly

promoted Akan culture, to the 20th when Frank Laubach inveighed against the encroachments of American power in the Philippines, missionaries in the field have helped to promote indigenous self-awareness as a counterforce to Western cultural importation. Obviously missionaries wanted to proclaim the gospel because they believed it to be superior to any message others might offer. But it is really not consistent to blame missionaries for believing in what they preach. And we must note this salient, consistent feature of their work—namely, that they confidently adopted the language and culture of others as the irreplacable vehicle for the transmission of the message. Whatever judgement missionaries brought with them, it certainly was not about the fitness of the vernacular to be the hallowed channel for communicating with God.

Besides the paradox of foreign missionaries establishing the indigenous process by which foreign domination was questioned, there is a theological paradox to this story: missionaries entered the missionary field to convert others, yet in the translation process it was they who first made the move to 'convert' to a new language, with all its presuppositions and ramifications. Thus we have the example of Robert de Nobili (1577–1656), an Italian nobleman who went to India as a Jesuit missionary, arriving there in 1605. He passed for a *guru*, an Indian saintly figure, and even for a *sannyasi*, a wild, holy man, adopting Hindu customs and religious terminology to define his own personal piety. Two other examples were Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who adopted the opposite path to de Nobili by assimilating into upper-class Chinese society during the Ming dynasty, coming to China in 1580, eventually undergoing a profound cultural transformation as a Confucian scholar; and Charles de Foucauld, who served in the French army in the Algerian war where he witnessed moving scenes of Muslims' personal piety, leading him to regain his own Christian faith, and becoming in everything a Tuareg Bedouin nomad. Whether missionaries converted anybody else, there is no doubt that they were their own first converts.

It is also apparent that at least in Africa, Christian missions expanded and deepened pluralism—in language, social encounter and ethnic participation in the Christian movement. p. 398 Missions helped to preserve languages that were threatened by a rising *lingua franca*, extended the influence of the vernacular through careful methodical and systematic investigations in the field, and helped to establish connections within the wider family of languages. In their grammars, dictionaries, primers, readers and systematic compilations of proverbs, axioms, customs and other ethnographic materials, missionaries furnished the scientific documentation by means of which the modem study of cultures could begin. Whether missionaries translated well or badly—and there are masterpieces as well as outrageous parodies—they made field criteria rather than the values of empirebuilding their operative standard.

Indeed, if there is any aspect of missionaries' motives I would want to pursue, it would be their desire to excel in whatever they undertook. They scrutinized their work in the hard and sombre light of giving an account before God. Thus we find in their meticulous record-keeping, in the minutiae of account ledgers, in faithful official and family correspondence and in the assembling of petitions, an extraordinary concern for accuracy.

In examining missionary archives I am struck constantly by the missionaries' painstaking attention to detail. Inventiveness was a rather rare vice in that stern, austere world of missionary self-accounting. Thus, unwittingly, was laid the firm foundation of modern historiography in Africa and elsewhere. Even the nationalist point of view that came to dominate much historical writing about the new Africa was to a large extent moulded by the missionary exploration of indigenous societies.

When they succeeded in translation, missionaries inadvertently vindicated indigenous claims, and when they failed they called forth the criticism of local people. Furthermore, their success in translation merely hastened the day of their departure, while failure called into question their continuing presence. Words have impact, especially in the abundant surplus of their unintended consequences. Translation is no respecter of motives—which is why it should be detached from the question of motives and examined in its own right.

Missionary statesmen in the 19th century saw quite clearly where the vernacular principle was leading, and they welcomed it as the supreme reward of Christian discipleship. For example, Henry Venn of the Anglican Church Missionary Society said that 'the marked national characteristics' that the vernacular principle fosters in the expression of the gospel, 'in the overruling grace of God, will tend to its perfection and glory'. He spoke vividly of 'a euthanasia of mission' once the vernacular principle exerted its full force. He said the business of mission was 'not to supply an European pastorate, but to prepare native pastors … and to fix the spiritual standard in such churches by securing for them a supply of Vernacular Scriptures' (*To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* [Eerdmans, 1971]). Such an aim, he counselled, differed sharply from the goals of colonialism in perpetuating overseas dependencies.

