

# *Origins of Anglo-Catholic Missions: Fr Richard Benson and the Initial Missions of the Society of St John the Evangelist, 1869–1882*

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*This paper investigates the origins of Anglican Anglo-Catholic missions, through the missionary theology and practice of the founder of the Society of St John the Evangelist, Fr Richard Benson, and an exploration of its initial missionary endeavours: the Twelve-Day Mission to London in 1869, and two missions in India from 1874. The Indian missions comprised an institutional mission at Bombay and Pune, and a unique ascetic enculturated mission at Indore by Fr Samuel Wilberforce O'Neill SSJE. It is argued that Benson was a major figure in the inauguration of Anglo-Catholic missions; that his ritualist moderation was instrumental in the initial public success of Anglo-Catholic domestic mission; and that in overseas missions he had a clear theological preference for disconnecting evangelism from Europeanising. Benson's approach, more radical than was normal in the second half of the nineteenth century, was a consequence of envisaging mission's being undertaken by a religious order, an entirely new phenomenon for Anglican missions.*

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## *The Oxford Movement and mission*

The original Tractarian leaders were not much interested in overseas mission. As an Evangelical the young John Henry Newman did exhibit some interest in the area, serving as secretary to Oxford's branch of the Church Mission Society for a year from 1829 to 1830.<sup>1</sup> But as a leader of the burgeoning Oxford Movement from 1833 he was

SPG = Society for the Propagation of the Gospel; SSJE = Society of St John the Evangelist; UMCA = Universities' Mission to Central Africa

<sup>1</sup> *The letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Ian Ker and Thomas Gornall, ii, Oxford 1979, p. xix.

preoccupied with recreating and subverting the Church of England, to give it a radical makeover as a Catholic Church by expunging or explaining away its Protestant dimensions and history. Newman was until August 1844 a subscribing member of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the oldest Anglican missionary society, and his correspondence does reveal a concern for colonial bishops, but not a major one; it is in that context that Ernest Hawkins wrote with regret accepting Newman's resignation.<sup>2</sup> John Keble, though the heir to a family High Church concern for the Episcopal Church in Scotland, was more concerned to be a spiritual guide to the perplexed of the movement than to advocate new missionary initiatives. Edward Pusey came closest through an awareness of the need for Christian evangelism to the urbanised and unchurched masses of industrial Britain. In 1833 Pusey published a pamphlet in defence of cathedrals, about which a contemporary debate was raging in relation to the proposals for reforming the Church of England which led, in 1835, to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act. However, Pusey's advocacy of well-endowed cathedrals as centres of theological learning lacked the contemporary focus on general utility.<sup>3</sup> While he demonstrated in the pamphlet a concern for the unchurched urban poor, he was vague on solutions.<sup>4</sup> Such a solution did take shape for him when, in 1842, the foundation stone of a church that he financed was laid in one of the poor areas of Leeds. Pusey planned for it to encapsulate his ideas of mission to Britain's urban poor. It would have a staff of priests living communally, supporting each other in active pastoral work, whose centre was the eucharist, the mystery and ritual of which would act to attract the poor to the beauty and wonder of Christ in their squalid world.<sup>5</sup>

This domestic mission, conceived more as recapturing the lapsed rather than evangelising the unChristian, was quickly developed by some Tractarian clergy in the second half of the nineteenth century. It gave rise to the so-called 'slum priests', ritualist priests living as celibate clergy among the 'undeserving poor', using the parish church as the liturgical centre of a dynamic and colourful religion centred around the presence of God in the eucharist and a sacerdotal, sacramental ministry. Urban mission work was also engaged in by Anglican nuns, working alongside the priests.<sup>6</sup> Ritualist parishes had a quite explicit theory of mission, similar to that of

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Hawkins to J. H. Newman, 12 Aug. 1844, in *The letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Francis J. McGrath, x, Oxford 2006, 311.

<sup>3</sup> R. Jupp, "Nurseries of a learned clergy": Pusey and the defence of cathedrals', in Perry Butler (ed.), *Pusey rediscovered*, London 1983, 139-61, 158-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

<sup>5</sup> Rowan Strong, *Alexander Forbes of Brechin: the first Tractarian bishop*, Oxford 1995, 43-4.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Mumm, *Stolen daughters, virgin mothers: Anglican sisterhoods in Victorian Britain*, London 1999, ch. iv.

Pusey. They believed that dramatic and ritualistic services, centred around the eucharist, drew the labouring poor and the working classes to church, because it offered them an appealing contrast to the drabness of their everyday lives. Ritual, it was maintained, had a power to teach Christianity to the illiterate and uninstructed. But, while some ritualist churches did attract a genuine working-class adherence, this was more limited than supposed. One historian of Victorian ritualism believes that such success as it did achieve had more to do with the self-sacrifice and devotion of the Anglo-Catholic priests, coupled with an outreach that was more accepting of working-class culture than were their Evangelical and Nonconformist competitors.<sup>7</sup>

*The historiography of Anglo-Catholic missions*

While there has been some analysis of ritualist domestic urban mission,<sup>8</sup> compared with the vast scholarly investigation into Evangelical missions those of the Anglo-Catholic Anglicans have been accorded little attention by scholars. The volume on missions and empire published as a supplement to the influential series *The Oxford history of the British Empire* (1998–9) pays some attention to the SPG, but almost none to the more autonomous Anglo-Catholic missions. And indeed, what attention has been paid to Anglo-Catholic missions has been obscured by a terminological confusion. Even knowledgeable scholars of mission use the term ‘High Church’ in a reductionist binary presentation of Anglican mission as either ‘High Church’ or Evangelical. In fact, Anglo-Catholics, with their advanced ritualism, exaltation of religious life and celibacy, their Romanist wing and thorough dislike of the English Reformation were distinct from the older High Church tradition in the Church of England. This latter group, which did embrace the English Reformation and a more moderate ritualism, dated from the seventeenth century. It was this grouping that predominated in the SPG until the very late nineteenth century, though there was a minority of Tractarian and Anglo-Catholic sympathisers among SPG members, numbers that burgeoned as more and more of the younger clergy adhered to the Oxford Movement. Consequently, SPG missions from the beginning of the eighteenth century to nearly the end of the

<sup>7</sup> John Sheldon Reed, *Glorious battle: the cultural politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism*, Nashville, TN 1996, 160, 162, 168, 170–2.

<sup>8</sup> Anglican slum ritualism has been studied, and sometimes celebrated, in works such as L. E. Ellsworth, *Charles Lowder and the Ritualist Movement*, London 1982; Bernard Palmer, *Reverend rebels: five Victorian clerics and their fight against authority*, London 1983; Geoffrey Rowell, *The vision glorious: themes and personalities of the Catholic revival in Anglicanism*, Oxford 1983, ch. vi; and Nigel Yates, *Anglican ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1839–1910*. Oxford 1999.

nineteenth were High Church but not Anglo-Catholic. So Jeffrey Cox subsumes Anglo-Catholic missions under the vague term 'High Church' Anglican,<sup>9</sup> while Robert Frykenberg's magisterial study of Christianity in India, critical of the imperialism of Anglican missions generally, only notes in a brief aside the comparative paucity of all Anglican missions in India, including Anglo-Catholic ones.<sup>10</sup>

A distinction also needs to be made between 'Tractarian' and 'Anglo-Catholic'. Although both groups developed directly out of the Oxford Movement, the term 'Anglo-Catholic' is used here to refer specifically to those Anglicans who realised their Oxford Movement catholic theology with some explicit degree of liturgical ritualism. 'Tractarians' refers to the earlier generation of Oxford Movement followers, who, like the leaders of the movement, were generally restrained in ritualism.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, some attention has been paid by Andrew Porter and Steven Maughan to distinctive Anglo-Catholic missions. Particularly with regard to his work on the Universities Mission to Central Africa but noting also the similarly Anglo-Catholic Oxford Mission to Calcutta and the Cambridge Mission to Delhi, Porter points to the prevalence of ideas like 'sympathy' and 'consideration' for indigenous cultures in these missions.<sup>12</sup> Porter finds in them not only sympathy for local cultures, but also suspicion toward the corrupting influences of aspects of western civilization.<sup>13</sup> Maughan points to imperialist fervour among various Anglo-Catholic influences within the SPG in the Edwardian period.<sup>14</sup> Enthusiasm for an imperial mission by the Church of England was also shared by the leader of English Anglo-Catholics, Charles Gore, bishop of Birmingham.<sup>15</sup>

This article looks at possibly the first Anglo-Catholic theorist of mission through the development of two of the earliest Anglo-Catholic missions, one in England in 1869, and the other in India in the 1870s. Both these

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Cox, *The British missionary enterprise*, London 2008, 194, 198, 206. Cox refers to Anglican sisterhoods and brotherhoods engaged in missionary work as 'High Church' when in fact they were explicitly Anglo-Catholic; and to the Universities' Mission to Central Africa as 'moderately High Church', when it was thoroughly High Church.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India from beginnings to the present*, Oxford 2008, 256–7.

