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EDITOR: The Revd Dr Robert Pope.

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Writing history is not the straightforward chronicling of events that it sometimes appears to be. Historians have to consider sources, what weight and significance should be given to each one, and how they are to be interpreted. This requires and deserves some thought because these factors affect how history is recorded and how we might understand our past.

The Society's Annual Lecture in 2018 offered an opportunity to consider the two-hundredth anniversary of the inauguration of the London Missionary Society and its mission to Madagascar. Dr Rachel Rakotonirina addressed the Society at Carrs Lane URC, Birmingham, on 8 September and, drawing on her doctoral research, she argued for a multi-disciplinary approach to the history of missions. While this will honour the accounts written by those who left home to serve in "foreign missions", it also acknowledges that those who received the missionaries might have a different view of events. Such an approach draws attention to unwritten histories, to the contribution made by indigenous peoples which are hinted at, but remain largely silent, in "official" records. The nuances are explored in the lecture which in turn causes us to question the power relationships, the privileges and hidden, even sub-conscious, agendas which have inspired the writing of mission history in the past. What can be viewed as imperialistic expansion is also seen as the inauguration of an indigenous church history and new, richer understanding develops as a result.

Our second article takes us to the world of eighteenth-century London Dissent. John Handby Thompson provides an analysis of Thomas Gibbons's diary, a fulsome account of the life and thoughts of an Independent minister as he sought to understand his life, that of his family and fellow human beings, and also events in the world, in light of the gospel and the providence of God. This is an extended analysis of a single source, which helps us to see how Gibbons attempted to come to terms with his world. We gain a clear impression of what it meant to be a Dissenting minister in eighteenth-century London; many things are quite different to the minister's work today, while some things seem to have changed very little.

Both articles cause us to pause and to ponder what should be given prominence and what should be set aside, as we attempt to understand the past and its significance. We extend our thanks to both contributors for submitting such engaging pieces.

Members are reminded that the Society now has a website and that book reviews and other matter will periodically be published there: https://urchistory.wordpress.com/

The Society has learned of the death of the Revd Geoffrey Beck at the age of one hundred. A former member, he will be remembered for his ecumenical commitment at home, and his concern to foster partnership with European churches.

ON THE WRITING OF MISSION HISTORY: THE LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY'S MISSION TO MADAGASCAR

I: The first Protestant Mission to Madagascar, 1818

The 18 August 1818 saw the arrival in Tamatave, an east coast port of Madagascar, of two London Missionary Society (LMS) ordained missionaries David Jones and Thomas Bevan, both 22 years old and from Wales. These young men's efforts to set up a school formed the first Protestant mission to Madagascar. There had been two unsuccessful attempts to introduce Christianity by Catholic missions from Portugal and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which had been limited to coastal settlements and had not been sustained.

The 1818 mission was also to be a failure, although for different reasons, and was followed by later successful LMS missions in 1820 and 1861 but is rightly marked as the beginning of LMS work in Madagascar. The LMS remained in Madagascar until the 1960s. Its successor Council for World Mission (CWM) continues to have strong links with the Reformed church in Madagascar. According to the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) formed in 1968, has a current membership of 3.5 million, 5,795 congregations and 1,200 ministers. As such the FJKM is the largest Protestant church in the country today.

The LMS had formulated plans for establishing a mission in Madagascar as early as 1795, the year of its founding. Initially it was the LMS missionary Johannes van der Kemp in South Africa, whose wife was half Malagasy, who made the most advanced plans to lead a mission with his fellow missionary James Read. Unfortunately, van der Kemp died in 1811 while making arrangements for securing a ship to Madagascar and the plan was abandoned.[1] After the Isle de France fell to the British in 1810 alternative plans were put in place, at the request of the Governor Farquhar, to send a mission via Mauritius.

Jones and Bevan arrived in Mauritius in July 1818 from their training at the Gosport Academy under Dr David Bogue and before that the Neuadd-lwyd Academy under Dr Thomas Phillips in Cardiganshire. They were accompanied by their wives Louisa Jones and Mary Bevan who had married in 1817 fully aware that they would begin their married lives as missionary wives in Madagascar. The 1817 treaty between Britain and Radama I of the highlands of Madagascar, that had ended the trade in slaves from Madagascar, was by this time in tatters, thanks to the mismanagement of compensation payments to Radama by the incompetent acting governor of Mauritius, General Hall, and consequently a mission to the highlands was not seen as likely to be welcomed by the Imerina king. The

1 J. T. Hardyman, "The London Missionary Society and Madagascar: 1795-1818 Part 1: 1795-1811", in *Omaly Sy Anio*, 7-8 (1978), pp. 43-82.

missionaries, without their wives, decided instead to start their mission on the east coast and between August and October 1818 set up a school educating local dignitaries' children. They were encouraged by their progress and so returned to Mauritius to collect their families, (both women had given birth to daughters in their absence), and returned separately in October 1818 and January 1819. By February 1819 however David Jones was the only one of the mission party left alive. All had succumbed to malaria with only Jones proving strong enough to survive the illness. This constitutes the short-lived mission of 1818. However, this was not the end of the story of the LMS in Madagascar.

Jones went back to Mauritius to recuperate in July 1819 where he started to learn some Malagasy among plantation labourers and slaves and set up a school for their children. By 1820 he was strong enough to return to Madagascar, by which time the British Governor Farquhar had returned to Mauritius and was keen to resume negotiations with Radama to reinstate the failed Treaty of 1817. He gave his support to Jones and sent him with the British government agent James Hastie to the capital of Imerina in the heart of the highlands, Antananarivo. Radama had also invited Jones to establish a mission in the highlands of Madagascar and so on their arrival in the capital, in September 1820, Jones and Hastie were warmly welcomed and met with elaborate ceremony and celebrations.

Jones, in being able to offer schooling and the provision of artisans from the LMS and training in the UK for a group of noble youths, proved highly valuable to the renewed treaty negotiations, and a new treaty banning the export of slaves was signed in October 1820. Radama also gave formal permission for the LMS mission and wrote to the LMS directors requesting they send as many missionaries and artisans as they could. Jones was installed in a royal house in the palace courtyard near the king's enclosure and provided with four servants. A school was built on Radama's orders within the court and a select group of noble children enrolled, including the heir to the throne and his sisters. Jones taught in English. In 1821 the third LMS missionary, another Welshman, David Griffiths, arrived and opened a school close to the royal palace, as did John Jeffreys, the first of the English missionaries, in 1822. The educational endeavours of the mission were to be its main concern in the early years, although this had not been the expectation. The missionaries had arrived with agricultural implements with the intention of introducing "modern" agricultural methods as part of their "civilizing" mission, only to find that the highlands were already being farmed using sophisticated irrigation methods and there was very little they could teach the locals. The popularity of their schools, and the fact they had not prepared for large scale educational work, meant that they were frequently requesting slates, paper, ink and primers from the LMS and supporters in Mauritius.[2]

The group of artisan missionaries who arrived in 1822 were experts in weaving, cotton spinning, metal working, and carpentry. Their success in these areas was

2 P. M. Larson, "Promiscuous Translation: Working the Word at Antananarivo", in P. Landau (ed.), *The Power of Doubt: Essays in Honour of David Henige* (Madison,WI: University of Wisconsin, 2011), pp. 99-101.

patchy largely because there were well-developed weaving and metal working industries already in the highlands. The weaver and cotton spinner went out of business, unable to compete with cheap imports from Manchester and the expertise of local businesses, and took to teaching in the schools. The blacksmith, George Chick, had to focus on intricate and ornamental metal working in order to compete with local skilled blacksmiths and ended up relying on palace building contracts to stay in business. The tanner, John Canham, also initially struggled, but thanks to a government contract to make shoes, managed to sustain his business. The carpenter, James Cameron, was highly versatile and managed to turn his hand to other things including making gunpowder and soap for the government to keep in profit. The printing press under Edward Baker was kept fully occupied, supplying teaching materials, catechisms, Bibles and hymn books for the mission.

Permission to preach had always existed, and Jones and Griffiths preached in English and French initially to local traders and those Malagasy who had travelled to Europe, but by 1824 the missionaries were confident enough in Malagasy to preach in the local language.[3] By this time their first pupils were also acting as local evangelists and prayer meetings were taking place independently of the missionaries. It was not until 1831 that permission was granted by Radama's successor Ranavalona I for the mission to baptise, hold communion and carry out Christian marriage services. Within weeks forty Christians were baptised including well-known figures such as Mary Rafaravavy and Paul Rainitsiheva, a former diviner.

The schools continued to be the success story of the mission with boys being educated in reading, writing, mathematics and, for some, Latin and Greek, while girls were taught reading, writing, mathematics and sewing. The schools grew from 30 boys and girls in 1821 to 2,000 in 1824.[4] However, it was to be after Radama's death in 1828 that the numbers increased significantly to 15,000 by 1835. In 1822 there had been three schools, combined into one in 1824 by Radama and its scholars used to establish over 30 schools in regions surrounding the capital.[5] By 1828 there were 100 schools, some in distant areas where there were Merina garrisons. These schools were staffed by the first male scholars and overseen by the missionaries and high-ranking senior scholars on occasional tours. The impact of Malagasy teachers from the very beginning was thus crucial to the success of the mission's educational endeavours. It should also be added that Radama's declaration in 1824 that he expected all men to be able to read and write in order to be admitted to the army and civil service also explains the rise in pupil numbers.[6]

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3 Ibid., p. 102.

4 Zoë Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar: Material Signs and Traces of the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.72.

5 Gwyn Campbell, *David Griffiths and the Missionary "History of Madagascar"* (Boston, MA and Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 664.

6 G. Campbell "An Industrial Experiment in Pre-Colonial Africa: The Case of Imperial Madagascar, 1825-1861", in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17/3 (1991), p. 536. Campbell, *David Griffiths and the Missionary "History of Madagascar"*, pp. 53-54.

Pier M. Larson points out there was a tension between the expectations of Radama and the LMS. Radama was not interested in creating a literate public but rather a scribal élite who could manage his empire and so he prioritised writing and mathematics in his prize giving each year. The LMS were concerned to create a reading public who could access the Bible in their own language. Jones and Griffiths wrote in 1826: "Unless we establish schools to teach these people to read, it will be of no use to put either tracts or Bibles into their hands".[7] The school primers they produced by hand initially and from 1828 printed, reflected their concerns, with Old and New Testament extracts being used for translation exercises. This was seen as a means of equipping their pupils as local evangelists who, they hoped, would convey the Christian message to their families. Joseph Freeman, an English LMS missionary who arrived in 1827, writing to Dr Phillips in the Cape declared: "they are not merely taught to read, they read the Scriptures, [and] they commit much to memory".[8]

The other notable achievement of the first mission was the rapid translation of the scriptures. By 1830 all of the books of the New Testament had been translated and published. The complete Bible was translated and published in 1835, making it the first complete translation into an African language. By this time *Pilgrim's Progress* had also been translated. Adults had been taught to read by missionaries and artisans in adult classes and by Malagasy scholars from 1825 onwards. The demand for reading material was great, with the LMS presses publishing 100,000 books, tracts and scriptures between 1827 and 1836 when they closed. Accounts from missionary letters reveal that Malagasy converts met frequently in private houses to discuss their reading of the scriptures, usually without a missionary present.[9] According to William Ellis by the end of 1831 a number of "devoted and pious native preachers" were established who spread Christianity by sharing their knowledge of the scriptures. The scriptures and other books were integrated into everyday life and being light were easily transportable. Baker, the printer, reported in 1831 that "The testaments, tracts, and whatever else we print are circulated from one end of Madagascar to the other".[10] In 1831 a second chapel was built in the capital to accommodate the vast voluntary numbers who attended services.[11]

Christianity was prohibited in 1835 by Queen Ranavalona I because she was worried by the influence of Europeans on her subjects at a time when France and Britain were making aggressive moves to establish control of the region.

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7 Jones and Griffiths to Burder, Tananarivou, 14 June 1826, LMS ILM 2/3/B, 11. Quoted in P. M. Larson "Literacy and Power in Madagascar", in https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/seminar/Larson2013.pdf, 4, (2013), p. 4.

8 Freeman to Phillips, Tananarivo, 3 June 1828, LMS ILM 2/4/D. See also Freeman to Orme, Port Louis, 10 December 1829, LMS ILM 3/2/C. Quoted in Larson, "Literacy and Power in Madagascar", p. 8.

9 Cf. ibid., p. 14.

10 Ibid., p. 16.

11 Mervyn Brown, *A History of Madagascar* (London: Damien Tunnacliffe, 1995), p. 150; M. Brown, "Ranavalona I and the Missionaries: 1828-1840", in *Omaly Sy Anio*, 5-6, (1977), p. 114.

The LMS missionaries, not permitted to preach, left by 1836, but Christianity did not retreat. Indeed Madagascar is such a famous missionary story because despite persecution, including martyrdoms, and international isolation, the church grew in number, commitment and as an institution. People who had never met a European missionary were taught to read and converted to Christianity and some of these went on to become renowned pastors, demonstrating how the highland Merina had accepted Christianity. Raison-Jourde argues that 5 per cent of Imerina could read by 1840, as many as 25,000 people. In 1851 there were seven churches in the capital alone with their own preachers baptising and administering the sacraments. When the LMS returned to Madagascar in 1861 after the death of Queen Rananavalona I they found a church numbering at least 5,000 baptised members with its own leadership and thousands more of adherents who were literate and familiar with the scriptures.[12] Within eight years the Queen and Prime Minister had converted to Christianity, baptised by Andriambelo who had converted to Christianity in the 1840s and risen to be a key leader in the martyr church and the Palace Church which was established in 1869. By 1890 the number of Christians associated with LMS churches had reached 60,000 members and 250,000 adherents. No wonder Lovett in his history of the LMS after 100 years devotes a whole chapter to celebrating the mission's successes in Madagascar. In 1899, he wrote: "Madagascar, during the last twenty-five years of the century, was in number of churches, converts, adherents and proportion of Christians to the heathen population, the most successful mission conducted by the Society".[13]

What I have just related summarises the accounts given by the histories of the early LMS mission to Madagascar, found both in mission publications and many of the secular histories of Madagascar.[14] It is a celebratory account of the success of a European missionary society.

These accounts of the early missions to Madagascar are based on missionary correspondence and published histories written by some of the first missionaries such as Griffiths, Freeman and Johns.[15] I will now turn to a discussion of the limitations of these sources and the problems of writing mission history more

12 Larson, "Literacy and Power in Madagascar", p. 20.

13 R. Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society, 1795-1895*, I (London: Henry Frowde, 1899), pp. 738-739.

14 Ibid. pp. 673-710; J. J. Freeman and D. Johns, *A Narrative of the Persecution of the Christians in Madagascar; with Details of the Escape of the Six Christian Refugees now in England* (London: John Snow, 1841); D. Griffith, *Persecuted Christians of Madagascar: a series of interesting occurrences during a residence at the Capital from 1838-1840* (London: Cornelius Hedgman, 1841); W. Ellis, *History of Madagascar* (London: Fisher and Son, and Co., 1838); V. W. Ryan, *The Gospel In Madagascar: A Brief Account Of The English Mission In that Island* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1863); C. S. Horne, *The Story of the L.M.S. 1795-1895* (London: LMS, 1894), pp. 171-199, 340-368; A. Sharman, *The Martyrs' Isle; or Madagascar: The Country, the People, and the Missions* (London: LMS, 1909); M. Brown, *A History of Madagascar*; S. Randrianja and S. Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History* (London: Hurst, 2009).

15 For a discussion of the plagiarism of Griffiths's *Hanes Madagascar* by William Ellis see G. Campbell, *David Griffiths and the Missionary "History of Madagascar"*.

generally before returning to the specific case of the first missions to Madagascar and how alternative histories might be constructed.

