

"The Origins of Australian Protestant Missions: Evangelical Visions"

Stuart Piggin

1. Introduction
2. The Pietist Vision
3. Jonathan Edwards's Vision for Australia
4. The Anglican Evangelical Vision
5. The Dissenting Evangelical Vision
6. The Methodist Evangelical Vision

Abstract

Significant players in the settlement of Australia were evangelicals with an elaborate missionary vision and the motivation to seize opportunities to 'gospelise' the world, including the Pacific. This paper locates the origins of the Australian Protestant missionary movement within the vision which Jonathan Edwards had for Terra Australis and Hollandia Nova, the growing confidence eighteenth-century evangelicals had in the gospel as the engine for the renovation of the world, and their understanding of Australia as a strategic base for missions to the Pacific.

1. Introduction

In 1803, Viscount Castlereagh's private secretary, Alexander Knox, advised:

For a hundred years, at least, there has not been so much attention given to religious matters as is at this time by numbers in the middle ranks of society in England. Of these, many are Dissenters, but many are also in the Establishment. Both descriptions are alike denominated methodistical. . . Of this extended class the political importance is much greater than any one slightly informed respecting them can conceive an idea of. In the first place, they have a *common sentiment*, which, if engaged on the side of government, would be an impregnable mass of strength; but, if unhappily revolted, alienated, or even chilled, the negative injury would be immense, to say nothing of positive bad effects.¹

Knox here identified the three divisions in the Lord's evangelical army: Establishment evangelicals, Dissenters

¹ *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, ed. by his brother, 4 vols, London, 1840, 4, 290.

(principally Independents, including Congregationalists and Baptists), and Methodists (both Wesleyan and Calvinistic). Many in government were aware of the 'political importance' of this 'extended class', and this evangelical constituency, including missionary society directors, colonial chaplains and missionaries, had numerous friends at Westminster.

Fifteen years earlier, when Christianity was planted in Australia, the evangelical tide was not then as high, but it was rising fast. And, since missions were becoming core to evangelical identity, it is not surprising that nineteenth century Australian Christianity was more committed to overseas missions than our reputation as a secular nation might suggest. That the highest form of Christian service is foreign missions was an argument heard as often in Australian evangelical circles as in British. The Rev. Allan Webb, for example, at the 1871 assembly of the Baptist Union, of which he was founder,² declared proudly that foreign missions were 'the proof of the denomination's excellence'.³ In this paper we will review the development of this missionary commitment through an analysis of five visions expressed within the vital Christianity or heart religion of the eighteenth-century and which were to leave a legacy in nineteenth-century colonial missions: that is, Pietist, Revivalist, Anglican, Dissenting, and Methodist visions.

Arguably, missions are the most distinctive institutionalisation of evangelicalism. Evangelicals would have liked to have institutionalised the revival in which they were conceived in the middle of the eighteenth century, but instead they institutionalised their spiritual energy in missions at the end of the eighteenth century. Why English-speaking evangelicals took half a century after the revivals to institutionalise foreign missions is almost as interesting as a related question, namely, why did it take Protestants so long to engage in missions after the Reformation? The normal

² Baptist Union of NSW Minute Book, 1871, Alan C. Prior, 'Missionary Service Overseas', *Some Fell on Good Ground*, Baptist Union of NSW, 1966, pp.187-197; G.B. Ball, *The Australian Baptist Mission and its Impact in Bengal*, MA thesis, Flinders University, 1978. The official history of the Australian Baptist Missionary Society is J. Redmann, *The Light Shines On: The Story of the Missionary Outreach of the Baptist People of Australia 1882-1982*, Australian BMS, Hawthorn, 1982. The first Baptist missionary society in Australia was formed in the Flinders Street Baptist Church in SA in 1864.