<sup>11</sup> I have previously noted this ritualist distinction between older and younger generations of adherents to Oxford Movement Anglicanism: Strong, *Alexander Forbes of Brechin*, 83–7. The distinction has a basis in contemporary nomenclature and also in secondary works: Reed, *Glorious battle*, 281 n. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Porter, *Religion versus empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700–1914*, Manchester 2004, 58.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 229, 231–2.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Maughan, 'Imperial Christianity? Bishop Montgomery and the foreign missions of the Church of England, 1895–1915', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The imperial horizons of British Protestant missions, 1880–1914*, Grand Rapids, MI 2003, 32–57 at pp. 36–8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 41 n. 36.

missions were inspired by the same man, Father Richard Benson of the Society of St John the Evangelist. Thus this is not primarily a study of mission in Britain or in India, but rather of the missionary mind-set of an important Anglo-Catholic instigator of missions, as exemplified in the two missions. In so doing I am conscious that I could be accused of perpetuating an historiographical approach from above that views Christianity in India as completely manufactured in Britain and exported to a passively accepting Indian population, with an over-accentuation on missionary instrumentality. This focus is perhaps a problem of sources, as letters to Benson about the development and reception of SSJE's inaugural mission by Fr O'Neill SSJE in Indore have not survived, and there are few other contemporary sources interested in this short-lived, small mission. But focus on a British instigator of mission is also something that can be justified. It is true that Indian Christianity under the Raj was a hybrid created out of the British Christianity from which the missionaries came and the local culture and religion that Indians (converts and non-converts) received, adapted or contested. A study of one component of that hybridity is certainly not a complete analysis of the SSJE Indian mission (that must await more lengthy investigation than is possible here); but it is an important and fundamental dimension of it. Notwithstanding the very significant historiographical trend begun by Robert Frykenberg – where Christianity in India is written 'from below' so that it is Indian Christianity – this paper argues that there is still a place for investigating the role and the thought of the missionaries themselves as they understood it. Admittedly, this is a partial treatment of missions, but it is one that addresses the criticism of Norman Etherington with respect to African church history, where he finds that the prevailing historical construction of illegitimate western missionaries and legitimate non-western religion has effected a marginalisation of missionaries.<sup>16</sup> This paper is an attempt to do what Jeffrey Cox did on a much larger scale for colonial Punjab, and reconstruct the outlook and practice of the missionaries of a small innovative Anglo-Catholic mission.<sup>17</sup>

The society that Benson founded in 1866 as a community of mission priests was the first religious order for men to survive permanently in the Church of England. As the society was explicitly devoted to mission this paper explores the configuration that Benson gave to the early Anglo-Catholic missions undertaken by his society. It will argue, first, that Benson was a major figure in the inauguration of Anglo-Catholic missions, both in England and overseas; second, that Benson was instrumental in the initial public success of Anglo-Catholic domestic mission because he was prepared to moderate the ritualist extremes of some of his Anglo-Catholic confreres; third, that in the Indian mission Benson had a clear

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial fault lines: Christianity and colonial power in India, 1818–1940*, Stanford 2002, 13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

theological preference for disconnecting evangelism from Europeanising. Consequently, although most Anglo-Catholic missions, including those of his own society, quickly reverted to the usual large missionary infrastructure and civilising agenda common to most Protestant missions, this initial Anglo-Catholic theorist of missions clearly preferred a more radical approach as a consequence of envisaging mission being undertaken by a religious order, an entirely new phenomenon for Anglican missions.

*The 1869 Twelve-Day mission to London*

The evangelistic focus of Anglo-Catholicism transcended the parish in the first ever Anglican mission to London in 1869. In September that year Benson invited a group of twelve clergy to Oxford for two conferences to discuss mission in the Church of England.<sup>18</sup> The priests were all explicitly Anglo-Catholic, most of them members of the *avant-garde* Society of the Holy Cross which had been founded by the slum priest Charles Lowder, in 1855, as a community for urban mission, modelled on the seventeenth-century 'Congregation of the Mission' of St Vincent de Paul, or the Lazarists as they were popularly known.<sup>19</sup> City clergy were canvassed for support, as were the bishops of London, Winchester and Rochester. Eventually, 120 parishes participated in the mission which ran from 14 to 25 November 1869. Participating clergy met for a day of preparation beforehand, again halfway through the mission, and on the final day when 150 parish clergy were present at Sion College in London.<sup>20</sup>

While this was an Anglo-Catholic initiative, flexibility was demonstrated by the organisers in allowing clergy to determine the actual shape of the mission in their own parishes. At St Laurence Jewry, where Fr Benson was the missionary, the evening mission service was a metrical litany based on the penitential Psalm li, followed by his sermon. In another parish the prayerbook was used; at the ritually advanced St Michael's, Shoreditch, the stations of the cross were prayed; and at St Augustine's, Haggerston, the mission priest led an outdoor procession with banner and cross, singing the litany of the Holy Name.<sup>21</sup>

Other mission techniques involved a devotional booklet for optional use, produced by SSJE as the *Book of the mission*; hymns set to secular tunes; and extempore prayer before afternoon mission services. But other facets clearly pointed to the Anglo-Catholic origins of the mission. Eucharistic celebrations predominated, but only in the morning to allow for fasting communion; the renewal of baptismal vows was used as a technique of

<sup>18</sup> Dieter Voll, *Catholic evangelism*, London 1963, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Ellsworth, *Charles Lowder and the ritualist movement*, 19–22.

<sup>20</sup> *The Guardian*, 17 Nov. 1869.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 17 Nov., 1 Dec. 1869.

re-dedication; and, more contentiously, the optional use of sacramental confession was included in the *Book of the mission*. This led to the inevitable letter of objection in *The Times* from Charles Westerton, a prominent Protestant opponent of ritualism.<sup>22</sup> On the same issue, the guardians of the Marylebone workhouse also wrote to *The Times* to disavow earlier reports of their association with it.<sup>23</sup>

There are indications that there was a deliberate policy of making this mission as appealing to as many parishes as possible by restraining the excesses of ritualism that some Anglo-Catholic priests delighted in. George Body's invitation to confession in his parish during the mission, as reported in the *Times*, was an exemplar of measured care:

[Mr Body] is waiting all day in the vestry to see, converse and pray with all penitents who may desire advice as to the salvation of their souls. He says plainly that he has no power in himself of absolving from sin, pointing to the image of Our Blessed Saviour over the altar, he says it is to Him, and Him only, that the sinner must look for forgiveness of sins and for peace. He afterwards said, 'If you come to me I don't ask you, if against your conscience, to confess your sins to me. I will receive and talk with you in your own way. I will not bind you to any particular form. I will advise with you, read to you, pray with you, I desire not to interfere with the prejudices of any one. My only wish is to assist you on the road to peace with God through Jesus Christ.'<sup>24</sup>

The official face of the mission and the chair of its committee was a reassuringly establishment figure, Robert Gregory, canon, and later dean, of St Paul's Cathedral. Gregory wrote to *The Guardian* disavowing the authority of the *Book of the mission* from which the optional use confession was drawn. The committee of the mission had not, Gregory claimed, authorised any mission book, on the principle that the local clergy dictated what form of mission service was to be used in their own parish.<sup>25</sup> Discretion around a ritualist agenda was arguably a deliberate policy on the part of Benson. It was in keeping with his actions in founding the SSJE, where he exercised that same carefulness with regard to the ritualist excesses of Anglo-Catholicism. In establishing the SSJE Benson had sought the prior approval of his High Church non-ritualist diocesan bishop, Samuel Wilberforce of Oxford; and the members of the society wore, as habits, ordinary plain black cassocks.<sup>26</sup> This was in contrast to the romantic emulation of Roman Catholic practice by other would-be monastic founders, such as Joseph Lyne.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, 14 Nov. 1869.