II: The writing of mission history

Lamin Sanneh in *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* asserts that Christianity, as a missionary religion, has sought to "translate" itself out of Aramaic and Hebrew and into new cultures from its very beginning. He argues in relation to Africa, that translation, whether it be of the Bible or of teaching materials such as the catechism, went far beyond the narrow bounds of "textual work". The role of language as cultural vehicle meant, according to Sanneh, that "missionary adoption of the vernacular ... [went far beyond mere substitution of one set of words for another and] ... was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message". Sanneh goes on to assert that this was "a piece of radical indigenization far greater than the standard portrayal of mission as Western cultural imperialism".[16] This is a revealing and valid insight which acknowledges the transformative nature of cross-cultural missionary interactions. However, I would want to add that it is important to recognise this transformation was not just done by the western missionary, but that indigenous agents were equally active in the process of indigenization and that mission history needs today to acknowledge, delineate and analyse this.

The anthropologist and West African expert J. D. Y. Peel, in writing about approaches to writing mission history, identities three strands: denominational histories of mission; explorations of the relationship between mission and imperialism; and lastly studies of the impact of Christianity on the religious history of the recipients.[17]

Denominational mission histories have been centre-stage for decades, with the multi-volumed Lovett on the LMS and Stock on the Church Missionary Society (CMS) as classic examples, and have indeed been returned to as bi-centenaries prompt renewed interest.[18] They were typically focused on success stories and were "monuments to the confidence and strength of missions".[19] The receiving cultures were seen from the perspective of the missionary, thanks to the use of western mission archives and authors who were usually connected to the denomination and missionary society. Anna Johnston asserts:

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16 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message. The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Maryknoll, 1992), p. 3.

17 See Terence Ranger, "Christianity, Capitalism and Empire: the State of the Debate", in *Transformation*, 23/2, (2006), p. 67.

18 Cf. Brian Stanley, *The History of the BMS, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992); K. Ward and B. Stanley *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity: 1799-1999* (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 2000).

19 R. A. Arnold, "Introduction", in R. A. Bicker and R. Seton (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p. 1; see also W. Ustorf, "What's Wrong With Mission History?", in V. Kuster, (ed.) *Mission Revisited. Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology* (Berlin: LiTVerlag, 2010), p. 11.

> They are thus fundamentally and frankly propagandist in nature. Their aim was variously to inculcate public support for missionary endeavours: to ensure an on-going supply of donated funds from individuals, institutions, and governments; to cultivate a community of like-minded British citizens who would stand up for missionary interests ... and to encourage a community of potential missionary recruits ... Unsurprisingly, there is always an emphasis on positive evangelical achievements whilst limited successes or spectacular failures are rarely mentioned.[20]

Newbury characterised mission histories of this type as belonging "to the border-lands between history and propaganda" in which "the beliefs and practices of non-Christian peoples are blackened by caricature; the human frailties of missionaries are concealed; [and] the character and extent of missionary success are oversimplified and exaggerated".[21]

There is the danger that this is still the case for denominational mission histories, although Brian Stanley, author of the BMS history, argues for denominational histories today to be more critically aware so that they can contribute to wider historical and anthropological studies, rather than be "history for believers" and to include indigenous stories.[22]

Much has been written about the complex relationship of missions and imperialism, notably by Stanley and Andrew Porter.[23] Modern historiography has traditionally asserted that the foreign missions of imperial powers such as Britain and France were intimately involved in enabling and maintaining colonial rule, and that the missionary relationship was a destructive one for indigenous cultures. Johnston argues "evangelical Protestant missionaries, keen proponents of what they termed 'Christianisation and civilisation', were extremely influential in both the material and intellectual realisation of modern colonial projects".[24] The ground-breaking study of the Tswana and nineteenth century missions by Comaroff and

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20 Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 6-7.

21 C. W. Newbury, "Introduction", in C. W. Newbury (ed.), *The History of the Tahitian Mission, 1799-1830 written by John Davies*; with Supplementary Papers of the Missionaries (London: Hakluyt Society, 2010).

22 B. Stanley, "Some Problems in Writing a Missionary Society History Today: The Example of the Baptist Missionary Society", in Bicker and Seton (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, pp. 38-49.

23 See for example A. N. Porter, "'Commerce and Christianity': The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan", in *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), pp. 597-621; A. N. Porter, "Religion and Empire: British Expansion in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1780-1914. An Inaugural Lecture" (London: King's College, 1991); B. Stanley, "'Commerce and Christianity': Providence Theory, The Missionary Movement, And The Imperialism Of Free Trade, 1842-1860", in *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 71-94; B. Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollo, 1991); Norman Etherington, *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005).

24 Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860*, p. 5.

Comaroff which applies anthropological methods to show how the cosmological perspective of the Tswana was fundamentally altered by the European missions' emphasis on introducing European worldviews, exposes the role of missions in preparing the way for colonial rule. Although individual missionaries and societies challenged aspects of colonial rule, missions were all too often seen as a justification and a precursor to colonial rule, even if this also furnished converts with the means to better resist colonialism in the twentieth century.

Although the case against missions as being an arm of the colonial state, and its relationship being ambiguous, has been well made, the dominant actors are still western missionaries and this focus is problematic.[25] For example, Porter's edited work *Religion versus Empire?* which investigates the relationship between missions and imperialism, a relationship that it ultimately questions, only gives one page to indigenous appropriations of Christianity.[26] This shows the missionary focus remains.

Less common, but nonetheless valuable, are studies which view the missionary relationships from the perspective of the receiving culture and focus on indigenous reactions to, and accommodations of, the message of Christianity.[27] Terrance Ranger and J. D. Y. Peel saw it as important to view Christianity in the context of a whole religious history of indigenous peoples. Karina Hestad Skeie calls for a "re-examination of Western mission histories and mission narratives" in order to reveal local agency in appropriating and "domesticating" Christianity.[28] It is often necessary however to look beyond the discipline of mission history to gain these new insights.[29] Increasingly, studies of historic mission fields are being tackled by anthropologists, archaeologists, literary critics and linguistic experts who explore the interaction between mission culture and indigenous culture and question the extent to which the missions were in control of the process of evangelism and inculturation. Arnold and Bickers in their discussion of the ways in which missionary archives are used by researchers point out that many are not writing mission history, but using the missionary records to inform their secular histories

25 H. Nielssen, I. M. Okkenhaug and K. Hestad Skeie (eds), *Protestant Missions and Local Encounters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 6; R. Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 60; J. Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (London: Routledge, 2008).

26 See T. Ranger, "Christianity, Capitalism and Empire: the State of the Debate", p. 70.

27 N. Etherington "Missions and Empire", in R. W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 312 argues that there have been few studies of local agency.

28 K. Hestad Skeie, *Building God's Kingdom: Norwegian Missionaries in Highland Madagascar, 1866-1903* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 6.

29 The series Studies in the History of Christian Missions typifies this missionary-as-actor focus. Indeed the criticism of Dutch missiologists of the centenary celebrations of Edinburgh 1910 suggests that this trend is set to continue. Cf. V. Kuster, "Introduction", in Kuster (ed.), *Mission Revisited. Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology*, pp. viii-ix. See for example Emily J. Manktelow, *Missionary Families: Race, Gender and Generation on the Spiritual Frontier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015) a mission history that focuses on the missionary.

or anthropological investigations of non-western societies.[30] Perhaps this is how mission history writing needs to evolve. As the missiologist and historian Werner Ustorf notes, mission studies more generally, not just mission history, is today more fruitfully pursued by using interdisciplinary approaches.[31]

III: The Case of Madagascar: Interdisciplinary approaches shedding light on mission history

The case of the LMS mission to Madagascar provides an excellent example of how an interdisciplinary approach to mission history is productive for understanding the local reception of European Christianity. While imperfect as a means of hearing the indigenous, Malagasy voice of the early nineteenth century highlands, the approach nonetheless provides a more rounded picture than traditional missionary-as-actor histories.[32]

The work of two scholars of Madagascar, Zoë Crossland and Pier M. Larson, provides fascinating insight into the reception of LMS Christianity in the 1820s and 1830s. Although not writing mission histories, both have much to contribute to accessing the third perspective of the indigenous voice of missions advocated by Peel and Ranger. Crossland is an archaeologist who has a particular interest in the pre-history of Madagascar, but who combines this with an anthropological perspective interwoven with semiotics. Larson is a cultural and intellectual historian with an interest in linguistics and literacy. He studies early modern Malagasy history as well as slavery and African diasporas of the Indian Ocean.

Crossland's study *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar* published in 2014 applies semiotic theory within an interdisciplinary approach to a reading of the material landscape of nineteenth century Imerina. Of particular interest for mission historians are her chapters addressing the Malagasy encounter with the first LMS missionaries. Relying on the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, and Webb Keane's "semiotic ideology", she shows how signs are read and misread by all actors in the encounter.[33] Indigenous agency and indeed non-

30 Bicker and Seton, (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, p.1; see also P. Holtrop, "Landscape Retrieved: On Mission and Missiology", in Kuster (ed.), *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology*, p. 65.

31 Ustorf, "What's Wrong With Mission History?", p. 7. An example of more recent work addressing this perspective is D. Lindenfeld and M. Richardson (eds), *Beyond Conversion and Syncretism: Indigenous Encounters with Missionary Christianity, 1800-2000* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011) which uses a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

32 Note that the work of the LMS, with the exception of the first, short-lived mission, was focused on highland Madagascar, in particular the Imerina kingdom. Most of the studies referenced and the comments made are about this region, and are not intended to represent the perspectives of all Malagasy peoples. Politically fraught, even today, Malagasy identity is complex and the relationship between coastal areas and the highland centre is difficult largely because the Merina kingdom has been perceived as repressive and dominant through history by those outside it.

33 Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

human agency in the form of long dead ancestors is placed centre stage by this approach. Her semiotic framework focuses on the space – intellectual, material and historical – where belief is constituted. She uncovers how local cosmologies incorporated missionary perspectives and how Christian ideas coexisted with local sacred duties within converts' intellectual understandings. Above all she demonstrates how this process of accommodation gave agency to the Malagasy recipients of mission. Alongside this, of particular importance for reading the Malagasy reception of Christianity in the 1820s, is Larson's article "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking': Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity" published in 1997 in *The American Historical Review*. In this article Larson identifies the difficulty for historians of European expansion, be it colonial or missionary, to "conceptualize cultural exchange in contexts of unequally distributed power".[34] Drawing on Frederick Cooper's recommendation that historians embark on histories of *engagement* in colonial contexts, he seeks to interrogate the ways the Malagasy "routinely engaged and rearranged colonial discourses by fitting them into local systems of knowledge".[35] This acknowledgement that the subaltern actively engaged with and filtered European discourses, goes some way towards avoiding an analysis which privileges European discourse and actors in the writing of mission history.[36] By focusing on the reception of Christianity he succeeds in uncovering a far more nuanced and interesting history of mission. He achieves this primarily via a linguistic and anthropological approach.

It is important to note that Malagasy "tradition" is dynamic, as Raison-Jourde, Crossland and Larson attest: a distinguishing mark of traditional religious belief systems in highland Madagascar is their flexible and porous nature which means that they actively incorporate the new while maintaining an important link with the past.[37] Ranger asserts this is true also of traditional religion in southern Africa history more generally, with innovation and differentiation being characteristic, rather than the assumed trope that traditional religion is homogeneous and stable.[38]

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34 P. M. Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking': Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity", in *The American Historical Review*, 102/4 (1997), p. 969.

35 Ibid., p. 970.

36 Cf. Elizabeth Elbourne on the Cape Colony argues LMS converts must have felt religious continuity with their pre-Christian beliefs as they adapted Christianity to their own ends. E. Elbourne, "Word Made Flesh: Christianity, Modernity, and Cultural Colonialism in the Work of Jean and John Comaroff", *The American Historical Review*, 108/2 (2003), pp. 435–459.

37 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar: Material Signs and Traces of the Dead*, pp. 50-55; Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking': Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity", pp. 974-995; G. M. Berg, "Radama's Smile: Domestic Challenges to Royal Ideology in Early Nineteenth-Century Imerina", in *History in Africa*, 25 (1998), pp. 69-92 and G. M. Berg, "Writing Ideology: Ranavalona, the Ancestral Bureaucrat", in *History in Africa*, 22 (1995), pp.73-92.

38 T. Ranger, "The Local and Global in Southern African Religious History", in R. W. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity. Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 72-73.

Mbembé argues this remains a feature of modern African tradition and religious practice where ritual expresses the "procéss of reinventing the self and the polis, [and] ... notions of divine sovereignty and patronage are transformed and new dogmas emerge".[39]

Malagasy worldviews regarded both the living and the dead as able to act and affect the world, there being a sacred stream of blessing or *hasina* between participants. The exchange of blessings ensured successful actions. It was a system that connected the most powerful with the population through obligations that flowed in both directions. Commoners needed to offer *hasina* in material expression such as unpaid labour and taxes to their superiors, who in turn paid material *hasina* to the monarch. The monarch was seen as the main body through which ancestral blessings were distributed. In return for material *hasina*, the monarch shared spiritual *hasina* or blessings which would ensure prosperity and success for individuals and for the country. Gerald Berg has termed this system "*hasina* ideology". He asserts:

> the Merina saw historical reality not as the product of human agency, but of ancestral beneficence, *hasina*, which flowed downwards on obedient Merina from long-dead ancestors in a sacred stream that connected all living Merina. For obedient Merina, politics consisted in nothing more nor less than a lifelong quest to position one's self favorably in that sacred stream as close as possible to ancestors and then to reap the benefits of that cherished association.[40]

Crossland further explains: "Hasina ... enmeshed the living and the dead in an ordered web of relationships that cascaded down from the ancestors, through the sovereign, and on through the hierarchy of descent groups to the lowest ranks of society".[41]

The king, in the central position in Antananarivo, was seen as the ultimate point of communication between the living and the ancestors. Radama had to ensure that he retained the position of his father and continue to be the channel through which *hasina* flowed. As Gerald Berg has shown, he did this by appropriating the beliefs and, in particular, knowledge of the missionaries.[42] Material advantage gained from the work of the missionary artisans who, with uneven success, introduced more advanced forms of industrial production, was not the only way in which Radama achieved this.

Crossland's study delineates "the degree to which different participants were able to seize and maintain control over the terms, manner, and content of

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39 J.-A. Mbembé, "African Modes of Self-Writing", in *Public Culture*, 14/1 (2002), p. 270.

40 Berg, "Writing Ideology: Ranavalona, the Ancestral Bureaucrat", p. 73.

41 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar: Material Signs and Traces of the Dead*, p. 103.

42 Berg, "Radama's Smile: Domestic Challenges to Royal Ideology in Early Nineteenth-Century Imerina", pp. 69–92.

missionary agency".[43] The first evidence of this negotiation is with the arrival of David Jones in Antananarivo in 1820. His first act on arriving at the capital was to offer a piece of gold to King Radama, saying "token of respect to you master". Ritual offerings of coinage were called *hasina* and missionaries routinely offered *hasina* to the king. They were unaware however of the deeper significance of the act and were, according to Raison-Jourde more generally blind to the sacred dimensions of political power and authority.[44] Crossland asserts that the missionary's field of recognition meant that they interpreted the act of *hasina* in a purely secular manner as paying tribute based on their prior experiences of coins in market contexts and as taxes or tribute. The sign behind the coin and the act of presenting it as *hasina* was not apparent to the missionaries. As a result they were prevented from "recognising the sacred and efficacious nature of the exchange".[45] They failed to understand that their connection to Radama, expressed through their offering *hasina* (which they merely saw as material tribute) was perceived by onlookers as a sign that the missionaries had become another avenue alongside the king through which blessings could flow. For the highlanders observing the ceremony "the relationship of Jones to Radama and his ancestors was made visible and contextualied through the performance".[46] The 1823 tour of the highlands by Jones, Griffiths and Canham, led by palace mission school scholars, illustrates how the Malagasy perceived the LMS mission. Crossland argues that the gifts the missionaries received on the tour, being akin to obligations paid in return for *hasina* "recognized their privileged location as ritual specialists attached to the royal court ... [and] acknowledged the missionaries' role as a channel of *hasina* from and to the king".[47]

This perception was magnified by Radama's careful response to the arrival of the first missionary in the highlands in 1820. It is Crossland's focus on semiotics which enables us to read the first days of the mission in a new light. It was vital for either the missionaries or the Merina to seize control of the semiotic territory through which understandings were negotiated. As the vastly different readings of the same event of paying *hasina* demonstrate, understandings could be radically divergent. How would the signs of mission be interpreted? The ability to control how semiosis takes place, in other words, to control discourse about belief, means being able to have control over when and where a sign is expressed, the ability to determine the relationship between a sign and an object and to determine the effect of a sign's expression. Interestingly it is Radama who takes possession of the field of interpretation from the beginning. The Malagasy contemporary historian, Raombana, recounts how the arrival of the missionaries at the capital was carefully staged with spectators lining the streets: "the whole male population were ordered

43 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p.102.