³ F. Hibberd, 'Federation and our Missions,' *The Baptist*, 15 October 1903, p.4.

answers to the latter question are that Protestant countries did not have the same opportunities as Catholic powers to expand and therefore proselytise as they were not maritime states, that the Protestants were too busy defending the purity of their faith against the Catholics and each other, that Luther and the other magisterial reformers believed that the great commission applied only to the apostles, and that without monastic orders, Protestants did not have the necessary labour force. I would suggest, however, that spiritual power and motivation are essential to ongoing missionary enterprise, and that, therefore, Lutheran and Reformed Scholasticism needed to be injected with, or displaced by, Pietism before Protestantism could become capable of missionary enthusiasm. Hence continental Protestantism engaged in missions before English-speaking Protestantism. But when the idealism of Pietism was thrown into the hottest British and American Puritan fires, a world-conquering missionary theology was refined. In England, Independent minister, Isaac Watts (1674-1748) reflected on Psalm 72 in such a way as to adumbrate salvation not only for the heathen in yet unknown parts of the world, but also prisoners in not yet imagined penal colonies:

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom **stretch from shore to shore**
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns;
The **prisoner** leaps to lose his chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest.⁴

2. The Pietist Vision

Just as it is important to understand that the immediate background to the New Testament was not the Old Testament, so it is important to our story to grasp that the immediate background to British Evangelicalism was not English Puritanism, but continental Pietism.⁵

⁴ Christopher Idle, *Stories of our Favourite Hymns*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980, 350.

⁵ The Pietists are the bridge or connexion between the first age of Protestantism, which was largely without a commitment to missions, and a Protestantism as committed to missions as their Catholic rivals. As Gustav Warneck, Professor of Missions at Halle, a Pietist centre, wrote:

It was in the Pietist circles surrounding the biblical scholar, Johann Bengel, that the term *Heilsgeschichte* (the history of salvation) was first coined. Pietism led to a renewed interest in what God was doing in history, an interest which the Scholastic Protestants did not have, but which the evangelicals were to develop with enthusiasm.⁶ Whereas the method of the Orthodox in the tradition of Martin Luther was to 'offer a confession of faith for public discussion',⁷ the renewal and revival movements, beginning with the Pietists, 'sought their legitimation in the hand of God in history'.⁸ Orthodoxy leads to theological disputation. The Pietist tradition leads to history. It is significant that at the time of his death, Jonathan Edwards was working on a *History of the Work of Redemption* which he described as 'a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of a history'. A *History of the Work of Redemption*, was first published in 1774, was brought out again in 1786, 1788, and 1791. Not only was it repeatedly republished in the years immediately preceding the creation of the great missionary societies, but the 1788 edition was dedicated to a group who were later to be among the most prominent fathers and founders of LMS.⁹ The Pietists, and the early evangelicals who emulated them, were intrigued, not only by what God had done in the past, but also what he was doing all over the world in the present, and they were therefore very eager to learn news of God's dealings from all over the globe. The eagerness to learn about contemporary Christianity, openness to what the Spirit

'It was in the age of Pietism that missions struck their first deep roots, and it is the spirit of Pietism which, after rationalism had laid its hoar-frost on the first blossoming, again revived them, and has brought them to their present bloom.' Francis M. DuBose (ed.), *Classics of Christian Missions*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1979, Document 8, p. 75

⁶ See Stuart Piggin, 'Evangelicalism and Contemporary History: The Revival Chronicles of the 1740s' *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, 14, December 1992, pp.1-26; Stuart Piggin, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Revival Chronicles of the 1740s' *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, 15, June 1993, pp.14-20.

⁷ W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, Cambridge: CUP, 1992, p.2.

⁸ Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p.2.

⁹ This edition has a dedication to a number of prominent evangelical Calvinists, many of whom were to be prominent in the foundation in 1795 of the London Missionary Society, namely 'To the reverend Joseph Barber, Samuel Brewer, B. D., John Clayton, John Eyre, Rowland Hill, A. M., Torial Joss, J. A. Knight, John Martin, Samuel Medley, John Rippon, A. M., John Towers, Thomas Wills, A. M., The Recommenders of this edition of President Edwards's *History of Redemption*, it is most respectfully dedicated by their obliged humble servant, Thomas Pitcher, No. 44, Barbican.'

is doing in other traditions in other places, and an appreciation of the present 'leadings of God', were conspicuous characteristics of early evangelicalism, awakening an interest in God's purposes for the whole world, including Australia and the Pacific.

Furthermore, Pietism's preference for *praxis pietatis* over doctrinal controversy, meant that it modelled an evangelical ecumenism and tolerance which facilitated the remarkable united efforts of evangelicals in missions and social service. One of the most prominent of Pietists, Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), sent missionaries to Greenland, the West Indies, Central and South America, Labrador, to the Indians of USA and Alaska, to South Africa and to Tibet. Eventually Moravian missionaries were appointed to Australia. Governor La Trobe of Victoria was a Moravian, and the Moravian missions to aborigines were among the few successful missions to them in the second half of the nineteenth century.