<sup>23</sup> *The Guardian*, 1 Dec. 1869.

<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, 19 Nov. 1869.

<sup>25</sup> *The Guardian*, 1 Dec. 1869.

<sup>26</sup> M. V. Woodgate, *Father Benson: founder of the Cowley Fathers*, London 1953, 63, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Anson, *The call of the cloister*, 2nd edn, London 1964, 51–69.

According to the public reports the London mission was a success, indicating that such moderation paid off. Not only were 120 parishes involved, many more than the number of definite Anglo-Catholic parishes in the city at that time, but full churches were commonly reported in the newspapers, especially for the evening mission services. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics claimed to be the inspiration for the mission, a measure of its favourable reception and outcomes. The *English Independent*, as reported in *The Guardian*, claimed that sermons were the main feature of the mission, fashioned upon Wesleyan revival addresses. On the other hand, there was a report in the *Tablet* that sermons, exhortations to confession and the renewal of baptismal vows pointed to the essentially Roman Catholic origin of the mission's methods.<sup>28</sup>

### *Benson and the 1869 mission to London*

Scholars of the mission have also pointed to various sources of inspiration for the London mission. Dieter Voll claimed an Evangelical background, along with Robert Jeffrey who suggested that there was Methodist revival methodology deriving from the former Methodist lay preacher and later Anglican priest, Robert Aitken, and also from Richard Twigg, Tractarian vicar of St James's, Wednesbury.<sup>29</sup> But John Kent has shown that Aitken was not involved in the 1869 mission.<sup>30</sup> Twigg certainly was, but there is no evidence of his involvement in the early planning conference held at the SSJE house in Cowley, Oxford. The biographer of the Anglo-Catholic priest, George Wilkinson, claimed his subject as the source of Evangelical roots for the 1869 mission, and Wilkinson's own parish mission at Bishop Auckland in 1865 as 'the earliest of the kind in the Church of England'.<sup>31</sup> But both Lowder and Benson had conducted an earlier mission in the parish of Bedminster in Bristol in 1862, which Benson described in a manuscript book as 'the first of our modern missions'.<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey and Kent point to the missions of the Lazarists in eighteenth-century France as the source of the 1869 mission's methods, through the influence of Charles Lowder.<sup>33</sup> This seems more likely, as Lowder was certainly involved in

<sup>28</sup> *The Guardian*, 1 Dec. 1869.

<sup>29</sup> Voll, *Catholic evangelism*, 49; R. M. C. Jeffrey, 'When all are Christians none are: Church and mission in the teaching of Father Benson', in Martin L. Smith, (ed.), *Benson of Cowley*, London 1980, 119–36.

<sup>30</sup> John Kent, *Holding the fort: studies in Victorian revivalism*, London 1978, 246.

<sup>31</sup> A. J. Mason, *Memoir of George Howard Wilkinson*, London 1910, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Kent, *Holding the fort*, 244. A letter, dated 6 August 1986, to the author of this article from Fr Alan Grainge, the SSJE archivist at St Edward's House, London, states that the manuscript book that Kent cites is no longer to be found.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey, 'When all are Christians', 130; Kent, *Holding the fort*, 236.

planning the mission. But while Lowder was the Anglican transmitter of these French Roman Catholic missionary methods, it was Benson who was probably the catalyst for their direct application. His place in that mission was more prominent than Lowder's, both as initiator of its planning conference, and in two of the subsequent parish missions; he also gave the final address at the thanksgiving service that concluded the mission.<sup>34</sup>

Kent claims that the renewal of baptismal vows, used by the most ritualist parishes as the culmination of the mission, was 'the most convenient' aspect of the Roman Catholic missions of the Vincentians for these Anglicans to emulate.<sup>35</sup> But if Benson was indeed the mission's major guiding hand then the choice of baptismal vows may have been more deliberate than merely a convenient adaptation of Roman Catholic practice. There are strong indications in Benson's life and writings that the sacrament of baptism was fundamental to his theology of mission.

Benson called baptism 'the major sacrament', and the source of a supernatural, objective reality of regeneration.<sup>36</sup> He maintained that the world and the Church were essentially in spiritual conflict because the latter was dedicated to God while the former was not. The Church, as a divinely founded society, was sustained by the indwelling Holy Spirit, whose presence was authenticated by a life of holiness as a consequence of being united to the Spirit through baptism.<sup>37</sup> Mission, therefore, was a participation in the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, whereby the Spirit made the baptised holy, in the likeness of Christ, and consequently attractive to non-Christians.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the practice of renewing baptismal vows came from Roman Catholic sources via Lowder. But its inclusion in the mission, when the planners must have known that it could possibly generate opposition, and was potentially at odds with their deliberate strategy of judicious moderation in ritualism, seems more than a matter of convenience. It points to Benson's profound and firm theological commitment to the sacrament of baptism as the divine basis of Christian life and mission.

The 1869 mission to London exemplifies a number of features of Anglo-Catholic mission, even if not all of them would necessarily recur in later missions, including those of the SSJE itself. Priestly leadership was common to many missions: it was expected that the ordained would be leaders.

<sup>34</sup> *The Guardian*, 1 Dec. 1869.

<sup>35</sup> Kent, *Holding the fort*, 263-4.

<sup>36</sup> Geoffrey Curti, 'The mystical theology of Father Benson', *Church Quarterly Review* cl (1950), 213-29 at p. 213; R. M. Benson, *Spiritual readings for every day: Christmas*, London n.d., 49.

<sup>37</sup> R. M. Benson, *The final Passover*, I: *The upper chamber*, London 1884, 232-3; *Further letters of Richard Meux Benson*, ed. W. H. Longridge, London 1920, 43-4; *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, ed. G. Congreve and W. H. Longridge, London 1916, 156-7.

<sup>38</sup> R. M. Benson, *The final Passover*, IV: *The life beyond the grave*, London 1898, 100, 504.

However, the emphasis on the sacerdotal authority of the priest, as indicated in the publicity surrounding the use of confession, was certainly more explicit than even the High Church SPG was comfortable with at the time. The similarity to Roman Catholic missions, pointed out gleefully by *The Tablet*, was a consequence of the evangelistic influences from that Church playing upon both Benson and Lowder. But the use of cautious ritualism, and the involvement of more moderate figures in the mission, undoubtedly helped to defuse the contentiousness of much of this dimension of the mission's public profile. The flexibility demonstrated by such tactics was probably what encouraged the active participation of non-Evangelical, non-ritualistic, parishes. It was a strategy of moderation that was definitely at odds with the views of some of the more contentious ritualists of the period,<sup>39</sup> and derived most probably from Richard Benson himself. But it would not always be the hallmark of Anglo-Catholicism. Under Benson, emerging Anglo-Catholic mission would focus on the development of holiness: an evident sanctification originating in baptism to which the unconverted would be attracted, and upon which basis the lapsed would be revived.