44 F. Raison-Jourde, *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar au XIXe siècle. Invention d'une identité chrétienne et construction de l'État*, (Paris: Karthala, 1991), pp. 27, 165.

45 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 107.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 114.

to rendezvous at Antananarivo".[48] In Jones's letter to the LMS directors, he relates how soldiers fired cannon and beat drums and people danced as he approached the palace. This impressive spectacle served to position Radama, not only in the eyes of the missionary but also in the eyes of his people as a great ruler. Thus began a pattern of Malagasy sovereigns mobilising missions, particularly LMS missionaries, as part of their strategies of governance.

This control was to continue with Jones being housed by Radama in the Rova, or palace courtyard. When a purpose-built house was later provided for him on the same site by the king more signs were deployed to show who controlled the semiotic landscape. At the ceremony to mark the laying of the foundations, the supporting pillars or *andry* were blessed with water by the King. Two signs were evident in this act. First, blessing by water was an important ceremony in Merina tradition that signified sacred blessings or *hasina*, in particular protective blessings, which flowed from the king. The mission was thereby brought into the stream of ancestral blessing and into a kinship relationship with the sovereign. William Ellis, in his *History of Madagascar* recounts "the people were astonished to find the king performing this act for a stranger and a white man" because previously the practice had been restricted to his family members.[49]

The supporting pillars of Malagasy houses were also symbolically charged as the central pillar or *andry* represented the strength and moral force of the family. Centrality was viewed in Malagasy cosmology as an important indicator of control and power. It is significant that the ceremony happened within the palace courtyard on a hilltop which was the centre of the capital, which was itself the centre of the highlands, and conducted by the monarch, who represented the centre of the kingdom. Antananarivo was regarded as the centre pillar or *andry* of the kingdom and the monarch as the centre or *andry* of that Kingdom, both giving prosperity, strength and peace to the kingdom.[50] The name for nobility "*andriana*" is derived from the term "*andry*". Crossland argues persuasively that "locating these strangers centrally within ancestral cosmology, Radama controlled the way in which the sign of mission was experienced".[51]

In a similar manner, Radama's control over the positioning of the mission schools outside the capital in 1824 also served to reiterate the centrality of Antananarivo and his rule. The first schools outside the capital were established entirely under his control, although that is not how the published mission accounts relate it. Radama selected the locations and determined which of the palace scholars would staff them. In a highly politically and symbolically charged move the first school was located at Ambohimanga, the old capital and sacred heart of the powerful north east of Imerina and sometime rival to the new capital of Antananarivo. The scholar chosen to teach there was significantly, Jones's first pupil and heir to the throne, Rakoto.

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48 S. Ayache, *Raombana Histoires 2* (Antananarivo: L'Academie Malgache: 1994), p. 631.

49 Quoted in Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 114.

50 Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona, "House to Palace, Village to State: Scaling up Architecture and Ideology", in *American Anthropologist*, 102/1 (2000), pp. 109-110.

51 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 110.

All of the first set of schools lay in the two most powerful districts to the east of the capital and it was only after these were decided that two schools were placed to the less important west. That there were more schools opened to the north and east of the capital after 1824 reflects the value placed on the direction of the northeast in highland cosmology. In house construction the cardinal directions were strictly managed, with the northeast corner being the most important and the space of the ancestors.[52] The political power base of Radama was also in the north east region. This priority was to continue in the way the mission organised its mission districts. "The missionaries listed the districts in order of precedence and in line with cosmological ranking from the centre to north and east, followed by west and south".[53] Radama also made a strategic move which ensured he continued to have control of the mission project. He united the three city schools into one college. He described it as "the parent institution and the fountainhead of all the schools that might be formed".[54] Ancestral blessings flowed from the king to the college and from there via its scholars sent to set up schools, to the Merina population. In this way, the stream of blessings was facilitated by the mission schools. The sovereign had control over mission decision-making and the Merina interpreted the work of the mission through their own patterns of belief and practice. The schools opened up new routes to political power for those of the outlying districts, so much so that villages without schools begged the LMS to provide them, and simultaneously served to position Radama as the centre of political power.

Labour service or *fanompoana* to the king was one of the ways in which *hasina* was offered by each district in hopes of blessings, realised as prosperity and material success, in return. Radama made extensive use of forced labour to facilitate his ambitions to extend and strengthen his rule, including army conscription and forced agricultural labour. The LMS mission was to rely heavily on this form of labour and as such contributed to Radama's agenda. *Fanompoana* was invoked to build the new school buildings and even to populate the classrooms. Although played down by the missionaries in their accounts of the success of their schools, attendance at school was a requirement of the sovereign, both Radama and his successor Ranavalona I before 1835.[55] Learning in the LMS schools, according to Berg, became a new form of *hasina* with students forming a new, unpaid, scribal élite controlled by the monarch.[56] Leonardi argues this meant that the "missionaries were turned into agents of the state and its imperial expansionism".[57] The teachers,

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52 Kus and Raharijaona, "House to Palace, Village to State: Scaling up Architecture and Ideology", pp. 98–113; Maurice Bloch, *From Blessing to Violence. History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 38.

53 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 118.

54 Quoted in ibid., p. 109.

55 G. M. Berg, "Virtù, and Fortuna in Radama's Nascent Bureaucracy, 1816-1828", in *History in Africa*, 23 (1996), p. 35; Brown, "Ranavalona I and the Missionaries:1828-1840", p. 113.

56 Berg, "Virtù, and Fortuna in Radama's Nascent Bureaucracy, 1816-1828", p. 40.

57 Cherry Leonardi, "Laying the First Course of Stones: Building the London Missionary Society Church in Madagascar, 1862-1895", in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36/3 (2003), p. 612.

from the first group of mission scholars, were also expected to work without pay as part of their labour service to the king. It took the LMS missionaries some time to secure funds to reimburse these teachers. Unsurprisingly, missionaries do not relate that their burgeoning class sizes were thanks to a form of forced labour. They also do not relate, if they understood this at all, that this served to position the mission as central to the sacred links between the sovereign and subjects.

The LMS missionaries deliberately sought to confront Malagasy traditional beliefs by destroying sacred items they termed "idols" and desecrating sacred sites where ancestors were thought to reside.[58] This was done in the presence of their mission school students in order to demonstrate to them the ineffectual nature of traditional religious powers. What it also did was to show the superior power of the new religion when no disasters ensued from the destruction. Malagasy observers attributed Christianity with the same protective powers as those of traditional religion. As Crossland writes of the missionaries and their pupils: "When dissembling *vazimba* graves, and fearing no consequences, they demonstrated that they had superior ritual know-how".[59] This interpretation of these actions was not controlled by the missionaries and indeed they were surprised for example when bibles and other religious printed texts were being used as charms. Larson asserts: "Malagasy conversion to Christianity entailed assimilation of mission religion to the cultural logic of Malagasy sacred practices".[60] "Malagasy Christianity issued from the creative production of new forms of expression and thought ... [which] were firmly anchored and articulated in the Malagasy language and Malagasy modes of thinking".[61]

The missionaries had to negotiate intellectual meanings and in the first mission relied heavily on the work of local mission school students to translate the Bible.[62] Ustorf points out that this reflects wider experiences in other mission fields where the local agent was crucial to cultural and linguistic translation of the message.[63] Larson's interest in linguistics enables him to analyse the translation choices made by these scholars and to show how they were an extension not a break with traditional worldviews. For example, the choice of word to describe worship, religion and prayer was *Fivavahana*. *Fivavahana* originally meant oral supplication offered to spiritual beings and ancestors. Malagasy translators used this term to describe Christian prayer and worship, with a focus on verbal expression. The missionaries were powerless to control the meanings and usage of

58 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, pp.84; 98; Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking': Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity", p. 978.

59 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 98.

60 Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking'", p. 978.

61 Ibid.

62 Larson, "Promiscuous translation: working the word at Antananarivo", pp. 89-112.

63 Ustorf, "What's Wrong With Mission History?", p. 11; cf. M. T. Frederiks, "Mission or Submission. From mission history towards an intercultural history of Christianity: case-study The Gambia", in Kuster (ed.), *Mission Revisited*, p. 87 on Methodist missionaries' use of local agents in The Gambia.

this term, in particular its connection with traditional oral culture and practices. Another example was the name assigned to converts. Originally it was *ny mpino* meaning "the believers" but this was quickly replaced by *ny mpivavaka* meaning "the prayers". Larson argues this suggests "a shift from a Euro-mission concept of Christianity as characterized by belief and creed to a more Malagasy one in which the essence of being Christian lay in the nature of what one did".[64] It is no surprise that prayer meetings were hugely popular in the early church and that they spread beyond the influence of the missionaries in the capital with meetings found in the countryside lead by mission school students who had been sent by King Radama to set up schools. The 1834 "awakening" stunned the LMS missionaries.

> There are also several prayer-meetings held in the town [Antananarivo] during the week-evenings. The two principal circumstances which we wish to notice in connexion with these meetings are, first, that a spirit of prayer actually exists and increases among the natives; and second, that these meetings are convened and conducted by natives themselves ... Public worship, chiefly for prayer and reading of the Scriptures, is held in many distant parts of country, principally raised and conducted by those who were formerly scholars or teachers in the missionary schools.[65]

Larson comments: "the success of the new religion lay well beyond the exclusive agency and linguistic capability of LMS personnel. *Fivavahana* was clearly an idiom in which Malagasy found meaning and continuity with longstanding ideas and numinous practices"[66] – how much more so, given the fact that much of the work of translation, and evangelisation beyond the capital, was carried out by Malagasy scholars and preachers.[67] Larson continues: "British missionaries had to abdicate the meaning and much of the practice of Christianity to what made intellectual sense in Malagasy vernacular culture ... the missionaries were not effectively opposing highland 'capacities and modes of thinking' but operating, in the eyes of Malagasy, within a Malagasy cultural logic".[68] Peel comments that missionaries in Nigeria also had to alter their understandings of Christianity in order to win converts.[69]

Gwyn Campbell argues that Christianity only succeeded when national

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64 Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking'", p. 982.

65 Ellis, *History of Madagascar*, pp. 484-485.

66 Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking'", p. 986.

67 Campbell, *David Griffiths and the Missionary "History of Madagascar"*, pp. 57-63; Larson, "Promiscuous translation: working the word at Antananarivo", pp. 89-112.

68 Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking'", p. 993.

69 J. D. Y. Peel, "Problems and opportunities in an anthropologist's use of a missionary archive", in Bicker and Seton (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, p.84. See also A. Porter, "Church History, History of Christianity, Religious History: Some Reflections on British Missionary Enterprise since the Late Eighteenth Century", in *Church History*, 71/3 (2002), p. 579. K. Hestad Skeie, reflecting Lamin Sannah, argues that the mere translation of Christian concepts into Malagasy "transformed and redefined the Christian message according to the Malagasy context". Skeie, *Building God's Kingdom: Norwegian Missionaries in Highland Madagascar, 1866-1903*, p. 57.

security and prosperity were in decline and traditional ancestral powers' ability to impart material blessings were shown to be failing. He has connected the rise in conversions to Christianity in the 1850s for example with widespread suffering caused by famine.[70] This view is challenged by Larson who argues that such categorical theories of conversion as one side's loss is another's gain as "ultimately based on mission understandings of Christianity" which ignore the role of agency and choice among the Malagasy.[71] While missionaries claimed to have effected a fundamental break with the religion of the ancestors, and indeed modern scholars have asserted similarly that Malagasy Christians had abandoned ancestral traditions, Larson argues that "Malagasy embraced alternative understandings of Christianity as an extension and a refinement of existing practices".[72] As Crossland has demonstrated, Malagasy imbued Christian concepts with their own understandings and made deliberate appropriations.[73] Kollman reinforces this conclusion speaking about East Africa. He claims: "Africans facing missionary evangelization have selectively appropriated the new message and found possibilities for creative agency in the midst of constraint".[74]

To view Christianity as discontinuous with Malagasy worldviews and practices is to overlook the control exercised by the Malagasy over the process of conversion. Interestingly, this control was, according to Larson, in the hands of peasants, rather than the Merina elite from whom the first scholars of the mission schools were drawn. He asserts: "highland Malagasy peasants appropriated the religious idiom of European missionaries yet transformed it to suit their own cultural logic".[75] This is confirmed by Crossland's study which argues that agency was not with the Merina élite or King Radama, even if the missionaries presented it in this way, but rather true change and adaptation was in the hands of the ordinary recipients of mission. The "success of Christianity's expansion was due more to its co-option by local people than to the efforts of missionaries alone".[76] Maurice Bloch, who has carried out extensive anthropological research in Madagascar claims: "To the Merina Christianity is not something foreign which conflicts with traditional values. This explains how many Merina can describe Protestantism as 'the religion

70 G. Campbell, "Crisis of Faith and Colonial Conquest: The Impact of Famine and Disease in Late Nineteenth-Century Madagascar (Crise De La Foi Et Conquête Coloniale: Les Conséquences De La Famine Et De La Maladie à Madagascar à La Fin Du XIXe Siècle)", *Cahiers D'Études Africaines*, 32/127 (1992), p. 415.

71 Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking'", p. 972.

72 Ibid., p. 978.

73 See also Skeie, *Building God's Kingdom: Norwegian Missionaries in Highland Madagascar, 1866-1903* on how the process of Malagasy appropriation continued on the return of European missionaries (of various dominations) from 1861 onwards.

74 Paul Kollman, "Classifying African Christianities, Part Two: The Anthropology of Christianity and Generations of African Christians", in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 40/2 (2010), p. 126.

75 Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking'", p. 970.

76 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 136. Cf. Elbourne, "Word Made Flesh: Christianity, Modernity, and Cultural Colonialism in the Work of Jean and John Comaroff", p. 451.

of the ancestors' – in other words, something truly our own".[77] The self-sufficient, self-governing and self-propagating churches established during the absence of the LMS, and even prior to their departure in 1836, and which were regarded as so impressive in 1861 on the missionaries' return, are evidence of the extent to which Christianity had become part of Malagasy self-understanding.[78]

IV: Postcolonial readings and mission history in Madagascar

The missiologist and historian Paul Kollman, in his analysis of the origin of the use of the term mission or *missio*, shows that the word itself is a loaded term which inevitably divides people between subjects, those who "do" mission, and objects, those who receive mission. This he argues, in the context of wider political events, namely colonialism, serves to create "the other". First coined by the founder of the missionary order of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century, mission "discursively plac[ed] Europe at the world's centre, both geographically and morally".[79] He argues that "*Missio* ... was no mere descriptive label ... but an important trope which helped justify the European project to subdue, Christianize, and civilize those they encountered". Writing mission history then in today's world needs to acknowledge the weight and power of meaning of the very term "mission".

Ustorf asks "whether mission history as a concept is still up to the job or whether it is in fact dead and gone".[80] He continues: "Mission history is over as soon as the missionary enters foreign ground – the story then becomes local religious history or non-western church history".[81] "This is not ... mission history, but their own church history".[82] Indeed there is a case for switching to writing intercultural histories of Christianity.[83] Certainly, there has been in recent years a trend to replace missiology with "intercultural theology". However, the pre-history of an indigenous church, its mission history, cannot be ignored and still needs to be accessed. This needs to be done in such a way that it does not distort present day self-understandings by glossing over the history of indigenous agency and exaggerating the role of European missionaries.