The modern religious map of p. 399 Africa reveals in a striking way the close connection between the growth of Christianity and the widespread employment of the vernacular. The converse also seems to hold: Christian growth has been slightest in areas where vernacular languages are weak—that is, where a *lingua franca* such as English, French, Portuguese, Arabic or Swahili has succeeded in suppressing mother tongues.

To make the contrast even starker, we can point out that the reverse phenomenon appears in Islam, also a missionary religion, but one that does not translate its Scriptures for its canonical rites. Islam is strongest in societies where a *lingua franca* exists, and weakest in places of vernacular preponderance. For example, Islamic gains in north Nigeria occurred at the hands of the Fulani reformers in the 19th century. In the process, the Fulani assimilated to the Islamized Hausa culture and lost their own Fulfulde language.

Islamic reform has nowhere to my knowledge made the perpetuation of the vernacular a concomitant of orthodox rectitude, and I know of no Muslim language institutes dedicated to the systematic study of the vernacular. Islam has succeeded brilliantly in its missionary enterprise, promoting at the same time a universal devotion to the sacred Arabic. In Africa, we see evidence of its considerable gains in spite of what we might regard as insuperable odds against a nontranslatable Scripture. For this reason the implications of Muslim success for pluralism are quite serious.

I will conclude, as I began, with a personal stow, this one about the unexpected dynamics of translation. After completing my Islamic studies in the Middle East in 1969 I went to Yorubaland in Nigeria as a lay worker with the Methodist Church. I was immediately taken to the local market to purchase some bare essentials for my fiat. My companion was a senior English missionary who had spent many years in Ibadan and knew his way around. He translated for me as we did the round of market stalls, with the stallkeepers' curiosity naturally aroused by the missionary, in their eyes a stranger from beyond the stars.

Before we had picked our way through the market, a small crowd had gathered to marvel at the sight of a white man translating for an African in an African language. It was as if we had got our arrangement wrong and put the Western cart before the African horse. The image of 'total stranger' the stall-keepers had of the Western missionary was completely belied by this exposure.

Of the several lessons one can draw from this incident, one is particularly relevant to the Western guilt complex about missions. There is a widespread tendency in the West to see missions as destroyers of indigenous cultures or else as alien cultural agents from the West. Yet in the incident at the local market, my missionary companion carne to be acknowledged by the stallkeepers as an accomplished 'native', one of themselves, on the basis of the vernacular rule that they normally used to determine the boundary between insiders and outsiders. In p. 400 the act of translating, my missionary friend demonstrated that he had as much claim to being in Africa as he had to identifying with the West. His own Western cultural differences were no longer a barrier, nor even a useful evaluative standard, but an opportunity for cross-cultural interchange. This example suggests that Christian missions are better seen as a translation movement, with consequences for vernacular revitalization, religious change and social transformation, than as a vehicle for Western cultural domination. Such an assurance should help alleviate some of the Western guilt complex about missions.

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Book Reviews

THE UNIQUE CHRIST IN OUR PLURALIST WORLD

edited by Bruce J. Nicholls

(Published 1994 on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship by The Paternoster Press, Carlisle UK and Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA Paperback, 288 pp. ISBNs 0 85364 574 4 and 0 8010 2013 1)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

The WEF Theological Commission conducted a Consultation in Manila June 16–22, 1992 on the topic of this volume. More than eighty theologians from all parts of the world participated. The papers are here published under the editorship of Bruce Nicholls, a former director of the Commission and currently editor of its journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology*. In addition to his introduction, there may be found the fourteen page official statement for the Consultation, 'The WEF Manila Declaration', a foreword by the Commission director, Dr Bong Rin Ro and twenty papers grouped under the following areas: The Unique Christ in relation to the plurality of religions, the challenge of modernity, political ideologies, the church's diversity and unity, peace and justice and hope and judgement of the world. Writers include Kwame Bediako, Rene Padilla, Valdir Steuernagel, John Vissers, Christopher Sugden and Isaac Zokoue. Notes and a subject index are appended, increasing the value of this compendium on a subject which is 'arguably the most important and urgent task facing the church worldwide today'.

AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO *BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY*

edited by D. A. Carson