3. Jonathan Edwards's vision for Australia

Jonathan Edwards¹⁰ shared with the Pietists a pronounced idealism which viewed the power and reach of the gospel as unbounded. In his vision of the gospel as fit to take the world for Christ and the heathen as Christ's inheritance, Edwards did not fail to consider Australia, a half century before it was settled. In June 1723, when Edwards was just 19, he discovered that the love of God, the love of learning and the love of that 'young lady in New Haven who is beloved by that Great Being who made and rules the world'¹¹ were gloriously compatible. In this spiritual Elysium, he dreamed of the perfections of the millennium, and he speculated on the contribution an evangelised Australia would make to that millennial glory:

How happy will that state be, when . . . divine [and] human learning shall be . . . diffused all over the world, and this lower world shall be all over covered with light, the various parts of it mutually enlightening each other;

¹⁰ See Stuart Piggin, 'The Expanding Knowledge of God: Jonathan Edwards's Influence on Missionary Thinking and Promotion,' in David W. Kling and Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, The University of South Carolina Press, 2003, pp.416-463.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p.279.

. . . when we shall from time to time have the most excellent books and wonderful performances brought from one end of the earth and another to surprise us - . . . new and wondrous discoveries from Terra Australis Incognita, the most divine and angelic strains from among the Hottentots, &c . . . when the distant extremes of the world shall shake hands together and all nations shall be acquainted, and they shall all join the forces of their minds in exploring the glories of the Creator, their hearts in loving and adoring him, their hands in serving him, and their voices making the world to ring with his praise.¹²

The very next year, in speculating on Isaiah 42.4, 'And the isles shall wait for his law', Edwards, wrote of the evangelisation of Australia as the fulfilment of prophecy:

But certainly these prophecies, many of them that speak of the glorious manifestation of God to the islands, do not only regard the first display of the gospel made soon after Christ's ascension; but by these glorious times they speak of, is intended also the times of the church's triumph at the millennium, and the times immediately foregoing, wherein these prophecies will be much the most notably accomplished. And what is peculiarly glorious in it, is the gospelizing the new and before unknown world, that which is so remote, so unknown, where the devil had reigned quietly from the beginning of the world, which is larger - taking in America, Terra Australis Incognita, Hollandia Nova, and all those yet undiscovered tracts of land - is far greater than the old world. I say, that this new world should all worship the God of Israel, whose worship was then confined to so narrow a land, is wonderful and glorious!¹³

That Edwards should think Terra Australis Incognita and Hollandia Nova were two different places was not surprising. They were not demonstrated to be one until the circumnavigation of Matthew Flinders in 1802,³. What is surprising in Edwards's speculation is the clear understanding

¹² Jonathan Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies' (entry Nos a-z, aa-zz, and 1-500)*, ed. by Thomas Schafer, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 212f. (Miscellanies 26).

¹³ Jonathan Edwards (1724). *Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. by Stephen J. Stein, *Works*, 5, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977, p.143.

of this 21 year old spiritual prodigy that Christ must have the world, including Australia.

Then, in the revivals (1734-43) much was learned of the power of the gospel as an instrument for renovating whole societies and for converting those drawn from different races and cultures. Little children were converted as well as adults; more strikingly, members of the lower orders were converted as well as those of the upper and middle classes; and most striking of all in America, 'the poor negro' and the Indians, to whom David Brainerd and other missionaries ministered, experienced revival every bit as dramatic as whites. Demonstrably, the gospel was divinely designed to rescue all humankind. In 1747 Edwards published the *Humble Attempt*, his sermons on the Concert of Prayer proposal, to encourage people to pray for revival and the spread of the gospel.¹⁴ This was the book which stirred to action William Carey, the father of modern missions. It is a study of the relationship between revival, prayer, prophecy, and missions. The large accession of converts into the churches in the revivals sparked and fuelled speculation that the millennium was just about to begin with its thousand years of unprecedented spiritual prosperity, and Edwards was excited with the imminent prospect that the earth would be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. In this context, he again expressed his confidence that Australia would be reached with, and transformed by, the Gospel. In particular, he was stirred by the image of the growing river (Ezekiel 47.1-12). In his writings he referred to Ezekiel 47 often, and, just after the revival in his own church in Northampton in 1734, he preached on this passage. Now in 1747, in the 'Humble Attempt', Edwards wrote that in Ezekiel 'the progress of religion is represented by the gradual increase of the waters of the sanctuary'. He could foresee, with the eye of faith, that stream of water purifying not only the Dead Sea which is what is referred to in this passage (47.8), not only the Mediterranean Sea with which it is compared (47.10), but that it will spread to the purification of all the oceans of the world, resulting in the conversion of the peoples of Africa, Asia, America and, said Edwards, Terra Australis.¹⁵ This, 41 years before the first fleet.