Kollman recommends mission historians avoid "a colonialist prism that centres the historical gaze on the activity of (mostly European) missionaries".[84] As the

77 M. Bloch, *Placing the Dead: Tombs, Ancestral Villages and Kinship Organisation in Madagascar* (London: Seminar Press, 1971), p. 28.

78 Skeie, *Building God's Kingdom*, p. 256.

79 Paul Kollman, "At the Origins of Mission and Missiology: A Study in the Dynamics of Religious Language", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79/2 (2011), p. 425.

80 Ustorf, "What's Wrong With Mission History?", p. 5.

81 Ibid., p. 6.

82 Ibid., p. 5.

83 Frederiks, "Mission or Submission. From mission history towards an intercultural history of Christianity: case-study The Gambia", pp. 91-92.

84 Paul Kollman, "Remembering Evangelization. The option for the Poor and the Renewal of the History of Christianity", in M. Holztrattner and C. Sedmak (eds), *Humanities and Option for the Poor* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), pp. 37-52.

example of the Comaroffs' study demonstrates, taking an interdisciplinary approach on its own does not guarantee that the indigenous perspective will be prioritised, or the dominance of the missionary actor questioned. Their study has been criticised for failing to appreciate the active agency of the Tswana in the process of worldviews colliding that they describe, and ultimately that their study still locates the missionary as the determining actor. They also treat mission sources as reliable evidence, whether for factual data or for more profound interpretations of hidden meanings. They do not step back from the material and assess its representational strategies. As a result, there is the danger that the lens through which they view the mission field is still that of the metropole.

Martha Frederiks argues the case for adopting a methodology that allows for "an active search for the cultural and racist biases ... and other power-relations that have shaped our view of history".[85] I would like to propose that alongside interdisciplinary approaches a careful use of the missionary record using post-colonial analysis can achieve this. The current trend within the field of writing imperial history, or as Stephen Howe terms it "new imperial histories", is salient for mission historians.[86] The impact of postcolonial studies and discourse analysis on the reading of imperial history has gone some way to challenge prevailing Eurocentric views, and to draw attention to the importance of recognising the perspective of the recipients of the imperial experience, both in its physical reality and its psychological expression.[87]

The relation of knowledge and power is most clearly seen when understood in the wider context of "discourse". Thus Foucault in analysing the processes rather than just the product of (historical) knowledge, comes face to face with the power relations which attempt to manipulate knowledge and, in turn use it as a means of manipulation.[88] Most notably Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism* has shown the complicity of Western discourses of knowledge and power in the context of colonial territories.[89]

Mission historians have been slow to adopt the methodology of postcolonial analysis which is somewhat surprising given their keenness to disassociate mission from empire. A focus on discourse and narrative would seem to be natural for the field. Nineteenth century missionary societies were among the

85 Frederiks, "Mission or Submission. From mission history towards an intercultural history of Christianity: case-study The Gambia", pp. 91-92.

86 Stephen Howe, "Introduction", in S. Howe (ed.) *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1-20.

87 Although, as Richard Gott points out, it has been largely ignored by the editors and authors of the Oxford History of Empire. R. Gott, "Shoot them to be sure", in Howe (ed.), *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, pp. 106-113.

88 M. Foucault "Two Lectures", in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, Michel Foucault* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), p. 93; L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 185; V. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (London: James Currey, 1994), p. 212.

89 E. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 59.

most powerful, influential and high-profile pressure groups in British life.[90] They produced and circulated vast amounts of written material.[91] The nature of the publications to which missionary societies exposed the British public, the images of Africans, Pacific Islanders, Indians etc. that they circulated, demand critical study.[92] Mudimbe has argued effectively that it is necessary to consider western literary constructions of the image of Africa as much as African contributions.[93] Colonial Discourse Analysis is concerned to trace from the text "the structure and assignment of subject positions".[94] That is, how power illustrated, exercised and maintained through discourse, subordinates the "Other" and also highlight where, on occasion, the dominant discourse is itself challenged. My own doctoral work of the 1990s draws heavily on postcolonial discourse analysis in exploring published and unpublished representations of Malagasy martyrdom from 1837, the date of the first martyr's death, Rasalama, to 1937 when her centenary was marked by Malagasy representations under French colonial rule. Uncovering the racial, class and imperial assumptions of missionary and convert leads to surprising understandings that suggest the mission-colonial conjunction is not as straightforward as might be expected.[95]

Madagascar is an unusual case when it comes to discussing colonialism and the usefulness of postcolonial discourse analysis. The encounters between Europeans and the Malagasy were never straightforward ones of colonial exploitation, and power was not necessarily solely in the hands of Europeans.[96] Madagascar was not colonized formally until 1896, comparatively late in the wider history of the 1880s European "scramble for Africa". Most European contact prior to this was with the British who were not to become the imperial power and did not have a serious intent to colonize the island. The majority of British influence was missionary and Nonconformist missionary (LMS and Friends, and Welsh missionaries initially)

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90 Susan Thorne, *Protestant ethics and the spirit of imperialism: British Congregationalists and the L.M.S. 1795-1925* (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 1990), pp. 85, 87-89, 93-100.

91 A. N. Porter, *European Imperialism, 1860-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1994) p. 22; cf. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 37.

92 Apart from my published articles and my unpublished PhD thesis (*Representations of Christian Martyrdom, The Case of Madagascar, 1837-1937*, University of Birmingham, 1998), the only other approach that attempts this seems to be that of the literary scholar Anna Johnston. Cf. her *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860.*

93 V. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, p. 213.

94 R. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 164.

95 R. A. Rakotonirina, "Re-reading missionary publications. The case of European and Malagasy martyrologies, 1837-1937", in P. N. Holtrop and H. McLeod (eds), *Missions and Missionaries* Studies in Church History, Subsidia (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2000, pp.157-169). R. A. Rakotonirina, "Power and Knowledge and their collision-collusion in mission historiography: Martyrological texts in and on Madagascar, 1837-1937" examined using a postcolonial approach, in *Studies in World Christianity*, 5/2 (1999), pp. 156-176.

96 Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 12.

at that, so not necessarily representative of British political power.[97] In addition, the kingdom of Imerina was itself an imperial power which sought to extend its influence across the island and indeed at one point in the 1820s, Radama had plans to spread its imperial presence to neighbouring regions beyond the island.[98] This kingdom sent diplomatic missions to the English court as early as 1820 and interacted with the British government as equals, with both sides seeking advantage from the relationship.[99]

However, mission history inevitably engages in representations of the *other*, whether they be in colonial settings or not. It is an account of the interactions of Europeans and North Americans with the recipients of mission, which in recent history have been the peoples of the majority South. It deals with relationships between largely white missionaries and non-white recipients of missionary endeavours. It also deals with relationships between subjects of powerful empires and the colonised peoples of those empires. While the binaries I have described are not as black and white as they might appear, it is still important to acknowledge the nature of the relationship. The imbalance of power, the presumption of European superiority and the role of racism underpinning these relationships must not be ignored or wished away. None of these are pleasant realities and we might like to think we are no longer subject to them, but it would be foolish to pretend they have not been influential factors in shaping missions and indeed mission historiography. How the idea of European superiority has coloured representations of non-Europeans, and in so doing reinforced those assumptions of superiority, needs to be made explicit, both in examining mission histories of the past and as part of writing mission history today. The work of Edward Said needs to be taken seriously by the mission historian because of the nature of the subject material and the power relations inevitably embedded in them. An approach that examines narrative representations and reads between the lines of the discourses of power not only helps avoid reproducing metropolitan dominant discourses of mission, it also helps uncover the indigenous voice. "Reading against the grain" as Spivak calls it, allows the unseen and unheard voices of the missionary narrative to be made visible.[100] It also enables the complexities of relationships to be discerned. There were missionaries who did not conform to type and who refused to believe or proclaim the superiority of European culture, some indeed actively opposed

97 Ibid., p. 59.

98 Larson, "Literacy and Power in Madagascar", p. 3.

99 However, a focus on imperialism, both British and Merina, can be revealing. The work of Campbell, Berg and Ellis, in particular Campbell's focus on economic history, reveals the complex connections between imperial rivalries and missionaries which mission biographies, histories and LMS annual reports either do not reveal or gloss over without comment (e.g.1890s listing examples of scholars being drafted). Of particular interest is the way in which the Merina government utilised the missions and their schools in the 1880s to source conscripts for their wars with France with the apparent cooperation and approval of the missionaries.

100 C. G. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271-313.

colonial policies.[101] Such a reading also uncovers how missionaries were themselves changed by their encounters. It reveals those converts who were more English than the English and those who used the tools of European culture to resist its power. It enables the impact of missionary representations on the culture of the metropole to be identified as well, as MacKenzie, Hall and Thorne have demonstrated.[102]

These subtleties are lost without sensitive readings which acknowledge the interplay of race and power.[103] Mary Louise Pratt has demonstrated successfully how travelogues of Europeans can be mined for this kind of insight into the "contact zone" between Europeans and the Other. How much more can be learned by turning attention to the mass of missionary records with similarly careful reading?[104] Elbourne's impressive study of the LMS in the Cape colony succeeds in reconstructing indigenous perspectives through a deliberate reading of western sources that notes indigenous voices' presence and absence.[105] J. D. Y. Peel advocated a similarly careful reading of primary material in missionary archives. He found great value in reading the unpublished journal extracts sent to the CMS Secretary of the Parent Committee written by "native agents", or local evangelists.[106] Frederiks advocates using mission archives with "a sensitivity towards the contribution of groups marginalized by the dominant reading of history", in particular prioritizing local agent's records in mission archives.[107] Modern histories of mission need to adopt approaches that ensure that the shadow of the missionary no longer obscures the indigenous Christianity that has always been asserting and forming itself, often in spite of the missionary.[108]

V: Returning to the events of 1818

One person who survived the 1818 episode of malaria that hit the LMS mission with such devastating consequences, but who is never mentioned in any

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101 Skeie, *Building God's Kingdom*, p. 6.

102 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and The Making Of An Imperial Culture In Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); John M. MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860*, p. 3.

103 Cf. Nielssen, Okkenhau and Skeie, "Introduction", in *Protestant Missions and Local Encounters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, p. 5.

104 Cf. Holtrop, "Landscape Retrieved: On Mission and Missiology", pp. 66-67.

105 E. Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

106 J. D. Y. Peel, "Problems and opportunities in an anthropologist's use of a missionary archive", pp. 70-94.

107 Frederiks, "Mission or Submission. From mission history towards an intercultural history of Christianity: case-study The Gambia", p. 82.

108 Nielssen, Okkenhaug and Skeie in *Protestant Missions and Local Encounters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, p. 14 advocate studying why European mission histories, even some still today, underplay or exclude local agency.

of the published accounts of the first mission, is Joseph, a slave translator who accompanied the missionaries from Mauritius in 1818 at the behest of the Governor. He was very likely a Malagasy sold into slavery and bound for a life of a plantation slave abroad when intercepted by the Royal Navy and "freed" in Mauritius. As such he would have become a government "apprentice" able to claim freedom after a period of seven to fourteen years of indentured government service. He would have spoken French Creole and Malagasy and possibly some English. His presence can be read in the missionary archive but it needs to be a deliberate reading to seek him out, one which recognises the distorting power of mission discourses both archival and published to ignore and write over indigenous stories. For example, Jones, in writing about the skill of his wife to win the affection of the locals mentions "she would sit with them and converse with them *through an interpreter* which highly pleased them".[109] How easy it is to read that sentence and focus on the tragedy of a young missionary's wife seemingly so well adapted to her new environment whose life was cut short. And yet how easy also never to think about who the interpreter was and what her or his involvement in the mission might have been. Missionary letters mention two slaves accompanying Jones and his wife from Mauritius as translators and another translator also called Joseph accompanied the Bevan family. In 1821 Griffiths also had a slave translator from Mauritius accompany him.

Jones's Joseph is mentioned again in correspondence in 1831 when Jones asks the Governor of Mauritius whether, as he is departing Madagascar, he should bring the slave translator back to Mauritius.

> I should like to have the instructions of His Excellency the Governor, whether I am to take him back with me to the Mauritius or leave him here with his relations. He is now an old man about 50 or 60 years of age, and I do not think he would be able to walk down to Tamatave. He has been, on the whole, a good and useful servant; and if I return to the Mauritius before the end of this year, as I intend, I should like him to remain, under oversight of my brother Missionaries, to take charge of what I shall leave in the country. I shall be much obliged to you to state the case to his Excellency: and please to let me know his instruction relative thereto, which I shall attend to.[110]

We do not know what the answer was or what happened to Joseph who had clearly been an integral part of the LMS mission and served it steadfastly from its very beginning in 1818 until at least 1831, possibly longer. His service is all the more remarkable when the tours of duty of European missionaries are consulted. Apart from Jones, Griffiths and his wife Mary Griffiths and Chick the blacksmith, no other person associated with the early mission served so long. Most missionaries

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109 Quoted in Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar*, p. 56.

110 David Jones to Viret, Tananarivo, 5 January 1830, MNA HB 20, 2-3 quoted in Larson, "Promiscuous translation: working the word at Antananarivo", pp. 94.

lasted an average of five years, some returning home within a year.[111] The other translators who accompanied missionaries have not been identified nor their stories told. A deliberate reading of the mission archive for traces of these crucial individuals needs to be carried out. Reading against the grain of the archive and seeking out the silences in the mission story as much as the loud triumphant cries of missionaries is vital for a clearer understanding of what happened. It is likely that their stories are mere traces in the missionary record and will never be complete.[112] So easily overlooked by missionary historians, it is, however, individuals such as these whose story a postcolonial analysis could begin to uncover, and which could challenge the assumed centrality of European missionaries to mission histories. A careful reading of oral history, despite the dynamic and shifting nature of such discourses and the impact of literacy on shaping memories, is another way of potentially accessing hidden stories, particularly of local evangelists, often female, and their role in spreading, and making indigenous, the new religion.[113] It is rare however to find mission historians prepared to excavate such local sources.

Read any of the missionary histories of the first and second missions to Madagascar and you will not find mention of Joseph. Instead you will read of heroic young missionaries who single-handedly established a mission, set up schools, preached to large congregations and translated the Bible between 1820 and 1836 without fully understanding or speaking Malagasy until about 1824 onwards.[114] Their indebtedness to translator slaves and the translation and teaching work of their first students is glossed over, or absent all together. Also impossible to see from the mission histories, is the ways in which these converts, visible and not so visible, contextualised and translated in cultural terms, the signs of Christianity, in terms familiar and lasting, so that two hundred years on, *Malagasy Christianity* can be celebrated, as well as the efforts of individuals such as Jones and Bevan. Interdisciplinary and postcolonial studies of missions enable these wider actors and intercultural processes to be actively sought and more easily discerned.

RACHEL A. RAKOTONIRINA

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111 Campbell, *David Griffiths and the Missionary "History of Madagascar"*, pp. 45-46.

112 E. Elbourne, argues that "the centrality of Africans to the spread of Christianity means that much of the early history of the mission is unrecoverable". E. Elbourne,"Word Made Flesh: Christianity, Modernity, and Cultural Colonialism in the Work of Jean and John Comaroff", p. 450.

113 F. Raison-Jourde and G. M. Berg argue that the oral tradition of Imerina is a problematic source for the study of nineteenth century history. They suggest that oral traditions still extant have, since the middle of the nineteenth century, been distorted and corrupted by the impact of western literature introduced by the missionaries and dominated by Merina and French preoccupations. Cf. F. Raison, "Le travail missionnaire sur les formes de la culture orale a Madagascar entre 1820 et 1886", *Omaly sy Anio*, 15 (1982), pp. 33-52; G. M. Berg, "The Myth of Racial Strife and Merina King lists: The Transformation of Texts", in *History in Africa*, 2 (1977), pp. 1-30; P. M. Larson, "Multiple Narratives, Gendered Voices: Remembering the Past in Highland Central Madagascar", in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 28/2 (1995), pp. 2, 304.