### *Benson and the origin of SSJE missions to India*

Anglo-Catholic missions began in Britain on a transparochial scale with the 1869 mission to London, following a small number of parochially-based initiatives earlier in the decade. A few years later, the energies of Benson and his small religious community prompted a mission to India. This came just a few years after the more well-known non-Evangelical Anglican initiative of the Universities Mission to Central Africa led by Bishop Mackenzie in 1857. But it preceded the more obviously Anglo-Catholic Cambridge University Missionary Brotherhood in Delhi founded in 1877, and the Oxford Mission to Calcutta in 1881. Within the SSJE mission to India was a unique undertaking centred on the work of one of the founding members of the society, Samuel Wilberforce O'Neill. Ordained in 1864 while he was a mathematics teacher at Eton, O'Neill served curacies under two of the leading ritualist priests of his day – T. T. Carter at Clewer and William Butler at Wantage – both of whom founded religious orders for women in their parishes.<sup>40</sup> O'Neill was one of the priests who gave an address to participating clergy before the Twelve-Day Mission to London, during which he led the mission at the ritualist parish of St Alban's, Holborn.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Reed, *Glorious battle*, 26–8, 242.

<sup>40</sup> H. E. W. Slade, *A work begun: the story of the Cowley Fathers in India, 1874–1967*, London 1970, 72.

<sup>41</sup> *The Guardian* 17 Nov, 1 Dec. 1869.

On 15 January 1874 O'Neill sailed from Southampton to begin the SSJE mission in India, along with his *confrère* R. L. Page.<sup>42</sup> They would be the first Anglo-Catholic missionaries to the sub-continent, although, of course, SPG missionaries from the older High Church tradition still prevailing in that society had been in India since the early nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> A Tractarian, A. W. Street, was appointed to the teaching staff of Bishop's College in Calcutta in 1839, but he was only indirectly involved in evangelism of the local population, and there is no evidence of any ritualist Anglo-Catholicism in the young man.<sup>44</sup> The letters that O'Neill received from Benson, as his superior and confidante, form the principal source for this exploration of an unusual Anglican missionary venture. The mission undoubtedly derived from Benson's earlier desire to go as a missionary priest to India. In 1859 he wrote to the warden of St Augustine's College, a training college for Anglican missionaries at Canterbury, laying out parameters for an Indian mission that were largely followed by O'Neill. In this letter Benson emphasised a communal life of prayer and poverty, and for missionary priests to be as indigenous as possible in their lifestyle, as a means of attracting converts. 'I want some men to join me in a devotional college . . . living on our own funds, as much in poverty as possible, and as much orientally in every habit and mode of life as possible.' There was an emphasis on personal mission rather than institutional support: 'I feel very strongly that missionary work ought to begin with me, and not with money . . . It pauperizes and paralyses the mission status when the men are agents of a monied Society, and not simply dependent on Him to the extension of whose Kingdom they are devoted.' As an evangelising strategy, Benson accepted that this sort of mission would be insignificant amidst the vast population of an Indian city, but was confident that the prayerful, ascetic life would become known locally and would attract potential converts. '[T]he habitual prayer would make it acceptable before God, and He will draw to us those whom He wishes to train for Himself.'<sup>45</sup>

Arriving in India O'Neill went to see Bishop Milman at Calcutta, who sent him to revive a moribund SPG mission station at Bankipur near Patna; but O'Neill had to leave this mission soon afterwards because the Indian government had purchased the buildings as a medical school. On learning of this development, Benson expressed his satisfaction that O'Neill was separated from such a substantial mission plant: 'Large premises are a

<sup>42</sup> Cowley S. John, Feb. 1874, 22.

<sup>43</sup> The SSJE mission would be followed a few years later by the Community of St Mary the Virgin, which sent sisters to work in the SSJE Pune mission in 1877 at the invitation of Bishop Mylne of Bombay: Anson, *Call of the cloister*, 255.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Neill, *A history of Christianity in India, 1707-1858*, Cambridge 1985, 229, 273, 395-6. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for this JOURNAL for drawing my attention to A. W. Street.

<sup>45</sup> R. M. Benson to Samuel Wilberforce O'Neill, 8 Aug 1859, *Letters of Benson*, 227-9.

serious hindrance to poverty... I would much rather our mission should do its work, principally witness, prayer, preparation, with as little of external surroundings as possible.<sup>46</sup> Benson's suspicion of substantial mission infrastructure also surfaces in another letter to O'Neill about mission schools. He opposed beginning a school because it would be contrary to the 'apostolic character' of O'Neill's mission and would identify the SSJE missionary with European 'social superiority'.

We want them [converts] to accept our religion and the Christian faith on other grounds. Social superiority has a great tendency to outshine spiritual superiority. It is a very difficult thing for any people to receive the message of heaven from their earthly social superiors. This difficulty one finds in England; it is the difficulty of modern mission work.<sup>47</sup>

Opposition to conversion achieved through colonial and social elites questions Jeffrey Cox's generalisation that 'virtually all' Anglican missionaries believed that this top down approach was unquestionably the right one.<sup>48</sup> It was also repudiated in practice by other near contemporary Anglican missionaries, including the Anglo-Catholic Godfrey Callaway in Africa and John Coleridge Patteson in Melanesia.<sup>49</sup> Benson was definite in his opposition to the sort of 'civilizing' mission which sought to introduce the Christian gospel to people indirectly via the supposedly beneficial advantages of British education and civilisation:

The attempt to civilize before Christianizing... in other words, which one sometimes hears, the attempt to make a man a good *man* before making him a good *Christian*... is the pretence of the Antichrist to raise men from the bondage of the debt of sin, without their having infused into them the justifying grace of Christ. (original emphasis)<sup>50</sup>

Benson wanted converts neither drawn by the possible material or cultural advantages offered by Christian missions, nor because Christianity was understood to be the religion of the social or colonial elite. A religion that was attractive because it was the religion of the colonising power was not the Christian faith as Benson understood it.

Benson's concern for an indigenous, or 'orientalised' mission, was further motivated by his suspicion towards a Christianised society such as had predominated in European Christendom. He had no desire to see a Christian India where Christianity, as the religion of the rulers, would be a debased religious force. Benson viewed Christianity as essentially a

<sup>46</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 23 July 1874, *Further letters*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 10 Feb 1876, *ibid.* 96. <sup>48</sup> Cox, *Imperial fault lines*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> E. D. Sedding, *Godfrey Callaway: missionary in Kaffraria, 1892-1942, his life and writings*, London 1945; David Hilliard, *God's gentlemen: a history of the Melanesian mission*, St Lucia, QLD 1978.

<sup>50</sup> Benson, *Spiritual readings*, 206-7.

demanding, uncompromising, minority religion, but one that was not to be confined within western culture:

Whether India will ever be a Christian country may be very doubtful. I cannot say I wish to see it. The experience of Christianizing countries leads one to believe that the country is Christianized at the expense of souls, and when all are Christians none are. We must surely look for Christianity to grow up in India in some very different form from that of the West. Let us hope that it will be a form of never-ceasing stand-up fight with the world around. The shorn Samson of Europe seems to be only fit to be mocked by his enemies in his blindness.<sup>51</sup>

O'Neill's mission, as closely guided by Benson, was not only in contrast to western colonial society, but also to the society's other mission under Fr Page which was begun first at Bombay and then later extended about a hundred and twenty miles inland to Pune, with a school, a church and a hospital.<sup>52</sup> But this raises the obvious question. Why, if Benson wanted a mission without Europeanizing infrastructure, with missionaries living poorly and indigenously in ways that were recognisably religious to the local culture, did he also agree to the more conventional Bombay and Pune mission with its substantial plant and Europeanising educational system?

Both SSJE missions began in response to a request from Bishop Milman of Calcutta in 1873.<sup>53</sup> But the Pune mission was very much under the direction of Fr Page and was targeted, at first, to the Europeans and Anglo-Indians in Bombay who expected the usual European ecclesiastical infrastructure. The extension of the mission to Pune was indeed established in the local part of that city. However, with Page in control, the SSJE mission there developed a Europeanising infrastructure – including technical schools, industrial workshops and a fruit farm. In 1877 a school was built and staffed by sisters of the Community of St Mary the Virgin; and this was followed by a church, hostels, a primary school and a hospital in 1901.<sup>54</sup> There are indications that Benson was not comfortable with these institutional developments. He urged repeatedly that a large infrastructure was deleterious to the society's life of poverty, calling the Pune mission buildings 'the sepulchre rather than the home of the living church'.<sup>55</sup> So there seems little doubt that the developments at Bombay and Pune owed most to the local leadership of Page, who favoured institutional developments with their Europeanising purpose.<sup>56</sup> Benson's own conception of mission had a more accurate expression in the form adopted by O'Neill, which was an early departure in Anglo-Catholicism from the prevalent Europeanising institutional form adopted by most Anglican, and many Protestant missions.