¹⁴ *An Humble Attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible Union of God's people in extraordinary prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth* (1748), Works, 5.

¹⁵ Works, 5.411)

Then in the last decade of his life, in 1754, he expressed the twin views, which became foundational to the missionary movement, that Australia needed to be reached by the gospel, because (a) otherwise the people would remain in darkness, whereas (b) if they received it, they would rise to greater heights than the civilized Europeans who had not received it.¹⁶ Hence Edwards's vision for the people of Australia is that they would be delivered from darkness, purified, brought to worship God, and themselves become missionaries, contributing their understanding of God and his creation to the whole world, an understanding superior to that of 'civilised' people who did not know God through the gospel.

(PP) 4. The Anglican Evangelical Vision

The story of how that vision became reality involves reconstruction of events within the three divisions of vital Christianity: the evangelical Anglicans, the Dissenters and the Methodists. The broad picture is clear, but some of the details are still unknown, at least to me, and I would welcome the help of my fellow historians in sorting the enigmas out, Rewind style. The letter announcing that New South Wales was to be settled by convicts was signed by Lord Sydney, Home Secretary, on 21 August 1786. Two months later he let it be known that he approved of the appointment on 24 October 1786

¹⁶ *Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A Holbrook, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol.3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) Section 8, pp.26, 185. Section 8 is headed (p.169):

The native depravity of mankind appears, in that there has been so little good effect of so manifold and great means, used to promote virtue in the world.

Then he adds on p.184f:

Surely Dr. Taylor's scheme is attended with strange paradoxes. And that his mysterious tenets may appear in a true light, it must be observed, at the same time while he supposes these means, even the very greatest and best of 'em, to have proved so ineffectual, that help from them, as to any general reformation, is to be despaired of: yet he maintains, that all mankind, even the heathen in all parts of the world, yea, every single person in it, (which must include every Indian in America, before the Europeans came hither; and every inhabitant of the unknown parts of Africa, and Terra Australis,) has ability, light, and means sufficient, to do their whole duty; yea, (as many passages in his writings plainly suppose) to perform perfect obedience to God's law, without the least degree of vice or iniquity.

of Richard Johnson as Chaplain to the settlement within His Majesty's territory called New South Wales.¹⁷ That the appointment came about through William Wilberforce's friendship with Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, is suggested by a letter from Pitt to Wilberforce, dated 23 September 1786:

The colony for Botany Bay will be much indebted to you for your assistance in providing a chaplain. The enclosed [probably the 'Heads of a Plan'] will, however, show that its interests have not been neglected, as well as that you have a nearer connection with them than perhaps you were yourself aware of. Seriously speaking, if you can find such a clergyman as you mention we shall be very glad of it; but it must be soon.¹⁸

The evangelicals knew the meaning of 'soon' and did not miss opportunities. On the evening of that same day, 23 September, 1786, Johnson received a visit from 'a friend' who asked him if he had 'the spirit of a missionary' or if he 'wished to go abroad'. Johnson said, 'I smiled and replied "No", adding 'I had no inclination or thoughts of ever leaving my native country'.¹⁹

Who was the 'friend' who planted the seed in Johnson's mind? A number of possibilities occur. It may have been Wilberforce, himself. He would almost certainly have received the Prime Minister's letter on the day that it was written, and therefore he had time to act on it. Whether or not it was Wilberforce who dealt with Johnson personally on that evening, further evidence that Johnson's appointment was due to Wilberforce's close personal connexion with Pitt is found in a letter, dated 15 November 1786, which Newton wrote to Wilberforce:

¹⁷ *Historical Records of NSW*, I, 2, p.27; J. Woolmington, *Religion in Early Australia*, Cassell, Australia, 1976, p.5f.

¹⁸ A.M. Wilberforce (ed.), *Private Papers of William Wilberforce*, London, 1897, Vol. I, p.15; cited in Neil K. Macintosh, *Richard Johnson, Chaplain to the Colony of New South Wales: His Life and Times 1755-1827*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1978, p.25.