114 Larson, "Promiscuous translation", pp. 89-112.

"THE DEAR AUTHOR": THOMAS GIBBONS AND HIS DIARY[1]

The Diary of Revd Thomas Gibbons, DD (1720-1785), a leading figure among London Independent ministers after the death of Isaac Watts, was a gift to the Congregational Library from its main benefactor, Joshua Wilson. It has never been edited, published or digitised, although some editing work was started by the late Edwin Welch, with help from Geoffrey Nuttall, and this was used when preparing Gibbons's entry for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.[2] Extracts from the Diary were published in the early volumes of the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*[3] and these, so far, are as much as has been publicly available.

Words on a fly-leaf by an early but unknown hand describe the Diary as "running from November 29, 1749 to February 17, 1785, the Day the Dear Author was struck with a Palsy". The wording is some mark of the regard, even affection, in which Gibbons was held by contemporaries. The Diary is half-bound in calf and 494 folio-sized pages in length, with double columns on each page, and there are several more pages of appendices: a formidable manuscript. Gibbons's handwriting is usually clear and he rarely uses shorthand. The entries are factual and to the point, occasionally in times of stress and illness emotional or reflective. It is full of the names of those he meets or does business with, religious and political, offering a kind of eighteenth century Dissenting and Whig glossary. It gives a rare immediate view of the daily duties of an eighteenth century Dissenting minister and of contemporary religious practice among Independents.

The Diary covers most of Gibbons's life-time ministry of the Independent meeting in Haberdashers' Hall in the City of London. He was also a tutor at Homerton Dissenting Academy, and Sunday or weekday lecturer for three religious charities, a hymn writer and composer of religious verse, the author of several books including the first biography of Isaac Watts, a leading member of the Dissenting Deputies and an inveterate lobbyist. He had an ordered domestic life but was troubled by a wayward son and an insane brother. The Diary shows Gibbons a humane and articulate observer, incredibly busy in his vocation, conscious of living under and dependent on grace, and not afraid of weekly self-assessments as a servant of God.

I: Provenance and first entry

On a separate sheet of paper before the Diary begins there is a record of how the Diary came to be in the Congregational Library. It is mainly in the hand of

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1 I would like to record the encouragement and help of Dr David Wykes both now and much earlier when he asked me to continue the editing work on the Diary begun by Dr Edwin Welch. This extended to about the first half of the Diary and the bundle of papers included important contributions by Dr Geoffrey Nuttall.

2 H. C. G. Matthews and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [hereafter *ODNB*], 22, pp. 38-39.

3 W. H. Summers, "Dr. Thomas Gibbons' Diary", *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, I (1901-4), pp. 313-329; 380-397; II (1905-6), pp. 22-38.

Revd J. Mann, pastor of a Baptist church in Maze Pond, Borough, London. It seems that Thomas, the son of Dr Gibbons, had married the aunt of one of Mann's neighbours, a Mrs Hodges, who came by the Diary on Thomas's death. Mann bought it from her on behalf of William Upcott, a librarian and noted antiquarian, who expressed a wish that the Diary should eventually be placed in the newly formed Congregational Library in Bloomfield Street, Finsbury. Joshua Wilson then records in his hand that he acquired the Diary from Mr Upcott. The Library's stamp shows the Diary was among the books which were passed to the Library by his widow on Joshua Wilson's death in 1876.

The first entry in the actual Diary, on 28 November 1749, is a very long extract from Bishop Hopkins's *On the Vanity of the World*. It must have taken Gibbons a whole morning to copy it. Its drift is unclear, though if Gibbons was at first uncertain as to the purpose of his Diary, a record of his daily life, or a Journal in the form of a Common Place Book, this extract is the only entry in the whole of the Diary in the latter form.[4] In what follows, Diary date references are shown in brackets if not indicated in the text.

II: Family

Gibbons's father was also a Thomas Gibbons and an Independent minister, first at Olney, when Thomas was born in 1720, and later at Royston. (Gibbons's birthplace was at Reach, near Newmarket, where his mother was lying in). The Diary records several visits from London to see his father at Royston and he notes his father's "dangerous illness" on 21 November 1751, but his death not until 13 April 1757. Gibbons then brought his widowed mother, Grace, to live in Bethnal Green where he visits her frequently until her death (4 February 1764). He also had an uncle who was an Independent minister, mentioned in the Diary on his death. "Went to Chelmsford in the Machine to attend the funeral sermon for my Uncle. Rev John Gibbons" (15 October 1765). ("Machine" was his usual word for a stagecoach, though faster ones were a "Flier").

On one visit to his father at Royston, Gibbons preached at the funeral of his sister Ann, a girl of 17, "with my brother-in-law Mr Atkins ... to a numerous and attentive auditory ... I hope it was not a lost season either to the Family or the Congregation" (3 October 1752). "Brother-in-law" suggests Gibbons had another sister besides Ann, though she is not named. He had had at least one further sister, the wife of a London bookseller, who was killed in a post chaise accident near Bath in the summer of 1747, too early for the Diary.[5] Later, Gibbons gave the charge at Atkins's ordination and his father preached (15 October 1752).

The Diary mentions two brothers, Edward and Samuel. Edward marries: "Meet my brother Edward at Doctors Commons and performed the part of father at his

4 Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690), Bishop of Derry (1681-1689). Hopkins was a seventeenth century Irish Bishop noted mainly for another work, *An Exposition of the Ten Commandments, with other sermons* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, 1692).

5 G. F. Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge 1702-1751* (London: Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 1979) [hereafter Doddridge], Letter 1263.

marriage to Mrs Bethia Collier of Uxbridge" (12 February 1753). Edward was later ordained at Uxbridge (8 August 1753) and his death there is noted on 21 December 1760. There is a terse reference to his brother Samuel's insanity (18 June 1756) and then on 23 August 1757, "Went with my Brother to Mrs Davies who in cases of madness makes use of oils and talked to her about Terms in behalf of my poor disordered Brother". Other references indicate Samuel was moved between institutions when not cared for at home at Royston and ended in Guy's Hospital.

Gibbons's wife, Hannah Shuttlewood, was the daughter and granddaughter of Independent ministers. Her father, John Shuttlewood was minister of Goodman's Field, in London. Her grandfather, another John Shuttlewood, had been ejected from Raunston in Leicestershire in 1662 and Gibbons supplied the text of a long entry for him in Samuel Palmer's *The Nonconformist's Memorial*[6] (4 April 1775). Philip Doddridge notes disapprovingly that Hannah was "twice his own age and of no fortune",[7] as if a fortune would have made Gibbons's marriage to Hannah more understandable. Thomas was 24 when they married in 1744 and it is improbable that Hannah was anywhere near 48 as she bore four children, the last in 1752, and briefly outlived Gibbons. It seems that they had promised to marry each other when they were quite young and Gibbons kept to it even though as they grew up Hannah was noticeably older. Hannah is nevertheless a silent presence in the Diary.

Their children were all boys. Nathaniel, "a most desirable child", died of smallpox (18 November 1751). There were fears about another child (he must have been Thomas) on 21 November but it transpired that he had whooping cough. It was on this day, however, that Gibbons heard that his father was dangerously ill, and he compares his lot with Job. A new boy was born the following year (22 April 1752) and was baptised Samuel on 31 May. A second Nathaniel died aged 11 on 28 May 1764, "a child of remarkably fine capacity and of most serious and manly turn of mind". Gibbons preached on Nathaniel's death on the following Sunday afternoon and published the sermon, "Divine Glories displayed in Babes and Sucklings".

Two were left. Gibbons takes Samuel, the younger, to watch him be inoculated (2 June 1766), a new kind of medical procedure that would anyway interest him. An accident to Samuel, by now older, is recorded somewhat after the event: "Waited on Mr Onslow in Relation to obtaining a Protection for a Waterman that saved my son Samuel from drowning about two years ago" (2 October 1770).

This was George Onslow, the son of Arthur Onslow, Speaker of the House of Commons,[8] who is said to have been Gibbons's friend. Arthur Onslow was notable as an uncorrupt politician in an age of political corruption. His son George, who followed his father as MP for Surrey, and was more of a placeman, proved helpful to Gibbons as now, but also later when Dissenters needed to enlist political support. The Protection is explained a fortnight later:

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6 (London: Printed for Alexander Hogg, 1778), II, p. 123.

7 Doddridge, Letter 990.

8 *ODNB*, 41, pp. 873-875.

> Carried the Protection from the Lords of the Admiralty obtained by my kind friend George Onslow to Thomas Stevens, the Waterman who saved my second son Samuel from drowning this day two years. A very acceptable Present to a Man who was in Fear of being pressed and durst not stir abroad. The Lord sanctify the merciful Event to himself and family (17 October 1770).

Gibbons did even more for the waterman than save him from the pressgang: "Went to Lord Onslow's ... He was so kind as to grant me a Badge for a Waterman whom I recommended to him for ... saving my son Samuel's life" (20 November 1776).[9] Samuel did not repay this endeavour. When older he proved incapable of holding down a job and after several misadventures, including being bought out of the army, and brought back from America, he disappears from the Diary.

By contrast, the older son, Thomas, comes to the fore in the later part of the Diary when his father is beginning to fail. Thomas is by then a bank clerk in London and attends Haberdashers' Hall (15 July 1784). The year before there is an account of a family outing with Thomas, in which Samuel appears to have been forgotten. "Went with my wife, Son, Daughter-in-Law, and Grand-daughter to Greenwich. Saw the Painted Hall" (22 September 1783). There was another family outing (2 September 1784) in a hired coach to Greenwich, again with a reference to Thomas as if he were the only son. It is Thomas, of course, who saved the Diary.

III: Ministry

Gibbons was ordained at Haberdashers' Hall on 27 October 1743, six years before he opened the Diary. He had been trained for the ministry at Deptford Dissenting Academy. After having had the temerity to complain about Abraham Taylor's teaching,[10] he completed his studies under John Eames at Moorfields. Isaac Watts was among his examiners.

It is perhaps necessary to stress how young Gibbons was when he opened his Diary and we meet him as a person. At 29 and six years into his ministry, he was still learning the part and, with young children at home, and in indifferent health, lacking in confidence.

> I have I believe employed myself in preaching too much and studying too little. My weekly exercise together with double preparation for the Lord's Day demand much of my time. My constitution is but weak; many a day I do lose, or almost lose, through the feebleness of nature ... (24 March 1750).

The public figure he was to become is not recognisable here. He had more bouts of bad health in 1751 and 1753, and yet we immediately see how busy he managed

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9 George Onslow (1731-1814) was now Earl of Onslow, a title inherited from a cousin.

10 John Waddington, *Congregational History, 1700-1800* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1876), pp. 266-267.

to be in this early period. After 1753 he does not mention serious ill health again until his mind clouds towards the end of his life.

His ministry was centred on the sermon, and the biblical text of every sermon preached is noted in the Diary. The texts are what marks one Sunday from another, rather than the Christian seasons. The services at Haberdashers' Hall are in the morning and the afternoon, with a service of preparation on Fridays for Communion Sundays which appear to be held monthly. He follows the puritan custom of assessing his "improvement" weekly, which he takes to be the time he devotes to study, and this is usually 25 to 30 hours. On 25 November 1763, twenty years into his ministry, he counts his sermons: "Surveyed my sermons and found them 1123". No doubt some were used twice or more, and others discarded, but it is quite a tally.

The second prominent aspect of his ministry is visitation. Visiting days are marked "VD" in the Diary and are usually early in the week. He records later that visiting is for "prayer and thanksgiving on various occasions, such as an intended journey, removal, illness or convalescence, an approaching delivery" (8 July 1760). Journeying in the eighteenth century was not undertaken lightly.

Another reason for visitation is private baptism, which from the Diary's evidence was Gibbons's usual practice, though public baptism on Sundays is occasionally noted, for example on Sunday 28 November 1756. The following entry, with its seemingly incongruous connection between eating and baptising, is a reminder that very often Gibbons also ate with those he visited: "Dined with Mr John Field. Baptised his son John" (27 September 1765). Most visits would be on foot and dining at midday with a member of his flock was a convenience as well as added pastoral connection. The Gibbons lived on the edge of the City, first at 2 Bunhill Row, then in Hoxton Square from 2 April 1754, both very Dissenting addresses. Haberdashers' Hall was in Staining Lane in Cheapside, perhaps a thirty minute walk from either location.

While most visits are to named members of the congregation, "Abroad on Business" is occasionally used. On occasion, who is visited is given but the business concealed. "Visit Mr Alexander, the Sheriff of the City, on a particular affair" (15 November 1750). A few visits have a very serious purpose. "Visited by Desire an unhappy man, Mr Joshua West, confined in the Poultry Compter for defrauding the Bank" (27 November 1750). West is moved to Newgate, with a Mr Baker, on 10 December and Gibbons visits them daily until their death warrants are signed. On 29 December he takes "a mournful leave" of Baker, but West is reprieved at least for the present. Another person sends for him. "Attended by his desire Mr Parsons at Newgate" (12 February 1751). The offence or outcome is not revealed. On a later walk he sees prisoners go from Newgate to execution. "What thanks to Heaven for restraining Grace ..." (3 October 1752). It is not clear whether these men who sent for him belonged to Haberdashers' Hall or if Gibbons was known as someone of influence. He seems to have been well received in the City. His visit to the Sheriff shows this, and he attended the Lord Mayor's Banquet: "Supped at the Lord Mayor's Feast" (29 October 1750). This kind of visiting continues, even when away from London. On a visit to Ipswich (20 August 1754), he goes to see

"two malefactors under sentence of death", presumably to pray with them. Or this: "To Newgate. Endeavoured to instruct a poor woman confined there under charge for the murder of her Bastard child" (26 November 1762).

To balance these and other visits to prisons there are two happy and unusual encounters, both of which are also reminders of how recent the seventeenth century was for Gibbons. On 15 September 1752 he meets a Mrs Foster, grand-daughter of John Milton, and on 12 March 1753 in Uxbridge, "visited and prayed with one Mrs Reynolds, a woman of 101 years, and baptised by Mr Baxter at Kidderminster. Her conversation very serious and though poor she is full of thankfulness for Divine Mercy".

The name Cromwell figures often in the early pages of the Diary as contemporary members of the family attended Haberdashers' Hall, including a number of brothers who were great-grandsons of the Lord Protector. Gibbons dines with Richard Cromwell, a solicitor, on 28 May 1751. On 13 March 1752, "Go to Stratford to meet the corpse of Mrs Cromwell, late wife of William". The funeral is at Bunhill Fields and on the Sunday afternoon following he preached "suited to her decease". William Cromwell has a later further loss: "Spent time in prayer with Mr William Cromwell on the Death of his Brother, Mr Henry Cromwell, this day" (5 January 1769). He prays at another Mrs Cromwell's (the widow of another brother, Thomas) "on account of her son Oliver going into Apprenticeship"[11] (8 November 1756). He prays with her again much later on the death of her son Thomas, a lieutenant in the East India Company (26 January 1772).

Haberdashers' Hall was a generous supporter of the Congregational Fund, the London-based body which supported poorer ministers in the country. After a collection for the Fund in March 1753, he notes "£60 to £70 annually, the morning collection greater than the afternoon", some indication of the congregation's size, or wealth, but also perhaps of the pattern of attendance. Gibbons was a member of the Congregational Fund board and frequently notes his attendance at their meetings.