<sup>51</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 13 June 1877, *Further letters*, 165–6.

<sup>52</sup> Slade, *A work begun*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Woodgate, *Father Benson*, 116.

<sup>54</sup> Slade, *A work begun*, 51–3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

*Nilkanth/Nehemiah Goreh and the SSJE mission*

This departure from a civilizing institutional agenda was facilitated by a significant Indian influence in O'Neill's mission. While O'Neill was at Bankipur he was joined by the Brahman Christian Nilkanth/Nehemiah Goreh. Goreh was baptised as a young man in 1848 under CMS Evangelical influence after a short public career in Benares as an opponent of Christianity. His conversion created a local furore and, as a new convert, he was initially an opponent of asceticism both in his former Hinduism and in Christianity. However, by 1860, influenced by a more sympathetic understanding of his former faith shown by James Ballantyne, the principal of the Presbyterian Sanskrit College in Benares, Goreh had written a book in Hindi upholding world-renouncing contemplative practices.<sup>57</sup> By this time Goreh had a much wider experience of the Christian world. He had previously visited England in 1853, as tutor to a young Sikh nobleman who had also become a Christian, and had been introduced to the queen as a prize convert. Returning to India in 1855 as a prominent Indian Christian, Goreh gradually began to loosen his ties with the CMS as he reacted to the obstacles that society erected to his ordination, and as he came into increasing contact with Tractarian theology, principally through the moderate High Churchman William Kay, Principal of Bishop's College, Calcutta.<sup>58</sup> Through Kay, Goreh began a correspondence with Pusey.<sup>59</sup> Goreh was finally ordained deacon in 1868 and sent by Bishop Milman to begin a mission at Mhow and Indore in Central India.<sup>60</sup> Then, in 1870, Milman ordained him a priest to begin a mission at Chanda in the north-west. It was at this time, in 1873, that Goreh began to correspond with Benson, a connection initiated by a mutual friend of both men in the Indian government. This eventually led to Goreh's return to England in 1876 to become a novice with SSJE the following year.<sup>61</sup>

Goreh met O'Neill in Calcutta soon after his arrival in India. The Englishman raised the possibility of the two of them establishing the Bankipur mission together, as occurred in June 1874. After the closure of this station after just a few months O'Neill began again in Indore, the city where Goreh had previously begun a mission. He was joined almost immediately by Goreh, until Goreh left for England in early 1876.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Fox Young, 'Enabling encounters: the case of Nilakanth-Nehemiah Goreh, Brahman convert', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* xxix (2005), 16–17.

<sup>58</sup> Idem, 'Holy orders: Nehemiah Goreh's ordination ordeal and the problem of "social distance" in nineteenth-century North Indian Anglicanism', *Church History and Religious Culture* xc (2010), 75–80, 81–2.

<sup>59</sup> C. E. Gardner, *The life of Father Goreh*, London 1900, 110, 115, 242.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 151.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 153, 158, 164–5, 211.

Notwithstanding Goreh's indisputable influence on O'Neill's mission, it did not originate with him but with Benson's earlier aspirations to go as a missionary to India. Both O'Neill and Page had left for India in November 1873 at a time when the correspondence between Goreh and Benson had only just begun. Even by 1875 Goreh and Benson were not necessarily regular correspondents. In May that year Goreh acknowledged in a long letter to Benson that he had by then received three or four letters from him to which he had not replied.<sup>62</sup> Although Robert Frykenberg portrays Goreh's association with SSJE as 'marginal',<sup>63</sup> the connection was in fact much more substantial. After returning to India from the SSJE house in Oxford in 1877 – after a year and a half as a novice it was discerned that he had no vocation to the religious life there – he maintained his correspondence with the SSJE founder for the whole of his life. In 1877 Goreh went to live with O'Neill and remained there until 1882, when he joined the SSJE mission at Pune: he remained part of that mission, and did not formally sever his status as a SSJE novice until 1882, the last year of his life.<sup>64</sup> An association of that length and variety was hardly marginal, even if SSJE was too western in its monasticism for it and Goreh comfortably to adapt to each other. Goreh's deep understanding of his former Hinduism, and of Indian culture, alongside the evolving self-understanding of his life as a Christian *sannyasi* (ascetic), can only have reinforced the indigenising, ascetic, non-institutional viewpoints that were already coming to O'Neill in Benson's letters. Together, Benson and Goreh significantly contributed to shaping this idiosyncratic Anglo-Catholic mission. Like most high-caste Christians in India, Goreh was no subaltern in the SSJE mission but a catalyst bringing together Benson's ascetical western Christian spirituality with the life of the *sannyasi* that Goreh had already begun to recapture from his anti-ascetic CMS years.<sup>65</sup> Goreh's input into the evolving SSJE mission in India came from a Brahman who had been a Christian for some three decades, and was increasingly influenced by Anglo-Catholicism through his reading of Pusey, his correspondence with Benson and his involvement with the SSJE and its mission in India.

### *The Indore mission*

At Indore, in October 1875, O'Neill rented a room in the home of a local family. The house had just three small mud-brick rooms and a narrow verandah at the front. Goreh described their thoroughly local living conditions.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 178.

<sup>63</sup> Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 414.

<sup>64</sup> Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, 268.

<sup>65</sup> Young, 'Enabling encounters', 17.

Mats, made of leaves of date-trees, served for our chairs, tables and bed-steads. We used plates and cups made of leaves, to eat our food in, and our fingers served for spoons, knives and forks; and we lived on food which our friend gave us, which consisted of cakes made of meal and rice and other vegetable substances. Do not think that there was any asceticism for me in any of this, for that is very much the way we naturally live. But it was, I suppose, great asceticism to Father O'Neill.<sup>66</sup>

In 1875 Benson counselled O'Neill about identifying too explicitly with European lifestyle and culture in India, advice of a piece with his 1859 letter to the warden of St Augustine's College about an Indian mission that was as 'oriental as possible'. He wanted O'Neill to avoid owning or renting a European house, envisaging his friend sleeping in a single room in a local house with a portable altar in the corner, or even on the roof, with no more belongings than he could pack in two hours. A chapel would not be needed for years, as Indians should not be admitted to services until they were Christians.<sup>67</sup> Seven years later, in 1882, Benson was still convinced that European self-assertion and public preaching would not be as attractive as 'devout retirement' in recommending Christianity to local Hindus. He was as convinced as any Evangelical Christian that Hinduism was 'false worship', but thought that Hindu reverence for the ascetic constituted a kernel of truth in a bogus religion. The 'Hindu has his own truer conception of reference. The Indian people take knowledge of any devotee in their neighbourhood, and are sure in due time to gain a reverence for him'.<sup>68</sup> Benson understood that this patient presence would take time to attract converts, but maintained that a few gathered after ten or fifteen years 'would be worth ever so many thousands addressed in the bazaars'.<sup>69</sup>

O'Neill did use some standard missionary strategies. He began to translate the Prayer Book catechism and the psalter, though Benson counselled him that time spent in conversation was better than print.<sup>70</sup> Although O'Neill understood Marathi, the local language, with great difficulty, he and Goreh did embark on preaching tours, and lectures in local halls. Again, Benson thought this a waste of time compared with the attraction of living a quiet prayerful life in the one place. Emphasising repeatedly the attraction of a life lived in prayer and asceticism, Benson remained hesitant about the value of translation. He was aware how long it would take to acquire a sufficiently insightful knowledge of local language and culture for any useful translation work to be done.

I am afraid that your reading and writing must somewhat interfere with the more immediate work and prayer of missionary life. When I hoped to go out, my idea was

<sup>66</sup> Nehemiah/Nilkanth Goreh, unpublished conference paper quoted in *Further letters*, p. vii. <sup>67</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 16 Sept. 1875, *Letters of Benson*, 171-2.