¹⁹ Richard Johnson's diary, Archbishop's Papers, Moore, 22, Australian, 1, Lambeth Palace Library, London. Also cited in Neil K. Macintosh, *Richard Johnson, Chaplain to the Colony of New South Wales: His Life and Times 1755-1827*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1978, p.27.

To you, as the instrument, we owe the pleasing prospect of an opening for the propagation of the Gospel in the Southern Hemisphere. Who can tell what important consequences may depend on Mr Johnson's going to New Holland? It may seem but a small event at present: so a foundation-stone, when laid, is small compared with the building to be erected upon it; but it is the beginning and the earnest of the whole.²⁰

Newton's description of Wilberforce as 'instrument' suggests that he was implementing a stratagem already devised by more mature evangelical heads, and his advocacy of the Botany Bay chaplaincy appears to have been the first fruit of his calling - he was converted just a year earlier - to a life devoted to 'the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners'.²¹

It may have been John Newton who pressed Wilberforce about the strategic missionary advantages of a chaplaincy in the South Seas, and it may have been Newton who was 'the friend' who raised the matter with Richard Johnson on the evening of 23 September.²² Newton was sufficiently involved with Wilberforce's pilgrimage in the mid-1780s to understand why Wilberforce would turn to him for a recommendation once Pitt had accepted Wilberforce's offer to find a suitable chaplain. Newton later corresponded regularly with Johnson in New South Wales.

The 'friend' just may have been Henry Foster to whom Johnson was curate in 1786. Foster, 'much respected as a pastor and judge of character',²³ was a foundation member of the evangelical Eclectic Society, founded in 1783, and he later demonstrated a keen commitment to missions: he was to become a member of the first Committee of the Church Missionary Society, formed in 1799, and always one of its most regular

²⁰ R.I. and S. Wilberforce, *Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, London, 1840, I, p.15.

²¹ Journal, 28 October 1787; R.I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, London, 1838, I, p. 149.

²² Bernard Martin, *John Newton: A Biography*, Heinemann, London, 1950, 324 observes that Newton took a keen interest in the selection of a chaplain for Botany Bay.

²³ M. Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect*, London, Lutterworth, 1958, p.80.

attenders.²⁴ It would have been natural for Wilberforce to turn to him for a recommendation, too, because he had attended on his ministry at St Antholyn's at the point of deepest heart-searching in 1785.²⁵ St Antholyn's was the parish next but one to Newton's parish of St Mary Woolnoth, and Richard Johnson was to be given the living at St Antholin's a decade after his return to London from Sydney.²⁶

The 'friend' may have been John Thornton (1720-90), the director of the Russia Company and 'the wealthiest merchant but one²⁷ in Europe',²⁸ who gave away annually between two and three thousand pounds, who was eager to place evangelical clergy in strategic parishes and was one of the principal donors to the evangelical Elland Society, and was a close friend and supporter of John Newton to whom he offered the living of St Mary Woolnoth in London in 1780. Thornton is known to have been interested for some time in prison hulks, and it was he who arranged for Johnson to visit on 22 October 1786 the hulk *Leviathan* when he was 'introduced to two hundred and fifty of his future congregation'.²⁹ It was Thornton who negotiated with the SPCK on Johnson's behalf for books which he might use among the convicts in Botany Bay.³⁰ And it was Thornton who presented Johnson with a copy of Cruden's *Concordance to the Bible* which is now found at Moore Theological College.

On 28 October 1786, four days after Lord Sydney's announcement of Richard Johnson's appointment as chaplain to Botany Bay, the elder Henry Venn, one of the first generation of Anglican evangelicals and now 'stricken in years', wrote to his daughter to congratulate her on the birth of her child. Birth was a good and wonderful manifestation of the general providence of God. But the grandfather devoted the bulk of his

²⁴ Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, I, London: C.M.S., 1899, pp.69, 84.

²⁵ R.I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, p.90.

²⁶ See Isabel M. Calder, 'The St Antholin Lectures,' *Church Quarterly Review*, January-March, 1959, pp.49-70.

²⁷ That one was reputed to be Hope of Amsterdam. See Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians*, Cambridge: CUP, 1961, p.78.

²⁸ G.R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, London: Longmans, Green, 1911, p.43.