Gibbons seems to have been spared much involvement in the management or running of the church. "Met young men in the evening" (17 May 1751) is obviously pastoral, and frequent in the early days of his ministry when he too was young. But "Met the Brethren of the Church at Canonbury House and dined ... a pleasant annual occasion" (1 August 1753) suggests there was an annual deacons' meeting when the minister was invited. It seems to have been a convivial evening in Islington, well away from the City, at a fine house still then in fields and built on the site of the country retreat of the Priors of St Bartholomew's until the Dissolution. As with the Abneys at Abney Park, Stoke Newington, who, since Watts's death, looked pastorally to Gibbons, it is a reminder that City churches often drew their membership from among those who could attend from well outside the City. The importance of the Abneys to Gibbons is revealed when Lady Abney died (12 January 1750). Gibbons preached to the Abney household twice on

11 Said to be the last Cromwell in direct male line from Oliver Cromwell. He took the line just into the nineteenth century, dying in 1802.

21 January, at the funeral on 25 January, and in memoriam at Haberdashers' Hall on the following Sunday. This was no doubt due to Lady Abney's place in Isaac Watts's life and Gibbons's reverence for him and for her.

If preaching and visiting were the two main aspects of Gibbons's ministry, composing hymns and religious verse was for him a third way of expressing his religious faith. Hymns and elegies appear singly and in collections among the 46 publications claimed for him at the end of his life.[12] Two hymns are mentioned in the Diary (14 April and 17 May 1751), "The Sinner's Security" and "To God the Preserver". The first had been sung that day at the afternoon service. A collection of Gibbons's hymns was published later in his ministry, in 1769: *Hymns Adapted to Divine Worship.* This is one verse taken at random:

> O let us make the Lord
> Our Truth Our Fear Our Love
> And by the Duty of our Lives
> Our poor Affections prove.

The hymns are based on identified passages of the Old and New Testaments and are written in short, long and common metres. Bravely, he includes some hymns by others in the collection, including some by Watts not published before his death, and one by Joseph Addison which stands out.

Two religious elegies by Gibbons, one for inclusion in Philip Doddridge's *Life of Gardiner* and one for publication at the end of David Jennings's funeral sermon on Watts, are mentioned in Doddridge's correspondence.[13]

A collection of Gibbons's religious verse, *Juvenilia*, was published in 1750 and dedicated to the Countess of Huntingdon. Doddridge, George Whitefield and Onslow were among the 500 or so subscribers, a remarkable show of support for his first book. In the preface Gibbons confesses: "Poetry I admit has been my favourite Amusement". Though there are elegies in the collection, there are several shorter poems dedicated to individuals.

At least one is not religious and offers a rare glimpse of Gibbons at ease. *A Journey from Newington to Royston* in May 1744 describes his journey by horse up the Lea valley and the New River to Ware, with a mid-day meal at the Hoddesdon Bull (still there) and supper at Puckridge, conversations with a stranger and later with Dutch sailors in a tavern, a sighting of Ely cathedral tower on arrival at his father's home, and recollections of boyhood there. It begins:

> Sweet was the Morning Blush of Day
> I from my downy Pillow rose ...

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12 A detailed bibliography is given in W. Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster and Southwark*, III (London: Printed for the author, 1808), pp. 180-182.

13 Doddridge, Letters 1221, 1440 and 1455.

As this publication and its support indicate, young as he was, Gibbons had come to notice. He appears to have visited Lady Huntingdon in the winter of 1747/8 and met her approval (to Whitefield's delight),[14] and again during a holiday in the Midlands recorded in the Diary in August 1750, perhaps to secure her agreement to the dedication of *Juvenilia*. He also dedicated a much later book to her, *Female Worthies, or The Lives of Eminently Pious Women*, a series of short biographies, published in 1777.

Philip Doddridge died in 1751 and was in failing health for a time beforehand. Unsurprisingly the Diary, starting in late 1749, carries no record of meetings with him. However, Doddridge's correspondence shows the pair did meet earlier when visiting Isaac Watts and, as already noted, Doddridge was interested in him and whom he married, and admired and employed his talent for religious verse. The first real entry in the Diary, on 29 November 1749, "Death of Miss Margaret Cooke", records the death of the daughter of one of Doddridge's friends whom Gibbons had met at Watts's bedside. "Supped with Mrs Doddridge", now a widow, on 19 August 1753, is a sad final reference.

George Whitefield does figure in the Diary, but the entries on 2 April 1750, when they breakfasted together, and on 23 April the same year, do not record their discussions. Gibbons heard Whitefield preach at the Tabernacle on 3 May 1750. On 15 January 1753, they met again in company with two visitors from New Jersey. One of the visitors, Samuel Davies, had preached for Gibbons on the previous Sunday. The next record of a meeting with Whitefield is not until 1769 when Gibbons was in Deal to deliver the charge at an ordination. A ship, "The Friendship", was "lying in the Downs" and was about to carry Whitefield to South Carolina. Gibbons went on board to say farewell (12 September 1769). He records hearing of Whitefield's death at Newburyport, Massachusetts, the following year (5 November 1770).

The reason for Davies's visit in 1753 becomes apparent later. He was "soliciting charity for his errand into Great Britain, to wit, that of founding a College in New Jersey" (26 April 1754). A gift of 40 guineas is immediately made by the Haberdashers' Hall congregation. Gibbons continued to help this cause, the forerunner of Princeton University, and was awarded an MA by the college in 1760. The next year, "Preached on occasion of the death of Rev Mr Samuel Davies, late President of the College in New Jersey, a most excellent man and my intimate Friend" (26 July 1761).

Gibbons's complaint at his weak constitution when he began his Diary is followed by a number of dramatic accounts of illness during his early ministry.

> My illness began on Tuesday 16th [April 1751] ... Can I forget how solitarily and sadly I spent part of Tuesday evening under great Indisposition of Body and in awful Apprehension of the Calamities that might be at the Door ... My children innocently sporting about filled my Spirit with anguish ... my Partner in Life might soon know the bitter Name of Widow ...

14 Doddridge, Letter 1434.

But he recovers and in May spends a week in Cambridge going on horseback. On his return he writes the hymn "God the Preserver", already mentioned. In September he holidays in Royston, where his father is now an invalid. It is a restful time. He makes only one journey, to Northampton, to baptise Susanna, the daughter of a Mr Bunyan. In the spring of 1752 he has recurrent ill-health, concluding with a sore throat which he cannot shift, a debilitating and frustrating complaint for a preacher. It brings him so low that he composes his own Epitaph, expressed in the conventional form, but including this passage: "after a Life of various Disorders of the Body, with some intervals of Health, and various Distempers of the Soul, with some good sign of Divine care". This is morbid and seems to exaggerate the number of his illnesses, but it is of a piece with his earlier fears of imminent death and the consequences for his family. In 1753 there is clear evidence of panic attacks or depression. He is assailed while preaching "with great weakness, terror and confusion" and is "sunk into gloom and disillusion" (11 October). He consults his doctor on this occasion, but what can he do but cup him?

This was not an easy time, with the death of a child, his father's grave illness, a second sister's death and perhaps early signs of his brother's disordered mind, on top of a vigorous and active ministry, but one still in its early years. It is merciful that there is no later recorded return of depression and no reports of serious illness, until his mind clouds shortly before his death. Thirty years on, in Gibbons's funeral sermon, the preacher noted he was "free of that dejection of spirit which spreads gloom over the soul".[15]

IV: Tutor and Lecturer

Even before he became a tutor Gibbons attended the "trials" of students (2 July 1750, 7 February and 25 March 1751). The trials consisted of a sermon or sermons preached by the students in the presence of their tutors. Success here allowed them to conclude their studies and seek a pastorate.

Gibbons was appointed a tutor at the Mile End Dissenting Academy in 1754, chosen jointly by the Congregational Fund and the King's Head Society (21 and 22 May). He was to teach Ethics, Metaphysics and Rhetoric, and pulpit style. He notes the removal of the Academy to Homerton on 11 December 1754. Less than a year in, the appointment caused him to question the balance of his time devoted respectively to preaching and teaching. "I design therefore, may God smile upon my Design ... to prepare my sermons as the first Work of the week and then to spend what other time remains in preparing Lectures" (1 March 1755). The concern probably arose because of his decision to concentrate immediately on writing all the lectures he would ever need. He records delivering the last lecture of the four-year course on 26 May 1758:

15 Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses*, III, pp. 182-3.

> Blessed be God that poorly as I was I finished the last Lecture of the four-year course of Lectures at the Academy and hereby I have acquired a sett of Lectures for my whole future life, or so long as I may continue the tutorship.

No revision or new ideas were contemplated, despite his continuing studies. He was still in post at his death. In an appendix to the Diary he names the students who passed through his hands. The number he taught and his long years of teaching are some measure of Gibbons's influence on Independency and the nature of eighteenth century ministry.

This is shown immediately by the increasing number of ordinations he attends, the charges he gives, and the increased distance he travels to attend them. For an ordination in the Isle of Wight, for example: "Set out this morning in the flying Machine for Portsmouth, 72 miles. Reached the place in the evening" (8 July 1760). In 1766 he attended five settlements or ordinations. This one may be of particular interest as indicating the breadth of belief among Dissenters happily and unitedly engaged in an ordination.

> Ordination of Rev Rice Harris to a joint pastorate with Dr Earle [Hanover Street, Long Acre]. Mr Kippis prayed and read. I prayed. Mr Savage preached. Mr Spilsbury asked the Questions. Dr Earle prayed over Mr Harris. Mr Furneaux gave the Charge (28 May 1766).

Harris had been Furneaux's assistant at Clapham, became a member of the Presbyterian Fund board and a trustee of Dr Williams's Library, as did Kippis. Harris and Furneaux were sometime Coward trustees, Kippis a tutor in one of the Trust's Academies. These three were Rational Dissenters of differing persuasions, Arian or Socinian. Furneaux, a man of extraordinary intellect, was renowned as a fighter for Dissenters' civil liberties and would join Gibbons later in the campaign against Subscription. In this company, alongside Savage certainly, and perhaps the other two, Gibbons would count as a moderate Calvinist.

A second example shows Gibbons attending the ordination of one of his own students.

> Attended Mr Popplewell's Ordination. I prayed and introduced the Work. Mr Winter prayed the ordination prayer. Mr Baker prayed. Dr Conder preached. Mr Brewer prayed. Mr Hitchen gave the Charge and Mr Popplewell concluded (20 February 1771).

Conder and Hitchen were colleagues in the Academy. Other than "the Work", sometimes "the Work of the Day", which may be Gibbons's own, the terminology and order of ordinations would be found today. As today ordinations were in the church to which the ordinand had been called.

The extra work as tutor did not cause him to decline lecture-ships. Already Sunday evening Lecturer at Mugwell Street (20 February 1759), he received news on 5 December 1761 that he had been chosen as the St Helen's Friday lecturer. On

9 December 1761 he was chosen as a merchants' lecturer at Pinners' Hall. Both these were in the room of the late Dr John Guyse, one of the four original Coward trustees. Gibbons comments: "It is somewhat remarkable that I should be chosen to succeed Dr Guyse in both these lectureships ... He was a truly great and good man".

The Mugwell Street lectureship was in the gift of that meeting. The St Helen's lectureship was in the gift of the Coward Trust. Gibbons quotes the voting in the Pinners' Hall case (9 December 1761), and it offers an independent view of the regard in which Gibbons was now held by his contemporaries. He led the field on the first round with 56 votes and polled 87 to 63 in the run-off. The lectureships were held until 1781, 1774 and 1777 respectively. An appendix to the Diary is devoted to the biblical texts chosen for the lectures.

Gibbons now learnt that he was made Doctor of Divinity by Aberdeen University (4 January 1765), a traditional honour and mark of respect for learned English Dissenters who were unable to matriculate at Oxford or graduate at Cambridge.

V: Experiences and interests

Gibbons experienced an earthquake on 8 February 1750:

> This Day I was sitting in my Study with a volume of Mr Baxter's before me, I felt a violent convulsion of the House, as if it would have tumbled instantly about my head. I find it is generally believed to have been an Earthquake.

He refers to much "Violence and Terror" in the cities of London and Westminster and concludes, "May it be sanctified to the Reformation of a dissolute and thoughtless Age ... and as to myself, may I be ... more diligent in my Preparation for death". Although the shock and fear were widespread, most damage to buildings was in the East End. There was an aftershock a month later, when Gibbons "awoke to windows clattering about me" (8 March 1750). Much more damage was done to buildings, some as near to Gibbons's house as in Old Street. "How awful are these Monitions of the Divine anger. Lord, may I be safe in that day when Thou shalt send death to me."

A severe thunderstorm provoked this:

> More damage was done by this Tempest perhaps [than] by any done in the memory of man ... many lives lost by lightning and the destruction of buildings. How great and awful the Power of the Deity! Who shall not fear before Him? (14 July 1773).

The next day, a Sunday, he preaches from Job 37:5 ("God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he which we cannot comprehend").

More peaceably, he takes an interest in natural wonders and science generally. "Saw eclipse of the Sun this morning ... Preached in the afternoon from Psalm 148, 'Praise Him from the Heavens' on the occasion" (1 April 1764). "Heard the

Harveian Oration at the College of Physicians" (18 October 1768), in honour of William Harvey who had discovered the circulation of blood. "Saw in the evening through a telescope the Transit of Venus" (3 June 1769). "Eclipse of the Moon ... very remarkable" (30 July 1776). "Attended at a Dissection of the human body by Mr Young" (9 January 1777). Natural wonders and discoveries in science are seen as revelations of God's hidden creation. There are several visits to collections of "curiosities" in museums and houses, and the word is perhaps apt in describing this side of Gibbons, but in a serious religious vein. A reminder of the times is that Gibbons's birthday moved to 11 June in 1755, from 31 May, because the Gregorian Calendar was adopted that year in place of the Julian calendar.

He had his portrait painted: "To Covent Garden to Mr Webster's, to sit a second time for my Picture" (28 April 1761). An engraving in Wilson[16] shows Gibbons with well-rounded shoulders suggesting a stocky figure. He has an intelligent face with kind eyes and a prominent nose. He is wearing a wig, a gown and bands.

In 1775 Gibbons published *An English Version of the Latin Epitaphs in the Nonconformists' Memorial*, Samuel Palmer's work of the same year. He added a poem "dedicated to the two thousand ministers ejected or silenced in 1662". It shows, perhaps unsurprisingly for a minister of his generation, a facility in Latin translation. It is a reminder of his old fascination with epitaphs.

There are no references to slavery in the Diary though he did meet someone who had been taken into slavery when a girl, the "Black Poetess", Phillis Wheatley.[17] He says of her only, "A Negro young woman of fine genius and very becoming Behaviour" (4 March 1773). She had been rescued from slavery and educated by American friends of Whitefield, who gave her as her Christian name (insensitively or by her own choice?) the name of the slave ship which had brought her from The Gambia. Her elegy on the death of George Whitefield pleased the Countess of Huntingdon and it was perhaps she who sent her to meet a fellow elegist. Phillis was in London seeking (and finding) a publisher.

Earlier, Gibbons had met Sampson Occum,[18] an American Indian (in his term), who preached for him at the afternoon service at Haberdashers' Hall on 20 April 1766. Known as "The Pious Mohegan" after the tribe of which he was head, he had become an ordained Presbyterian minister. He was in England fund-raising for the school which was to become Dartmouth College.

Gibbons was a patriot and puritan. He did not celebrate Christmas but took one of his sons each Christmas Day for several years to see the King when he appeared in public. "Blessed be God he appeared to be in good health", he noted on 25 December 1758. Gibbons records King George II's death and hears the proclamation of King George III on 25 and 26 October 1760. And then the following year, "Walked out with my Family in the afternoon to White Conduit

16 Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses*, III, between pp. 178 and 179. There is also a water-colour painting of Gibbons at Dr Williams's Library.

17 *ODNB*, 58, pp. 420-422.

18 *ODNB*, 41, pp. 413-414.

Fields. The evening – Illuminations and Rejoicings on account of the King and Queen's Coronation" (22 September 1761).