<sup>68</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 6 July 1882, *ibid.* 163-4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

<sup>70</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 16 Sept 1875, *ibid.* 172.

to get away from books as much as possible. I should think that one would have to get hold of the people, their ways of thought and life as well as of language and native literature, and to give much time to intercessory prayer on their behalf, if one is really to work an effect on them.<sup>71</sup>

Demonstrating a knowledge of local conditions, and the social and familial ostracism that converts had to endure, Benson advised that such men and women would have to be cared for materially once their Christian adherence was known to their Hindu or Muslim families.<sup>72</sup> Until his first visit to India in 1890 Benson had no direct experience of either India, or Hindu or Muslim cultures; he was, however, not completely ignorant about them, at least in westernised theory. He delivered a paper on comparative religion to an undergraduate society in Oxford in 1875, and was familiar with the writings of Max Müller, the nineteenth-century Oxford Sanskritist and pioneer of the study of comparative religion. Undoubtedly a more direct and personal knowledge of the local culture, and of the obstacles facing a Christian convert within it, would have resulted from Benson's acquaintance with Goreh. But it could also have come from missionaries in India whom Benson could have met in England.

Working with a mission strategy that relied on an ascetic communal Christian life conformed to local cultural indicators of what constituted an authentic *dharma* (religion), O'Neill needed a base for the mission that would give him greater freedom than that permitted by being a tenant in another person's home. He and Goreh first tried a house in the nearby village of Silotiya, where a local house of three rooms and a surrounding verandah was built.<sup>73</sup> But by 1880 this house had been given up and a new St John's Mission House built in Indore itself.<sup>74</sup> It was situated three miles outside the European canton, and constructed in the commonest local style of two long rooms above one another with a low verandah front and back. The house had little furniture. The upper room was a chapel, the lower partitioned into 'cells' for the missionaries. Despite Benson's scepticism about translation work, here O'Neill did his writing, including his translation of the psalter into Hindi. At nights O'Neill slept upstairs on the floor behind the altar. The non-monastic members of the mission, including Samuel Gopal, O'Neill's principal Indian assistant and catechist, and his wife and children, lived in an adjoining smaller house, but the whole mission met for worship and meals, eaten in Indian fashion. It was a largely local diet, with meat only on Sundays.<sup>75</sup> O'Neill was probably the only European living in the local city, and a point of curiosity to many.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 21 Jan 1881, *Further letters*, 242.

<sup>72</sup> Benson to O'Neill, Ascension Day 1882, *Letters of Benson*, 1580.

<sup>73</sup> Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, 228–9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 252.

<sup>75</sup> *Further letters*, pp. x–xiii.

<sup>76</sup> Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, 252.

There is little evidence for the local reaction to such a short-lived, idiosyncratic and personal mission. The major source is a short hagiographic article written in 1905 by Samuel Gopal.<sup>77</sup> The mission had a deliberate policy of providing charity for the most destitute poor by dividing the city up into visiting districts for the Indian catechists who were learning Christianity under O'Neill. Working under Gopal's overall supervision, and resourced by the savings engendered by O'Neill's ascetic lifestyle, the students would distribute small amounts of money weekly, and shelters and blankets in the rainy and winter seasons. They reported to Gopal on all applicants for charity, and recounted their stories to O'Neill over dinner on Saturday evenings. O'Neill also quizzed Gopal about the condition of each local applicant before they were admitted to the mission's charity list. O'Neill would frequently accompany the students to speak with the poor about Christianity. Clearly, these neglected destitute, who included the lepers living far beyond the outskirts of the city, were grateful for the charity and the human contact, for Gopal reported that 'this systematic and well regulated method of caring for the poor made a deep impression on the citizens of Indore'. But it does not seem to have translated into conversions, as Gopal also goes on to say 'who can dare gauge its results. The last day will reveal it'. Clearly results, in terms of conversions, had not materialised during the days of the mission itself.

While the poor may have welcomed the mission for its charity, there does seem to be some evidence that the higher castes did not. Gopal recounted one consequence of the outdoor preaching engaged in by O'Neill and other members of the mission. They would march in procession through the streets, barefoot, and chanting the litany in Hindi, stopping at various places for O'Neill or one of the others to give a short address in simple Hindi. Christian books and tracts were also sold, despite the mission being warned against this by the police. One of the catechists was in fact arrested for selling Christian literature. The magistrate, a Maratha Brahmin, fined him 50 rupees or 200 days in gaol. When O'Neill protested that the student was just following his instructions and that he should be gaoled in his place, the magistrate had the missionaries evicted from the court. It was only when O'Neill informed Sir Henry Daly, agent to the governor-general at the court of the Maharajah, that the student was released. The incident suggests resistance to the mission among the local Brahmins, but also a willingness by O'Neill to use imperial power to correct what he understood to be an injustice by local authorities towards those for whom he was

<sup>77</sup> Samuel Gopal, 'Samuel Wilberforce O'Neill', *The Cowley Evangelist* (Dec. 1905), 269-77. I am indebted to Hannah O'Rourke, a master's student at the University of Oxford, for her research skills and persistence in tracking down this article for me.

responsible. He was, however, prepared to undergo the gaol sentence himself without protest.<sup>78</sup>

There is only one other possible indication of local response to the O'Neill mission in Gopal's account. The missionaries used a local bathing place close by their street. It was frequented by Hindus as it was connected to a Hindu tomb, and Goreh expected there would be an objection to O'Neill using it, but no such protest emerged.<sup>79</sup> This may have been because of the mission's charitable work among the lower castes of the city, or because O'Neill's lifestyle did indeed conform to indigenous parameters of holiness.

O'Neill died on 28 August 1882 from cholera which he had contracted from his servant whom he had been tending.<sup>80</sup> His unique mission in India lasted just eight years.

### *The significance of the SSJE missions*

How unique was the O'Neill-Benson-Goreh mission? A similar, but even more thorough going enculturated lifestyle would be adopted by Salvation Army missionaries when they arrived in India in the 1880s. They not only, like O'Neill, adopted local habits in clothing, furnishings and diet, but also used local music in their worship and took Indian Christian names.<sup>81</sup> More famously, from the 1950s the Benedictine Dom Bede Griffith would take this emphasis on the Indianness of mission even further by seeking a genuine theological dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism, and to fashion a Christian faith in India that genuinely incorporated insights from the other religion.<sup>82</sup> However, O'Neill's mission, though more circumscribed, not only preceded these two, and was peculiar among contemporary Anglican missions, but its origins were even earlier, embodying as it did the mission ideas of Benson from at least the late 1850s.

So what does this investigation into the initial missions, both domestic and foreign, of the Society of St John the Evangelist tell us about the historiography of contemporary missions and the history of Christian missions in the later years of the mid-Victorian period? The Twelve-Day Mission to London in 1869 was an indicator of the importance of Richard Benson as an early instigator of Anglo-Catholic missions, and of his theology in which he understood mission as a contest between the Church and the world, exemplified in Christian holiness resourced by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit imputed through baptism. It enables us

<sup>78</sup> Gopal, 'O'Neill', 273-4.      <sup>79</sup> Ibid. 270.      <sup>80</sup> Woodgate, *Father Benson*, 141.