²⁹ Henry Venn's letter to his daughter cited above from Henry Venn, *Memoir of Henry Venn*, 1834, p.446f.

³⁰ Macintosh, *Richard Johnson, Chaplain to the Colony of New South Wales*, p.29.

letter to a particular providence of God, the appointment of the 'Chaplain to Botany Bay', and he rejoiced in this token of future blessing for the distant regions of the earth. Venn enthused:

With what pleasure may we consider this plan of peopling that far-distant region, and other opening connexions with the Heathen, as a foundation for the Gospel of our God and Saviour to be preached unto them; when 'a vast multitude, whom no one can number,' shall, 'call upon his name;' - when 'the wilderness shall become a fruitful field,' and all the savageness of the Heathen shall be put off, and all graces of the Spirit shall be put on. . . . All heaven will break forth in that song of praise, 'Allelujah! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!'

If the evangelical was convinced of the power of the gospel to reform society and to reach and renovate a lost world, then his happiness could only be completed through personal engagement in the work. And, in the missionary ideology which would motivate many British and American evangelicals to great acts of self-sacrifice in the coming century, there was the equivalent of the martyr's crown for him called to the apostolic vocation of pioneering the gospel in the far corners of the earth. Venn concluded:

(PP) See what honour God putteth upon them who love Him in sincerity! To be the means of sending the Gospel to the other side of the globe - what a favour.³¹

Whom God honoured the evangelicals honoured, and Venn's evangelical contemporary, John Newton, bestowed on Johnson the title, 'Patriarch of the Southern Hemisphere'.³²

Conceived by Newton, the converted slave trader, leant compulsion by Thornton whose wealth was a 'wedge of gold', actualised by Wilberforce, Pitt's intimate, and accepted by Richard Johnson, Foster's curate: that is the Botany Bay chaplaincy. It was to be a settlement 'whence the Gospel light may hereafter spread in all directions, and multitudes may rejoice in it who are at present covered with a thick

³¹ Henry Venn, *Memoir of Henry Venn*, 1834, p.446f.

³² Newton to Johnson, December 1792, *HRNSW*, I, II, p.474 footnote; Macintosh, *Richard Johnson*, p.14f.

darkness.'³³ It was seen as a base for evangelising the South Seas, not as an object of missionary concern itself.

5. The Dissenting Evangelical Vision

Meanwhile the Dissenting division in the Lord's army was winning its own victories. One of the original Scottish ministers who had approached Edwards over the prayer concert was John Erskine, later editor of Edwards's *History of the Work of Redemption*. Almost forty years later, in 1784, the same Erskine sent the *Humble Attempt* to John Ryland, co-pastor of College Lane Baptist Church, Northampton, who shared it with a group of English Baptist ministers, including John Sutcliff of Olney and Andrew Fuller of Kettering³⁴. Fuller wrote in his diary: 'July 9 [1784]. Read to our friends, this evening, a part of Mr Edwards' Attempt to Promote Prayer for the Revival of Religion, to excite them to the like practice. Felt my heart profited and much solemnised by what I read. July 19. Read some more of Edwards on prayer, as I did also last Monday night, with sweet satisfaction.'³⁵

The group issued a call to concerted prayer, agreeing to meet on the first Monday of each month to pray for the spread of the gospel, and the prayer movement spread both rapidly and extensively.³⁶ Having created the demand, in 1789, Sutcliff wrote a preface to a new edition of the *Humble Attempt*. Already in 1785, having wrestled with Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*,³⁷ Fuller had written his *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, in which he demonstrated that there was no contradiction between God's sovereignty in election and the universal obligation on all who hear the gospel to believe in Christ. Hence they now had an incentive to pray for missions and to believe theologically in the obligation to world

³³ Newton to Johnson, 28 November 1789, cited in James Bonwick, *Australia's First Preachers*, London 1898, p.148.

³⁴ 'The Prayer Call of 1784' is found in John Ryland Jr., *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages of Humility* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1784).

³⁵ *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3 vols (Philadelphia, 1845): vol. I, 35-47.

³⁶ Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992): 5.

³⁷ M. X Lesser, *Jonathan Edwards, a reference guide*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994, 24, cites Edwards as the 'principal' theological influence on Andrew Fuller (1754-1851), and *Freedom of the Will* as the 'most powerful' book to influence him apart from the Bible.

mission. Now they needed a plan. This was set out in Carey's *Enquiry*.