Patriotism had by then become a religious exercise. Fears of a French invasion led to a Day of National Fast (effectively a day of prayer for the nation) on 6 February 1756. At Haberdashers' Hall this involved four hours of prayer, readings and preaching. On 23 May 1756 Gibbons "preached on the occasion of the declaration of War with France", the beginning of a war which would not formally end until 1763: "As the Nation is peculiarly threatened at this juncture there is an extraordinary call for prayer. [He] designs to spend the first hour after Rising in the Morning in Devout Exercises" (18 June 1756). The National Fasts were held each February from 1756 to 1759. In addition, on 7 July 1757 Gibbons "attended and engaged at an Exercise of prayer set up from seven to eight upon the critical and alarming situation of the Protestant religion and Great Britain in particular". This was prompted by the King of Prussia's defeat at Cologne. (Frederick II was a Deist but his alliance with Britain against France was enough). His earlier victory in Bohemia had merited a sermon "both parts of the day" from Psalm 135 (22 May 1757).

For Gibbons, the Hanoverian succession guaranteed the safety of the Protestant religion. He saw the French war as a threat to both. Others may have seen it as the continuance of historic rivalry, or in India and on the high seas a war over trade and territory. Even when he preached "on account of the taking of Pondicherry" on 26 July 1761, a major prize which secured India and was the prelude to victory, it was for Gibbons the preservation of Protestant Britain. Gibbons heard peace proclaimed on 22 March 1763: "The Lord grant that it may be lasting". The temper of Gibbons's Protestant patriotism can be seen in this passage: "This morning heard the Rumour, whose truth was afterwards confirmed, of the death of that illustrious Hero, and in the Year 45, the honoured Instrument of Salvation in the Kingdom, the Duke of Cumberland" (1 November 1765). Or in this hymn:

> Thy Providence O Lord
> Has fix'd our happy Lot
> In *Britain*'s highly favour'd Isle
> An Heav'n distinguishe'd Spot.
>
> *Freedom*, profuse is Bliss
> Thro' all our Nation reigns;
> No Persecution shakes its Rod,
> No Tyranny its Chains.
>
> We all may take the Road
> Our Conscience bids us go;
> Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,
> Secure from ev'ry Foe.[19]

19 Thomas Gibbons, *Hymns Adapted to Divine Worship* (London: Printed for J. Buckland, J. Johnson and J. Payne, 1769), LII, verses I, IV, V, pp. 221-222.

In 1764 Gibbons celebrated peace by taking a holiday free of religious duties. He had two young men from South Carolina staying in the house and to entertain them the family visited Blenheim Palace and Lord Temple's house and gardens at Stowe. Whether Gibbons was educating the Americans is unclear, but probably so as they were still with him in 1769 when one of them, Robert Perreneau, was entered for Edinburgh University. Gibbons accompanied him, leaving on 1 July in the Newcastle Machine which took two days over the journey. After recovering, they went forward to Edinburgh by post chaise and arrived on 8 July. Robert was duly entered and Gibbons preached for Dr Walker at the New Church, "the Provost and Judges being present".

VI: The General Body of Dissenting Ministers

Gibbons first records attending a meeting of the General Body of Dissenting Ministers on 14 April 1752. The General Body was formed around 1732 to seek the removal of various civil disabilities under which Dissenters still laboured. The repeal of the Test Acts, which excluded Dissenters from major parts of public life, was the original target, though bills in 1733 and 1735 failed, and later attempts continued to fail until the Acts were finally repealed in 1828. Each Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist church in London, and ten (later twelve) miles beyond, was invited to send two Deputies and from this number a Committee of 21 was formed. Gibbons was a member of the Committee. "Committee of Three Denominations 10 to 12. To House of Commons on the Militia Bill" (15 February 1757). The purpose of this visit, soon after the start of the war with France, was to try to ensure that the newly formed Militia did not exercise and train on Sundays.

The General Body was permitted to offer Loyal Addresses to the Crown. After the proclamation of George III, Gibbons records meetings of the Committee in November 1760 to draw up a Loyal Address and a final meeting on 19 November to sign it. Gibbons was in the party which presented the Address to the King on 21 November. He also records "kissing hands" with the Prince of Wales.

Soon after the declaration of war against Spain in 1762, Gibbons was one of seven members of the Committee chosen to prepare a further Address. It prompted this reflection when the Address was presented: "Through Mercy we were graciously received. How much better our times, Blessed be God, than the Days of our Forefathers" (6 October 1762).

Gibbons was also at this time a manager of the Regium Donum. This yearly bounty for "the relief of necessitous widows"[20] of Dissenting ministers had been initiated by George I. To Gibbons it was a sign of Hanoverian benevolence towards Dissent. With his fellow distributors of the bounty, Dr Langford a Presbyterian, and Dr Stennet a Baptist, he now started to attend the Levees of certain peers involved in the politics of the day. These visits need not be listed, though much is made of them in the Diary. The invitations and their acceptance afforded a

20 Later extended to poor ministers.

link between active politicians and leading Dissenters of potential value when the General Body stirred into political action.[21] At one Levee, (8 December 1768), the Dissenters were introduced to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Cornwallis. On another (9 April 1766) Gibbons obtained the permission of the Duke of Newcastle, a former prime minister, to dedicate a book to him. (It was his *Treatise on the Tropes and Figures of Rhetoric*, derived from his Academy lectures and published on 1 December 1766). When Newcastle died, Gibbons approached Onslow, a nephew by marriage of the Duke, to obtain "leave to dedicate my Ode on the Death of the late Duke of Newcastle to him" (16 December 1768).

The concern of the General Body for Sunday observance was revived in 1772. "Much taken up with going from one place to another for the Encouragement of a Petition to Parliament for punishing Offenders for violating the Lord's Day" (30 January 1772). Gibbons visited Onslow on 24 February 1772 "on the Sabbath matter", perhaps to facilitate the meeting then arranged for 28 February with Lord Dartmouth at the Treasury, after which Gibbons "had an Interview and Conference with Lord North and Mr Onslow on the matter". After further lobbying, he records that the Petition, signed by "Clergy Episcopal and Dissenting and Traders", was carried into the Commons on 6 March 1772.

Another matter had been running alongside the concern for Sabbath observance. This was a move to relieve Dissenting ministers of the requirement under the so-called Toleration Act, 1689, to subscribe to the doctrinal Articles of the Church of England. The General Body met on 4 March 1772 and appointed a Relief committee to pursue the matter. Gibbons was among Independents on the committee, alongside Dr Savage, Dr Conder and Dr Furneaux. The committee met on 10 March and was followed by Gibbons's "lobbying at several noblemens' houses with Dr Savage and Dr Jeffries" (11 March 1772).

On 3 April 1772, "Bill for Relief agreed without a division ... Motion moved by Sir Henry Houghton and seconded by Sir Geo Saville". The Bill received its Third Reading in the Commons on 8 May and Gibbons's canvassing moved to the Lords. Alongside Rice Harris, and Dr Stennet on 8 and 9 May he visited the Duke of Richmond, Lord Camden and Lord Dartmouth. On 19 May, however, the Lords rejected the bill by 73 votes to 23. Undeterred, but after some time for reflection, the General Body meeting at Dr Williams's Library on 13 December decided by 55 votes to 13 "to make a fresh application for Relief". A second Relief Bill in 1773 was also rejected by the Lords. Some of the opposition in the Lords was down to the Bishops, as a number of Church of England ministers were themselves anxious to have their own subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles relaxed and had mounted a petition to Parliament in 1772. A further stumbling block was what test of qualification would be acceptable to Dissenters and to Parliament in place of the doctrinal Articles in the event of change, and this was the focus of debate when the issue returned in 1779.

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21 Apart from the Duke of Newcastle, Levees attended by Gibbons once or more often included those of the Duke of Grafton, the Marquess of Rockingham and Lord North, the prime minister.

First, however, it may be worth pausing to note that other accounts of this campaign, based on contemporary sources, speak of animosities between orthodox Dissenters, (who were not personally troubled by the Trinitarian Articles), and those whose theological views were more unitarian, and therefore had doctrinal objections to subscription. The latter questioned the genuineness of the concern of the former for relief and called the managers and supporters of the Regium Donum the "Kings' Men".[22] While Gibbons would not cavil at the name calling, his Diary, which is after all another contemporary source, shows his own active part in the campaign alongside both orthodox and unorthodox Independents and his determined support for it. The small minority in the General Body against continuing the campaign in December 1772 indicates a clear majority in favour of change. To Gibbons it was an issue of religious liberty: why should the rules of the Established Church, whatever they were, be applied to Dissenters?

Gibbons attended the Relief committee of the General Body on 12 March, 1779, the Commons debate on the issue on 17 March, and the Relief committee again on 20 March when it was agreed that the test in place of the Articles should be "a Subscription to the Belief that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain the Will of God". Some Rational Dissenters argued that there should be no test. Later that day, Gibbons "Dined at the King's Arms Tavern with the Committee and others, particularly the famous Mr Edmund Burke, and got home between Twelve and One o'Clock".[23] On 26 April the General Body debated the Test and agreed to it by 53 votes to 7. The measure proceeded through Parliament and Gibbons "went to the House of Lords and saw the Bill pass" (11 May 1779). On 12 September 1780, he "went to Hicks Hall with Dr Fisher and qualified myself as a Dissenting Minister by taking the Oath of Allegiance, Supremacy etc and Subscribing to the Declaration that I believe the Scriptures". "Qualifying myself as a Dissenting minister": is there a touch of irony here?

VII: Memoirs of Dr Watts

Busy as 1779 had been on the Relief campaign, it also marked the completion of Gibbons's most important book. "This day finished Dr Watts's Memoirs. They were begun September 29th last" (20 May 1779). The book is dedicated to Mrs Elizabeth Abney: "In your family Dr Watts passed almost half the number of his days". In a preface he says the book is "derived from manuscripts given me by himself and his brother Mr Enoch Watts and from various intelligences I have received from others, and from my intimate acquaintance with him for several years before his death". Although there are chapters of biography by Gibbons, the book quotes extensively from Watts's own writing, even in the chapter devoted to

22 See, for example, R Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England* (London: Independent Press, 1962), pp. 182-3.

23 Burke's association with this agitation is discussed in Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 531-532. Burke later deplored those Radical Dissenters who supported the French Revolution.

childhood. The book also includes letters to and from Watts, and a selection of his hymns not published in his lifetime. In these ways Gibbons lets Watts speak for himself and the book became a quarry for later more conventional biographies. The inclusion of a selection of epitaphs written on Watts's death widened the acclaim to contemporaries. The book was published on 1 May 1780. On 16 June Gibbons went "to Mr Banks a Statuary" to give him directions on making a bust of Watts.

The book led to a meeting with Dr Samuel Johnson who wished to include Watts in his *English Poets*. "Visited the celebrated Mr Samuel Johnson this day" (17 August 1780). One would not expect Gibbons to be more expansive but we know from Boswell that "Johnson took to him" and asked to have "a dish of tea" with him. Gibbons's conversation was said to be "cheerful and entertaining"[24] and he was of course a published poet himself and used to relating to figures of the day. Somewhat later, on 17 May 1784, when Gibbons was beginning to fail, he and Johnson had dinner together at Mr Dilly's, the book seller, as noted by both Boswell and the Diary.[25]

VIII: Closing years

Gibbons remained busy in the last years of his life though the public mood was again heavy after the loss of the American Colonies, where English Nonconformists had so many friends and connections: "Day of public Fasting and Humiliation. Prayed and preached. Ezek 18.30, the latter part" ("Return ye and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin") (13 December 1776). This was the year of the American Declaration of Independence. He records another "Day of Fasting and Prayer by Royal Authority" on 27 February 1778. The Americans had already overcome a British force at Saratoga and this year France joined the war in their support. More fasts were to follow on 9 February 1779, the year in which war began with Spain, and on 4 February 1780. "Later Attended an Exercise of Prayer and Preaching on account of the State of the Nation at Mr Palmer's in Hackney" (9 August 1781), the year Yorktown (Toronto) was burnt. "Another Meeting for Prayer and a Sermon at my own Place on account of the alarming and critical State of our Kingdom" (20 February 1782). Peace came in 1783 and on 29 July 1784 Gibbons preached at a Day of Thanksgiving on Psalm 116.12 ("What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?").

During this unsettling period, a number of friends died and he began to think again about his own death. On 20 January 1774 he was a pall bearer for "my Revd Brother Mr Edward Hitchen", a colleague at the Academy. On 3 May 1775 he spoke over the grave of "my dear friend Dr Langford" and the next day preached his funeral sermon. On learning of the stroke and death of Dr Samuel Wilton, minister of the Weighhouse, he wrote in the Diary, "The Lord sanctify it and give

24 Gibbons's funeral sermon, quoted in Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses*, III, p. 183.

25 James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, Ll.D.*, IV (London: Printed by Henry Baldwin, 1791), pp. 126, 278, 494.

them grace to improve it. What loud warnings. O may I be ready" (4 April 1778). On 5 June 1781, he attended the funeral at Bunhill Fields, "and supported the Pall", of another old colleague at the Academy, Dr Conder. After another funeral, "What multiple Instances of Mortality. May I be ever ready for my Removal" (1 February 1783).

One old friend was still alive and now living more conveniently in Spa Fields. Gibbons and Lady Huntingdon exchanged visits on 6 and 13 May 1778. As usual nothing is recorded of what was said but it was just a year after the publication of *Female Worthies* which had been dedicated to her.

He endured civil disorder, the Gordon Riots: "Dreadful Tumults, Destruction of Jayls, Houses, in the City in the last week by a Mob that declared themselves Enemies of Popery, but were by their Actions Enemies of Mankind" (10 June 1780). This is so quickly followed by the expulsion of students that one supposes they may have taken some part in the riots: "Extraordinary Meeting of the [Kings Head] Fund. Six Pupils, our whole Number, expelled for their Behaviour in point of Insolence and Ingratitude" (12 June 1780).

His ministry continued, as did his visits for charitable ends. "Went to Mr Price's at Newington Green with a Petition on behalf of William Ward, lately pressed" (23 December 1782). Richard Price, politically the most radical Rational Dissenter of the day, would be happy to sign to help someone escape the pressgang. Gibbons had earlier heard Price preach and enjoyed the sermon.

Gibbons preached on an earthquake in Sicily on 23 March 1783 from Psalm 46:8. ("Come behold the works of the Lord. What desolations he hath made in the earth."). This was the massive earthquake at Messina and he doubtless remembered being unnerved by two smaller ones nearer home in 1750.

There was a major celebration on 7 November 1783: "Dined at home. At 4 o' clock met my People for Prayer and Exhortation on account of my Ordination of forty years since. A numerous Assembly". In various ways "the Brethren of the Church" were beginning to help his ministry. The introduction of "singing between the long prayer and the sermon" may have been partly designed to rest his voice, or himself (5 October 1770), (and it is interesting to see this term still used in my youth for that prayer). In July 1782 the church premises were refurbished and Gibbons did not preach there until Haberdashers' Hall reopened on 6 October. Even earlier, the Church had started to look for someone to assist him in the pulpit. "Mr Gayton invited to preach for a month among us" (9 April 1779), but Gayton declined. The matter was taken up again on 26 April 1784. "Through Mercy much Harmony. Hear our prayers and send us truly a Man of God". Is there a note of anxiety here? In the result, "Joseph Brooksbank, a student at Homerton, was invited to spend the ensuing year, his last at the Academy, preaching at the Afternoon meeting, with a view to being an assistant to me and afterwards maybe Pastor" (12 July 1784). It was not too soon. Gibbons recorded, "a fog cast upon my brain" later in July. Brooksbank accepted (and did indeed succeed Gibbons after his death but as afternoon preacher only).[26]

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26 Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses*, III, p. 184.

