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**Andrew Porter.** *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. xviii + 373 pp. $74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-2822-9; $31.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7190-2823-6.

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## God and Caesar

It seems so simple. As Jesus said in the Gospels, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25). But for the Christian missionaries who went forth to spread the gospel in "heathen lands," Caesar was always nearby, and it was not always clear who was due what.

In *Religion versus Empire*, Andrew Porter is concerned with this question from the outset: "The subject of this book is at once the entanglement of British missions with Britain's empire and the extent of their separate development" (p. 1). Porter provides a vivid illustration of this tight intertwining of empire and mission in an example from South Africa. As the first four London Missionary Society missionaries were leaving for Cape Town, they found themselves without a ship and having to ask for imperial assistance. They eventually sailed on the convict transport, *Hillsborough*, bound for Botany Bay, arriving at the Cape in March 1799. Porter reflects that their dependence on this free passage represents in a stark but simple way "the impossibility for missionaries of escaping the embrace of government, whatever illusions they might entertain as to the likelihood or desirability of independence." They had the "expectation that they could take advantage of a government offer or facilities (however apparently 'providential') without risk of compromise or obligation," and Porter observes that such naÃ¯ve notions proved to be "perennially recurring features of missionary thinking and much traveled pathways to 'political' involvement with government" (p. 76).

Porter also seeks to perform a much needed amalgamation of three "relatively distinct and enormous literatures, the first on Britain's imperial history, another on Britain's domestic religious and ecclesiastical past and that concerned with the local histories of distinct regions or colonial societies around the globe." These three literatures have evolved quite distinctly and yet the study of "Christian missionary expansion, whether as agents of British expansion overseas, as expressions of popular and provincial British religious commitment or as a critical influence in shaping local politics and identities," has the potential to both broaden our knowledge of each area, and also erect bridges between and among all three (p. 7).

This tour-de-force by the Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at King's College, London, is the most definitive account to date of British imperial expansion working, and not working, hand-in-hand with the creation and expansion of international British missionary networks. These networks are the central focus of Porter's narrative, a narrative that reaches back into the eighteenth century and forward into the twentieth, to present a complete picture of this imperial dance.

Porter begins with a broad overview of missionary practices and precedents from 1701 to 1789. The majority of recent British missionary scholarship focuses on the period after the publication of William Carey's famous essay, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, in 1792, and his departure on mission to India in 1793. Carey's es-

say marked the beginning of the modern Protestant missionary activity; that is, missions primarily to Africa, India, and Asia, particularly China. Porter returns us to an earlier period to review British missionary activity among the Indians and Africans in the American colonies to demonstrate that "by the time Carey set sail, developments in Britain's Atlantic and Caribbean colonies had long and amply illustrated the chief missionary problems and possibilities which were constantly to recur and shape the connections of missions and empire" (p. 16).

Porter's second chapter looks at the reorganization of missionary enterprise from 1790 to 1812, a period when British interests begin to expand around the globe and a re-evaluation was made of how to interact with the native peoples they met and what responsibilities they had toward them. For many Christians, but not all, it was clear that Christianity had to be carried to these foreign lands, and it is during this period that many of the great missionary societies were formed: Carey's Baptist Missionary Society (1792); the London Missionary Society (1795); the Edinburgh (Scottish) and Glasgow Missionary Society (1796); and the forerunner of the Church Missionary Society (1799). In this period, the links between imperial expansion and missionary expansion were quite tenuous. Both groups were feeling their way literally through new territory. Porter's observes that "in this period it is difficult not to be struck by the comparatively insignificant place occupied by empire in the minds of many evangelicals. To a degree that at times could leave onlookers quite bemused and evangelicals themselves open to ridicule, their thinking was dominated by the concept of an all-embracing, superintending Providence" (pp. 58-59). The youthful exuberance and sense of enthusiasm in spreading the Gospel is evident in all the missionary literature of the time. There are very few doubts about the rightness of the mission, and little thought given to empire, unless it be the Kingdom of God.

In chapter 3, Porter reviews the development of the initial terms of engagement between British mission and empire from 1800-30. By the beginning of the 1800s missionaries were discussing the question of whether to "follow the flag" or to strike out on their own. "Colonialism was by no means necessarily conductive to missionary activity" (p. 64), but these newly formed organizations, under funded, understaffed and with very limited knowledge of the world, frequently had little choice but to follow the flag. Hopping a transport ship, as the South African example above illustrates, was often the only option available. "There was to be no escape for the missions," Porter notes, "from encounter and engagement with, even dependence on, governments, whether imperial or colonial. At first, however, neither side sensed where events were leading and neither state nor mission societies wanted dealings with each other" (p. 65).