It was this group of Baptist ministers who in 1792 formed the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), the first of the great Protestant missionary societies and sent William Carey, the 'Father of modern missions,' to India. Carey had used the *Humble Attempt* in his *Enquiry* to discount the contention that certain prophecies had to be fulfilled before the heathen could be converted.³⁸ He also repeatedly cited David Brainerd's experience among the Indians as an example of the power of the gospel to convert the heathen before they were civilized.³⁹ The *Humble Attempt* also caught the imagination of the founders in 1795 of the London Missionary Society (LMS), who published yet another edition of it, and in 1796 it was old John Erskine himself who was the chief instrument in the formation of the Scottish Missionary Society (SMS)⁴⁰.

These British missionary societies were fully stretched financially and in their imaginations in reaching the 'higher' civilisations of India and China, and the more romantic of missionary challenges in the South Seas islands and in Africa, to worry much about Australia. Of the many celebrated fathers and founders of LMS, the one who most affected Australia was Thomas Haweis, an 'occasional nonconformist' and a Calvinistic Methodist in connection with the Countess of Huntingdon. Haweis was to publish a multi-volume history of the Christian Church which majored on the missionary expansion of the Church through the preaching of the Gospel. This history he dedicated to Joseph Hardcastle, LMS treasurer and the Wilberforce of the Dissenting world, and the other LMS directors. It was Haweis who persuaded LMS to send missionaries to the South Seas, and a significant number of them were to make Sydney first their base and then their home, establishing the dissenting division of the evangelical army in Australia.

Missionary work in the Pacific Islands began as an outcome of a great debate which occurred among the directors of LMS. David Bogue, a learned Congregationalist, wished to see LMS

³⁸ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1792, 1961 edition): 12.

³⁹ *Enquiry*, 36, 69-71.

⁴⁰ A. Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971): 234.

focus its energies on India, sending well educated missionaries there. He contended that, precisely because India was a great civilisation, it would succumb more readily to the Gospel to which civilisation was a helpful, if not essential, step - an interesting miscalculation and a dubious theology. Haweis, by contrast, was convinced that God was calling the society to send artisan missionaries to work in the South Seas. The founders of LMS tended to support either Calvinistic Methodism or Presbyterianism, the chief difference being a commitment on the part of the latter to an educated ministry. LMS resolved this dilemma by doing both, and the important consequence of this was that the best educated missionaries went to India, while those of more humble educational attainments went to the South Seas and often ended up in NSW.

On 14 May 1798, for example, eleven LMS missionaries arrived in Sydney, dislodged from the Society Islands (which includes Tahiti) by the threat of martyrdom.⁴¹ 'If the chaplains began an Evangelical tradition in New South Wales,' observes Ken Cable, 'it was the London Missionary Society men who gave it substance.'⁴²

Haweis exclaimed on his death bed (1820): 'Wonderful things the Lord is doing upon earth!' He was buried in Bath Abbey where his epitaph reads:

The Southern savage Isles he pitying view'd,
And urged the peaceful heralds on their way;
Through fruitless years the patient hope pursued,
Till glorious conquests crown'd the long delay.
As good old Simeon, ere his spirit fled,
Surveyed the promised Branch from Jesse's rod;
So HAWEIS beheld MESSIAH'S kingdom spread,
And then in peace departed hence to God.⁴³

6. The Methodist Evangelical Vision

The new 'methodistical' 'class' identified by Castlereagh's secretary in 1803, campaigned for liberty, not so much liberty of worship as the old Dissent had done, but liberty of

⁴¹ Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860*, OUP, Melbourne, 1978.

⁴² S. Judd and K. Cable, *Sydney Anglicans*, Anglican Information Office, Sydney, 1987, p.6

⁴³ Arthur Skevington Wood, *Thomas Haweis, 1743-1820*, SPCK, London, 1957, p.265f.

evangelistic aggression because evangelicalism was a world-conquering expression of Christianity. It sought liberty to proselytise people of other faiths and to have its converts protected. It would ally itself naturally with opponents of all monopolies, including commercial ones, such as the East India Company enjoyed, and the political monopoly which early governors exercised in the gaol states of the penal colonies. Aggressive trade and aggressive Christianity were natural allies, and some of the most effective evangelists in early Australian history were settlers, such as Henry Reed, who became very wealthy through consciously looking for conspicuous success in matters spiritual and temporal.