<sup>81</sup> Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 314.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Bede Griffiths, *The marriage of east and west*, London 1982.

to determine that his foundation of a community dedicated to living the vowed religious life in the Church of England and with St John the Evangelist as patron was not mere personal preference for a particular saint, but a theological statement about that community's purpose. The Society had been in existence less than three years when the London mission took place. At a time when the Church of England was still theologically opposed to the idea of a life of vowed celibacy, and there were just four professed members of SSJE, Benson, as Superior, made the decision to involve his little band in the planning and execution of a major initiative in public domestic mission. It was a sizeable task for a small group whose corporate life had only just begun. But the rule drawn up by Benson for the Society enshrined the explicit connection between mission and sanctification that lay at the heart of his theology of mission, and encompassed much of the methodology of the 1869 mission to London:

It is the object of the Society of St John the Evangelist, in adoration of this Divine Mystery [the incarnation] to seek that sanctification to which God in His mercy calls us, and in so doing to seek, as far as God may permit, to be instrumental in bringing others to be partakers of the same sanctification; bearing always in mind, that above all things it is necessary for those who would carry out the work of missions to abide in Christ, apart from whom we do nothing, and that if we abide in Him the life which we have must show itself in acts of love to all mankind.<sup>83</sup>

In the recent plethora of scholarship on missions and missionaries the overwhelming focus of scholarly attention has been on Protestant Evangelicals. Scholars working on British Evangelical missions have identified a number of predominant characteristics. These have included an ambivalent relationship with imperial authorities which generally involved increasing cooperation as the nineteenth century progressed.<sup>84</sup> Underlying this ambivalence, however, was a common mission view that the British Empire was a providential grant to facilitate global conversion by a Christian Britain, a theological understanding that dated back to the beginnings of British missions with the SPG in 1701,<sup>85</sup> but which disguised the coercive nature of much British colonialism. The typical Protestant Evangelical missionary of the mid-Victorian period was still male, usually married, although single female missionaries became more common in the later nineteenth century often due to the segregated condition of women in the non-Christian societies that the missions were targeting. According to a number of historians this social and gendered

<sup>83</sup> R. M. Benson, *The religious vocation: instructions on the Rule*. London 1939, 39–40.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Porter, 'An overview, 1700–1914', in Norman Etherington (ed.), *Oxford history of the British Empire companion series: missions and empire*, Oxford 2005, 40.

<sup>85</sup> Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire, c. 1700–1850*, Oxford 2007, 60–3.

configuration of missions made them largely adopt and seek to inculcate the idealised domestic and gendered arrangements of British middle-class culture as the 'norm' for converts.<sup>86</sup> Protestant missionary families were supposed to model this standard for their converts, notwithstanding the emotional costs and ways in which the ideal was fractured, as when children were sent back to England for their schooling only to be alienated permanently from their families.<sup>87</sup> However, the single-sex and celibate culture of religious life took the missions of the SSJE outside this norm, so that both of them were to some extent on the margins of Anglican and Protestant missions, that of O'Neill more so than Page's. They were missions of a religious order which was barely accepted by its own Church, both because of its vowed life and its Anglo-Catholicism, however restrained its ritualism might be. O'Neill's mission was influenced by the marginality of Goreh, living between two cultures and two religious traditions, but well within the local culture and geography of the town of Indore. This meant that the O'Neill-Goreh-Benson mission participated deliberately in the hybrid marginality that lay at the heart of the British Raj, where all people, British and Indians, participated in the blends of cultures to which Robert Frykenberg has repeatedly drawn attention.<sup>88</sup>

However, the O'Neill mission was not just a western mission adapting itself to a non-western culture for the purpose of evangelistic strategy, something other missions increasingly tried to do from the later nineteenth century. It is clear that this mission was a deliberate hybrid from the beginning. The knowledge and input of Goreh's religious and cultural experience played an indispensable part in shaping O'Neill's mission on the ground in Indore, albeit the religious shape of the mission was determined beforehand by Benson's longstanding missionary desire. However, Goreh's intimate understanding of local conditions, society, culture and religion was what enabled O'Neill effectively to realise Benson's vision. The O'Neill mission was the endeavour of a partnership in which both men gained something. O'Neill, the knowledge to navigate the implementation of Benson's vision on the ground; and Goreh the co-direction of a mission more in keeping with his own *sannyasi* ideals and hopes for Christian mission in India, as well as the recognition from Europeans that his attachment to the SSJE mission gave him.

<sup>86</sup> J. G. Greenless and C. M. Johnson, *Good citizens: British missionaries and imperial states, 1870–1914*, Montreal 2003, 3, 8; A. Johnston, *Missionary writing and empire, 1800–1860*, Cambridge 2003, 38–40.

<sup>87</sup> For example, the childhood of Bishop Stephen Neill: D. B. Daugherty, *Bishop Stephen Neill: from Edinburgh to South India*. Oxford 2008. I am grateful to Robert Frykenberg for drawing my attention to the gap between ideal and reality in missionary children's lives, and for this reference.

<sup>88</sup> Robert E. Frykenberg, *Christians and missionaries in India: cross-cultural communication since 1500*, Grand Rapids, MI 2003.

Much of the focus in recent mission historiography has been on the world and motivations of converts, rather than of missionaries. However, in the O'Neill mission there were no converts, just inquirers; and given Benson's view of a long catechesis for potential converts it is unlikely that this would have changed very much if the mission had continued longer. This was not understood, either by Benson or O'Neill, as a failure, but rather as the expected outcome of an ascetic mission relying on no social or political colonial connections to recommend its religion to locals, but only its coenobitic resonances with Indian religious culture. For Benson, Christianity was necessarily a minority, counter-cultural religion, notwithstanding his view was that of an Anglican whose Church had a long history of establishment as part of the ruling hegemony in England and the British Empire. Benson's model of mission was not just contrary to that of most Anglican and Protestant missions which clearly sought numbers of converts, and even the conversion of their host society; but it was also counter to the prevailing model of Anglo-Catholic ritualist mission in Britain. Anglo-Catholic apologetic identified ritualism as a missionary model suitable for reclaiming the labouring poor among their dreary slums by its colour and dramatic performance. Benson, as superior of the SSJE, as instigator and arguably the driving force of the 1869 mission, whose missionary model was personified in India by O'Neill, would eschew ritualism, advocating in its stead the attractive power of a community or individuals living simply and in poverty according to the same theology that the ritualists strove to commend through spectacle. The recent work of Jeffrey Cox makes it clear that what he calls 'High Church' Anglicans, that is, Anglo-Catholics, could challenge the prevalent Protestant missionary model of the missionary family by sending celibate vowed religious missionaries; yet he also shows that such missions generally adopted the institutional mission exemplified by Page's mission. By contrast, this paper demonstrates that such a mission was not the preferred method of the founder of the Cowley Fathers, and that institutional mission was not the invariable outcome of these new Anglo-Catholic forms of Anglican mission. The theological perspective and missionary strategies preferred by Richard Benson also suggest a nuancing of the imperial-mission nexus that was prominent in Anglican mission in the high Victorian period, most especially under the leadership of Bishop Montgomery in the SPG.<sup>89</sup> While the SSJE mission under Fr Page in Bombay and Pune did indeed build upon existing British imperial presence and populations, Benson's clear preference for the O'Neill mission indicates that at least some early Anglo-Catholic missions exhibited an explicit antagonism to the imperial connection because it associated Christianity with worldly power and a

<sup>89</sup> Maughan, 'Imperial Christianity', 32-57.

colonising culture. More research into specifically Anglo-Catholic missions is needed in this respect, but if antagonism to the imperial British state proved to be more common in subsequent Anglo-Catholic missions, it may have derived from the initial Tractarian impulse of opposition to the liberal British domestic state and its erastianism.<sup>90</sup>

The early diversity in Anglo-Catholic missions is a reminder that not only did missions vary enormously in perspectives and local forms, but also that the Christianity that they advocated and propagated was not a monolithic phenomenon. There is a greater need in the study of missions to delineate the varied characteristics of the Christianity that the hugely diverse missions propagated. Mission Christianity was a much more multivalent phenomenon than the study of what has come to be known as ‘Christian mission’, an all too monochrome term.