In chapter 4, Porter connects the three fields of historical study–imperial, British domestic, and overseas local–with missionary activity from 1800 to 1835. One example he cites is that of Dr. John Philip and his battle with both the local British imperial officials at the Cape and the local white settlers over black labor and black rights. In this instance, Philip appealed back to Britain, where the increasingly powerful London Missionary Society and the Clapham Sect could influence domestic opinion and support Philip's pleas to Parliament. Most of the missionary societies gained strength and membership during this period and this growth related to the "continuing debate about the meaning of 'civilization' and especially the possibility of civilizing, or improving the conditions of, non-European peoples" (p. 92). The debate soon encompassed the "three C's"–Christianity, civilization, and commerce–and the questions as to which of the three "either could, or should, be introduced first, in what forms and with what degree of overlap" (p. 93).

By 1850, there were in place global networks of British Protestant mission activity. In chapter 5, Porter describes how these networks developed between 1814 and 1850, "fostered by the active pursuit of common goals and the intermarriage of members of missionary families" (p. 117). These global networks were part of a general expansion and, as Porter calls it, a "new wave" of missionary activity that occurred in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. This "new wave" was due, as Porter shows in chapter 6, to the fact that the missionary societies "were riding high on the back of the humanitarian tide" during that period (p. 137). By mid-century, however, the enthusiasm and excitement of the earlier days were waning as it became more and more evident that the primary goal of bringing indigenous individuals to Christ was not succeeding as rapidly as planned or expected. In chapter 7, Porter discusses how the search for converts and success or failure "always reflected local social and political conditions" (p. 164). And even in those places where conversion had been somewhat successful, little consideration had been given to the configuration of the indigenous churches, the future roles of the converts in those churches, or indeed, the future of the missions themselves.

In chapter 8, Porter focuses on the development of the "faith" missions in the second half of the nineteenth

century as one response to the decline in support and enthusiasm felt at mid-century. These evolved from a desire to return to a simpler approach to mission work, and reforms included the replacement of the term "missionary society" with "mission," the dismantlement of the societies' home organizations, and a straightforward approach to fundraising that took in donations and sent them directly out into the field. Theologically there was a shift as well. Missionary societies in the first half of the century generally held a post-millennial ideal that expected missionary activity to aid in the ushering in of Christ's Second Coming, and was rooted in the Enlightenment ideas of progress. This post-millennial ideal was replaced in some quarters in the second half of the century by a pre-millennial ideal that viewed the world more pessimistically and expected "Christ's imminent return to judgment, *after* which the millennium would dawn. For the missionary the pre-millennialist imperative was to push ahead with evangelism on the widest possible front before the Second Coming occurred" (p. 194). A common characteristic of these faith missions was "a determination to operate in isolated and unfamiliar territory, as far as possible beyond any European influence or colonial rule and at a distance from other missionary bodies" (p. 224). China, the interior of Africa, and the Muslim world all became prime targets of faith mission activity. Thus while it has been the fashion for historians to perceive closer links between the missionary effort and imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century, Porter shows that "many missions devised wholly different plans for recovery and advance" (p. 224).

Despite the wide appeal of the faith missions, from 1860 to 1895 "for most evangelicals … the future lay not in wholesale rejection of the recent past and the mounting of new kinds of mission but in the revival and adaptation of existing and more familiar traditions" (p. 225). In chapter 9, Porter describes the strategies and activities of the two wings of evangelical Anglicanism represented by the Universities' Mission to Central Africa and the Church Missionary Society. Chapter 10 is a wide-ranging discussion of missionary activity during the high age of imperialism that demonstrates how little British imperial motives in this period corresponded with the theory and practice of mission. As the century drew to a close then, "an important part of the missionary movement's attempts to sustain its appeal and generate renewed support thus involved its re-appropriation of the secular humanitarian goals so significant to its progress in the first half of the nineteenth century" (p. 315).

These secular humanitarian goals, Porter argues in chapter 11, gave rise to a significant degree of "anti-imperialism" among Protestant missions in the two decades before the Great War. Missionaries held to a continued belief in the fundamental unity of humanity. This belief put them at odds with the racist and Social Darwinian theorizing evolving as the imperialist scramble reached its zenith. In his final chapter, Porter reflects on the broad conclusions that might be drawn from his study, and what directions future research might take. In the end, and as the reference to giving unto Caesar at the beginning of this review suggests, "missionaries might not advocate empire, but were often associated with institutions or beliefs identified by local peoples with imperialism" (p. 316). But, as Porter demonstrates in this sweeping analysis of the connections and disjunctions between religion and empire, "although missions could not avoid empire, they were determined to put it in its place" (p. 330).

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