Indeed Henry Reed was a Methodist, and the coming of official Methodist work to NSW was an expression of the confidence arising from three great morale-boosting victories. The first was the victory which the Methodists themselves achieved in 1811 over the attempts of the Establishment to outlaw the itinerancy on which it was critically dependent.⁴⁴ Itinerancy enabled it to contact large numbers of people untouched by the parish system and to keep them entertained by providing a turnover of preachers. Evangelicalism was rather adept at devising methods of reaching 'the lower orders'. There was something populist about it. Indeed the evangelical party in the Church of Scotland was known as 'The Popular Party', in contrast to the more refined 'Moderates'. The second morale booster was the defeat in 1813 of the East India Company's exclusion of missionaries from India. This was a great triumph of the ecumenism which existed between the three divisions in the Lord's army. The campaign which resulted in parliament's being inundated with 900 petitions and half a million signatures was led by Wilberforce, Thornton, Thomas Thompson, a Methodist MP, Andrew Fuller, Secretary of BMS, and Joseph Hardcastle, Secretary of LMS. As a result of this victory, the expectation was that 'legal security' for Dissenting missionaries would be extended to all British dependencies, not just India.⁴⁵ The third was the defeat of Napoleon which gave a new fillip to evangelical ambitions, not because of an outpouring of patriotic pride, but because it meant the end of

⁴⁴ Lord Sidmouth's Bill to outlaw the Methodists provoked a swift response, producing in a week 700 petitions to parliament signed by over 100,000 people.

⁴⁵ Bernard Manning, *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, Cambridge: CUP, 1952, 431.

a war which many Methodists and Dissenters thought to be a national sin, destructive alike of life and trade.⁴⁶

The Wesleyan Methodists, the main corps in the third division in the evangelical army, came to Australia in significant numbers a decade and a half later than the Calvinistic Methodists.⁴⁷ But the denomination did come to Australia at the height of its power, with a brash new confidence in its right to be treated with toleration and to be accorded liberty to propagate its message. Wesley died in 1791, but the Wesleyan connexion grew dramatically during the Napoleonic Wars. The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) was formed between 1814 and 1818 to capitalise on this surge of missionary interest. At the 1816 Wesleyan Conference it was reported that 116 overseas missionaries had been sent the previous year. The last of these to arrive at his post, on 10 August 1815, was Samuel Leigh, the first Methodist minister to work in Australia. NSW was targeted by the newly created Wesleyan missionary bureaucracy because it was 'supposed there is much missionary work in that Colony'.

By contrast with their mission to the convicts, the Methodist missions to Pacific Islanders enjoyed remarkable success. Early Methodists, too, believed that NSW would be the base from which the islands of the sea would receive the Gospel. From Sydney would radiate the missionary advance of the Church into New Zealand, Tahiti, Tonga and Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia, New Hebrides and New Guinea, eventually into the countless millions of Asia. 'Let them give glory unto the Lord, and declare His praise in the islands' (Isaiah 42.12).

Sequel & Conclusion

The missionary movement appears to have matured during the second half of the nineteenth century with the development of independent Australian missionary societies and Australian or state branches of denominational missionary societies originally started in Britain. This was when evangelical Christianity was probably at its apogee in Australia, say from 1859 to 1914. Because it was strong it formed its own missions, and because it formed its own missions it was strong.

⁴⁶ J. E. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace*, Cambridge: CUP, 1982.

⁴⁷ J.D. Bollen, 'A Time of Small Things - The Methodist Mission in New South Wales', *Journal of Religious History*, 7.3, June 1973, pp.225-47.

But it was able to form its own missions with the force of inevitability because, from its inception, its history was intertwined with the history of missions. It was settled at a time of missionary excitement by those committed both to missions and to using Australia as a base for the evangelisation of the South Seas. Our churches for much of our history have been so orientated that they have applauded and supported overseas missions.

The large army of Australian men and the even larger army of Australian women who have enlisted for overseas service suggest that it has been part of the psyche of many Australian Christians that they have expected to find in missionary engagement the deepest level of satisfaction as they seek to respond to the love which constrains. It has been observed that Australian evangelicals make good missionaries. Maybe this is because in the gene pool, in addition to the national plainness of speech and openness of heart, there are strains of Puritan fire, Pietist idealism, and the Evangelical motivation to mission elevated to unstoppable commitment by the holy emulation which the three divisions in the Lord's army, working together and in their separate fields, inspired in each other.