The first two SSJE missions indicate four further points of significance. First, that a deliberate appreciation of indigenous culture (common in most successful Christian missions), and even of limited aspects of indigenous religion, began to emerge among Anglo-Catholic missionaries by the 1870s, though more explicitly in the early twentieth century.<sup>91</sup> Benson is an early example, possibly even the earliest explicit Anglo-Catholic example, of this. The sympathy of Anglo-Catholic ritualist priests for British working-class culture has already been noted, and certainly the ritualist moderation of the 1869 London mission similarly indicated patience with the diverse ecclesiastical cultures of contemporary Anglicanism, as well as with the different cultures of the social classes of 1860s London. However, Benson’s appreciation of Indian religious culture was strictly confined to its asceticism and unworldliness, and he remained as firmly antagonistic as an Evangelical to any suggestion of Hindu religious truth. He made a clear distinction between Hindu asceticism as a natural practice and Christian *asceticism* as a divine outworking of the supernatural gift of baptism:

We should always carefully distinguish between the perfection their own Hindu devotees profess to seek for by mere asceticism, and the Christian practice of asceticism for the purpose of developing the sanctity of God communicated to us as His children in Baptism. S. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans would draw out that difference between seeking to constitute some claim by virtue of nature, and seeking to conquer the flesh in the power of the regenerating Spirit.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Simon A. Skinner, *Tractarians and the ‘Condition of England’: the social and political thought of the Oxford Movement*, Oxford 2004, 87–93.

<sup>91</sup> Rowan Strong, ‘Continuity and change in Anglican missionary theology: Dr Thomas Bray and the 1910 World Missionary Conference’, *Journal of Postcolonial Theory and Theology* ii (2011), 20–32 (<http://postcolonialjournal.com/Resources/Strong%20JPTT.pdf>). <sup>92</sup> Benson to O’Neill, 16 Sept 1874, *Letters of Benson*, 138.

Benson, therefore, maintained the usual Christian dichotomy of Christian truth against non-Christian falsity, which was hardly surprising as it was the basis for all nineteenth-century Christian mission. But while Benson shared this common facet of nineteenth-century Christianity, it is clear that he did not share a common missionary assumption of 'christianise and civilise'.<sup>93</sup> Benson's concern that a mission life be appropriate to the culture in which the potential convert lived meant that the outward form of the mission adopted by O'Neill was dictated by Indian conditions and beliefs. It was a sort of back-handed acknowledgement of the religious values of the missionaries' Hindu adversaries. So the house of the mission at Indore was fundamentally the same as those around it; there was little in the way of European furniture that, presumably, O'Neill would have found more comfortable; and the chapel demanded that the worshipper sat on the floor as he did in an Indian temple, rather than in the pews of the neo-gothic colonial churches. The adoption of an Indian diet with limited meat was part of the same local pattern.

Given Benson's hostility to other religions it is unlikely that he wanted O'Neill to enter into any sort of in-depth dialogue with Hindus which would have enabled O'Neill's mission to adopt something more than an outward similarity to the Hindu pursuit of holiness. Such an assessment is supported by much of the advice that Benson gave to O'Neill as his mission unfolded. It indicates that Benson thought that converts brought little of value from their previous religion:

I cannot help feeling that a retired life, such as that of a *Sannyasi*, is the way to draw all men after us – at least, to draw those that shall be saved. In public preaching we are not to meet those who are inclined to scoff. The devout stand aloof. Our hearers are men who need to be converted every way.<sup>94</sup>

However, in the letter that he wrote to O'Neill in 1877 he was explicit in hoping for an Indian Christianity that was different from that of the west, a view which suggests that encultured adaptation to the externals of local culture might have gone further had O'Neill's mission survived longer.

Secondly, the connection between Benson's theology and his real but limited appreciation of Indian culture points to the importance of including theology within the purview of the history of missions. This is a dimension of mission studies that Andrew Porter and Robert Frykenberg have long advocated.<sup>95</sup> Belief, and how it is constructed and understood, is

<sup>93</sup> This connection between conversion and British civilisation went back to the 1720s when it began to become prominent among SPG advocates with respect to that society's missions to the North American indigenous peoples: Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 50–9. <sup>94</sup> Benson to O'Neill, 14 July 1882, *Letters of Benson*, 166–7.

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Porter, 'Church history, history of Christianity, religious history: some reflections on British missionary enterprise since the late eighteenth century', *Church*

an obvious historical dimension of the mission enterprise.<sup>96</sup> Theology is not always, or only, a cover for other, more nefarious motivations. To date, those historians who have embraced a consideration of theology in their study of missions have largely confined their explanations of missionary theology to providence and millennialism, largely because these themes were prominent in the Evangelical missions that have been the overwhelming subjects of most mission studies.<sup>97</sup> But this research would indicate that there is a case for a much wider theological investigation into the connection between missionary theology and the work and outcomes of missions. Benson's understanding of mission points to other seminal themes, at least in developing Anglo-Catholic missions from the later nineteenth century: theologies of an inherent antagonism between Christianity and the world; the Incarnation of Christ; holiness; and baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the O'Neill mission is an early example of an Anglican mission undertaking an enculturation policy. The adoption and adaptation of Hindu ideas had already been espoused by the 'fulfilment' theology of some non-Anglican missions, such as that of William Miller of the Free Church of Scotland and principal of Madras Christian College, who, from the 1860s, saw Christianity as the fulfilment of Hinduism.<sup>98</sup> The Benson-O'Neill-Goreh strategy was also similar to the enculturation agenda of the so-called 'faith missions' made most famous by Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission, and contemporary with the SSJE mission initiative. While Taylor's initiative derives from a conservative Evangelical theology and culture and the O'Neill mission from an Anglo-Catholicism that was more or less at war with Evangelical Christianity in England, there are more similarities than partisan ecclesiastical politics would suggest. In both these missions there was a common downplaying of the institutional model, though in Benson's case this was a more explicit preference for rejecting such a model. There was a similar commitment to simple living and personal sacrifice by the missionary, coupled with an intention of adapting to local norms; and there was a theological reliance on the

*History* lxxi (2002), 555–84 at pp. 581–2; Richard Fox Young, 'World Christian historiography, theological "enthusiasms", and the writing of R.E. Frykenberg's *Christianity in India*', *Religious Compass* v (2011), 71–9.

<sup>96</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 282.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, various works by Brian Stanley, particularly "Commerce and Christianity": providence theory, the missionary movement, and the imperialism of free trade, 1842–1860', *HJ* xxvi (1983), 71–94; Porter, *Religion versus empire?*, 10–11, 33–6, 58–62; and Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and empire, 1815–1914*, London 2008, 2–4.

<sup>98</sup> Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 339. However, like Benson, Miller's enculturation agenda was limited, in his case by his passionate defence of the supreme value of western education: Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian missions*, London 1966, 107.

providence of God for sustainability.<sup>99</sup> Though divine provision was demonstrably assisted by excellent public relations at home in the case of the China Inland Mission, the theological emphasis on a division between the Church and the world was yet another similarity between these two missions at different poles of the Christian spectrum. Such areas of similarity indicate that mission history would benefit from a greater degree of cross-denominational study, including denominations formerly antagonistic to one another. Certainly studies of Anglo-Catholic missions need to incorporate comparative studies of Roman Catholic missions, as both missions centred on personnel drawn from religious orders.

Fourthly, Benson's theology and preferred mission practice was sharply antagonistic to the perpetuation of a Christendom model of mission which saw the objective of mission as being the remaking of the local society into a Christian one. His was an anti-Christendom model that, demonstrably in O'Neill's case, sought to achieve a distance between mission and British imperialism, though this was less successful in the case of the Page mission. Benson's ideal of mission, seen in O'Neill's work, brought together two strands which Andrew Porter has seen as separate in mission history. The Evangelical strand stressed the fundamental importance of the individual experience of conversion. The 'High Church' strand emphasised the communal and ecclesial vision of a converted community.<sup>100</sup> Benson straddled these two dimensions with his belief in conversion as a long, individual and arduous process, unattractive to most persons in the local society. Yet this conversion was best achieved by the missionary living in a community of prayer, asceticism and sacramental life into which converts would eventually be inducted, which was removed from, and even contrary to, the usual lives of the British in colonial society. Evangelical and High Church strands, though increasingly divided and antagonistic in the British metropolis, were not always so remote from each other in the mission field. Benson's emphasis on an arduous process of conversion, with converts largely few in number and hidden from public view, yet attracted to a Christian communal life of prayer and sanctified asceticism, suggests that not all Christian missions should be studied for their influence, benign or malignant, as agents of social change in the local culture which has been the focus of much recent mission history.

<sup>99</sup> Cox, *British missionary enterprise*, 206–7.

<sup>100</sup> Porter, 'Church history' 583.