At the service of Thanksgiving for Peace on 29 July 1784 Gibbons added this to his account of the occasion in the Diary: "Blessed be God, I had reason to believe he was with me, in prayer more especially. Thanks be to God for a Gleam of Mercy to an undeserving Creature". On New Year's Day 1785 he wrote: "Blessed be God for the Mercies of the Year and my comfortable Arrival at the entrance of another. As God is so rich in Mercy, may I be as abundant in my Obedience". It is the last substantial entry in the Diary, though sporadic daily entries continue, including the General Body on 9 February and his usual lecture at Homerton on 16 February. On 17 February he records the start of another day, "At home", and spends it there. It is the final entry. That evening, Wilson records, Gibbons left the house to go to the coffee shop in Hoxton Square, as was his usual practice, to read the evening newspaper. Here he is later found to have collapsed, is carried home, and died there five days later without recovering his speech.[27]

Gibbons was buried in Bunhill Fields on 25 February and Hannah was laid next to him on her death a short time later. The gravestone carried an epitaph calling him "upright and kind, with a benevolent heart and ardent piety". The epithet at the foot read "Multis ille bonis flebilis occidit", Horace's tribute to Quintilius: "He died mourned by many good people".[28]

IX: Conclusion

Gibbons wrote hymns in the style of Watts but did not claim to be a Watts. He was a tutor in a Dissenting Academy but was not a Doddridge, who nevertheless admired him. A higher claim can be made for his poetry, religious and secular, and for his memoirs of Watts, but his continuing importance lies in his Diary and the ministerial and influential life and times it records. It illustrates the pastoral and preaching life of a Dissenting minister in a period when the "enthusiasm" of the Methodists and the growing unitarianism of Presbyterians are commonly taken as the landmarks of Nonconformity. Gibbons followed neither tendency and the moderate Calvinism and orthodox churchmanship that he practised, and taught to two generations of ordinands, became in the following century the foundation of Congregationalism's greatest period. The place of the sermon in ministry was Gibbons's strength, along with the commitment to study to ensure it was a learned ministry, and these also were the marks of Congregational ministry in the nineteenth century.

Other claims can be made for the Diary. It has very human reminders of eighteenth century London, its social misery and the cruelty of its system of justice, the growth of travel and connectedness, the limits of medicine, the nearness and unpredictability of death, especially among children, and its necessary accommodation in people's lives. The closeness of the seventeenth century is palpable in the early pages of the Diary – all those Cromwells, and Abneys, references to Baxter, reverence for the ejected ministers a century before there was

27 Ibid., p. 179.
28 Ibid., p. 183.

a Memorial Hall, and generational continuity of ministry among Independents. Later, the importance of the Hanoverian monarchy and its favours to Dissent; and yet the call to extend the religious freedoms already conceded become a major part of the record, the perceived dangers to the Protestant religion and the necessity to defend it, the place of national prayer days in times of war, (and the frequency of war), the incongruity of Dissenters currying favour with politicians in an age known for its corruption, and observing the social niceties of the day so alien to the puritan temperament. The Diary pours light and understanding on all these. It also points up the unity of Dissent on issues of religious liberty.

As to Gibbons himself, the last word should perhaps be by a near contemporary about his pastoral ministry, in the words of Walter Wilson in his chronicle of dissenting churches and meeting houses:

> Dr Gibbons was a man of great piety, unimpeachable manners, upright and benevolent, and of great cheerfulness of temper. His religious principles were said to have been Calvinistical; but we have heard that he considered himself Baxterian; and he was of the habit of speaking with much candour of those who differed from him in sentiment ... He was happily free from that dejection of spirits which spreads a gloom over the soul and tends to occasion misconceptions of the nature of genuine religion. His conversation was cheerful and entertaining ... he impressed with an habitual reverence of God...His hopes and expectations were founded on the Gospel.[29]

JOHN HANDBY THOMPSON

REVIEWS

***Richard Davis and Revival in Northamptonshire.* By Stephen Pickles. Ashford: The James Bourne Society, 2015. Pp. 288. £13.95. ISBN 978-1-90177-1606-1. Copies obtainable from The James Bourne Society, Gable Hook Farm, Bethersden, Ashford, Kent, TN26 3BQ.**

This book is very difficult to obtain! It is not available through most of the usual channels, and only the most persistent internet user will find copies available online. However, persistence pays off because the book is well worth reading. Many readers of this Journal will already know of the significance of Richard Davis of Rothwell not just in Northamptonshire, but Nonconformity across England as Independents and Presbyterians worked out their respective identities in the latter seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

Pickles sets out a comprehensive biography of Davis and an assessment of his work, which he does over fifteen chapters. This work is broad, thorough, and deep. It is a serious work of reference on Richard Davis, indeed probably the definitive book. However, it is not an objective book, and nor does it ever claim to be, with a chapter entitled "Evidence that the charge of Antinomianism against Davis was false". I suspect many historians would want to explore the underlying issues of the charges against Davis and what they signified about the issues between Independents and Presbyterians in the last years of the seventeenth century, rather than the detail of whether Davis was an Antinomian or not.

If readers have already heard of Davis, or have an interest in this period or these concerns, there is much here to stimulate the mind, but it is perhaps not the ideal place to start for one wholly new to both the people involved or the time period. The book has an index with is very strong on people and places, but a little scant on other topics.

MICHAEL HOPKINS

***Labour and the Free Churches, 1918-1939.* By Peter Catterall. London: Bloomsbury, 2016 (pbk 2018). Pp. 338. £70.00 (pbk £28.99). ISBN 978-1-44111-589-8 (pbk ISBN 978-1-35006-726-4).**

Morgan Phillips, then General Secretary of the Labour Party, frequently claimed that the Labour Party owed more to Methodism than to Marx. Perceptively, Catterall points out that several of these references were made in his capacity as Chairman of the Socialist International as explanation of the very distinct nature of the British Labour Party. What would an anti-clerical French Socialist have made of George Thomas breaking into "Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah" when trooping through the lobby in support of Attlee's nationalization programme? Thomas remembered: "Instantly there would be a mighty choir singing its way through the lobby" (p. 154). But in reality, as Catterall is aware, the matter was nothing like as simple.

In origin Methodism was not sympathetic to radical politics. John Wesley was an autocratic Tory declaring "The supposition that the people are the origin of power is in every way indefensible" and Jabez Bunting (who supported the transportation of the Tolpuddle martyrs) was wonderfully unambiguous, "Methodism hates democracy as it hates sin". Even if, as one should, one looks wider than Methodism to Nonconformity, generally its core political attachment up to the First World War and beyond was to the Liberal Party. And in so far as the Christian Socialist tradition played a vital role in the formation of the Labour Party then Anglicans such as F. D. Maurice, R. H. Tawney and William Temple were considerably more influential than Nonconformist social theorists.

To those who want to go more deeply into this, Catterall's book is a very useful resource. It draws strongly on local studies together with fascinating national statistics. Particular emphases include arguing that Nonconformist sacramentalism has been overlooked as a source of Nonconformist social ethics (but how typical was W. E. Orchard?) and questioning Robert Pope's view that the Nonconformist conscience "was essentially played out by 1914" (p. 19). For Catterall it was still politically significant during the 1920s. As Catterall makes clear the Nonconformists did not lightly give up their support of the Liberals. Nonconformists remained differentially more likely to vote Liberal and none of the main Nonconformist churches shifted to a predominantly Labour allegiance; indeed a substantial number of middle-class Nonconformists actually now voted Conservative. None the less there was movement to Labour. From 1922 onwards (with the extraordinary exception of 1931-35) the majority of Free Church MPs were Labour and in total 44 per cent of interwar Labour MPs were Nonconformists. Already, however, the evidence was there that this would not last. Catterall reveals a fascinating generational change – 60 per cent of Labour MPs were Nonconformist in 1906. By 1935 it was only 20 per cent of the new intake (p. 129). This was not simply because Nonconformity was now in decline but because its centre of gravity was moving from the old Labour industrial areas to the suburbs.

Catterall argues the disproportionate significance of Nonconformists in the Labour Party reflected the way in which the chapels inculcated drive and ideals, speaking and organisational skills and a reputation for honesty in their adherents. The minority who acquired these attributes in the late nineteenth century could be highly prized in the trade union movement, even though they might also have personal characteristics (such as temperance) which separated them from the average working man. But, rather contrary to his view of the continuing importance of the Nonconformist Conscience, they were less significant in influencing the policies of the evolving Labour Party because of its simplistic moralisms and relative lack of interest in industrial questions. Nonconformity's influence was more in terms of personnel than of policies. There was, however, a contribution to rhetoric and tone. Labour speakers might see themselves as in a moral crusade or suggest that Labour policies were based on the Sermon on the Mount. Not infrequently these values were used to claim Labour's moral superiority over churches that had, it was inferred, failed to live out their own principles which Labour was now putting into practice. That such rhetoric was to

linger for a surprising time in a secularizing party and culture is evidence of how significant Nonconformists were in the party's origin.

I found the book's ending rather anticlimactic. Catterall analyses some of difficulties in Christian politics that his study has illuminated, such as the Churches' tendency to make absolute assertions about issues not really understood. As a former Church and Society Convenor I can certainly nod sagely at that! The Nonconformist social gospel tradition desperately needed the depth provided by the Anglican tradition of social ethics embodied by Tawney or Ronald Preston and the Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr. But I would rather end more positively. Nonconformist Socialists understood that their faith must lead on politically to justice, equality and human dignity and helped establish a Labour Party which unlike some European Socialist parties never saw religion as the enemy. The skills with which the Free Churches equipped working class leaders were instrumental in creating a party which in 1945 gave the country the greatest reforming government of the Twentieth Century. The National Insurance Act and National Health Service – as well as the Coalition's 1944 Butler Education Act and 1945 Family Allowances Act – signalled the move from a welfare system based on means-testing to one premised on universal provision. That was a huge achievement.

In his concluding comments Catterall warns "As the Free Churches found in the interwar years, a focus on social issues can distract from and obscure their fundamental spiritual message" (p. 219). But the gospel as Jesus preached it is the sovereign rule of God over all of life. "He judged the cause of the poor and needy. then it was well, is not this to know me, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 22.16). If to know God is to do justice, then social issues are not distinct from the fundamental core of the Gospel. For all their imperfections Nonconformist Socialists never made that mistake.

MARTIN CAMROUX

The First Clapham Saints: A London Village 1600-1720. **By Timothy Walker. London: The Author, 2016. Pp. viii + 272. £15.00. ISBN 978-0-9567163-1-6.**

This is a well-researched study of the growth of Clapham in the seventeenth century, though like many privately published books it is much too detailed for comfortable reading or easy reviewing. From 1600 or so onwards the village of Clapham became increasingly attractive to London merchants as a place to build "retiring homes", away from their business homes in the dirt and noise of the City and the tiresome company of their apprentices who lived with them there. Just four miles from London Bridge, an hour by horse and later by carriage, Clapham offered them a home with fresh drinking water and a clean rural environment within reach of their businesses. The village continued to grow over the years, with a significant increase in the number of "big houses" after 1688. By 1720, 30 per cent of Clapham's dwellings were "retiring homes", making it a noticeably unbalanced village, yet still a century away from being thought a suburb.

The merchant families formed a group, often connected by marriage and business, as well as by religion and politics. The wider interest is that in the period covered by the book a great number were Puritan and later Nonconformist, so that at times their homes in Clapham became places of safety as well as retreat. There were of course some Anglicans as well in the big houses, most notably Pepys who came during the Plague (which Clapham largely escaped) and returned later in his final years. His friend and connection in Clapham, Dennis Gauden, was victualler to the Navy. From 1700 there were bankers and other professionals among the newcomers.

The book mentions the ejected ministers who came to Clapham to preach or as teachers, and in more detail the ministers called by an Independent congregation. But this is a book mainly concerned with lay men and women and there is both a bibliography of names in different periods as well as a chapter on the families most frequently mentioned. The detail here of these Nonconformist families may be of research interest and reference. (I found among them the Gould family who provided William Coward of Walthamstow with his second wife, and hence the name of one of his ships, and the Paice family from whom he drew an intended trustee).

There are interesting chapters on the puritan *mores* of the merchant families seen as a group and over time, covering wills and bequests, attitudes to wealth and possessions, funeral practices, (their extravagance deplored), marriage settlements and dowries, and the extent to which business trumped romance as a factor in marriage. The merchants played a full part in village life, paying for a lecturer at the church, organising the Watch to keep out vagrants, looking after the poor, and appointing the school-teacher, often a Nonconformist. There appears to have been a tradition of Clapham residents serving as governors of St Thomas' Hospital.

The Clapham families' mercantile interests varied but were mainly in overseas trade, including the Baltic and Russia, Spain, India, the Near East, and North America where many had relations or religious connections. Two, John Beauchamp and James Sherley, had helped finance the "Mayflower", and one, Edward Winslow, had crossed in her. A few were engaged in parts of the slave trade. The Gould family had shares in plantations, for example. A not untypical merchant, Arthur Shallett, brought coal from Newcastle, carried fish from the West Country to Spain and Portugal, and brought back wine and brandy, the latter from a distillery he had helped construct. He hired ships to the Navy after 1688, eventually became insolvent and was sent to the Marshalsea. He was an Independent, but his religion is noted in passing and appears incidental.

This is so in many cases. Surprisingly little is said about religious practices, but the Independents alone had a continuing religious meeting albeit in a house. Before and during the Commonwealth Presbyterians appear to have been content to use and support financially the parish church in Clapham or the parish churches near their businesses in the City, and of course influence appointments to suit their beliefs. Eleven Clapham residents served as City Common Councillors and six as Aldermen. Several sought to introduce elders in the parish churches in their wards. All this ended after the restoration of the monarchy when the clergy they had favoured were likely to be ejected. The Test Act made it difficult for anyone unwilling to swear

an oath or take Anglican communion to be elected to City posts. The next time Clapham Nonconformists were prominent in the City was briefly during James II's attempt at toleration when he appointed two Clapham Presbyterians as aldermen.

After 1662, ejected ministers coming to preach or live in Clapham were made welcome despite the Five Mile Act. They were asked to preach to groups in residents' houses, but when the incumbent of Clapham Church became too old or ill to take the whole service, it appears they were invited to preach there too. An indulgence of Charles II was granted for a Presbyterian to teach in the school. Business was not affected but City appointments for Nonconformists did not resume until after the Glorious Revolution which, as already noted, was a further spur to building in Clapham. Politically, Clapham became, as the author puts it, "a Whig warren". Socially, with five inns and situated on the carriage road to Portsmouth, there was the first sense that Clapham was becoming less of a village.

Independents in Clapham seem to have been less prominent than Presbyterians at least initially. The two sets lived amicably together. Independents formed a gathered church in the house of a widow of one of their leading families and after her death in 1704 built a small chapel and much later a larger building when Philip Furneaux was minister. Under him and his rationalist preaching they prospered. The Independents' story is pursued in Ivor Rees's *Clapham Dissenters* (reviewed in *The Journal*, vol. 9, no. 9, November 2016). The Anglican church in Clapham moved in an evangelical direction in the eighteenth century and this allows the author in conclusion to point us briefly to Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect, whom he presumably had in mind when choosing the title of his book. But this is now a very different Clapham, the Common drained and built around, and a different community to the one the book describes.

JOHN HANDBY THOMPSON

***The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century.* Edited by Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. £95.00. Pp. xx + 546. ISBN 978-0-19-968371-0.**

This is the third volume of an envisaged five-volume series on the history of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, commissioned by Oxford University Press. It comes in the wake of the Press's five-volume Oxford History of Anglicanism. It is satisfying to see that such a highly respected Press can acknowledge the significance of the Dissenting Traditions, even if it came as the result of "pestering" officers of the press regarding the "precedents" set by the publication of the Anglican series (p. v). Though volume III, this is the first of the series to be published.

The thirty-six page introduction, by one of the editors, offers an excellent and insightful overview of the book's content. Five sections follow. The first turns to "traditions within Britain and Ireland" and offers separate chapters on "Congregationalists", "Baptists", "Quakers", "Unitarians and Presbyterians",

"Methodists and Holiness", "Restorationist and New Movements". A section on "traditions outside Britain and Ireland" follows, which has a similar structure to that of the first section, but primarily concerns North America: Presbyterians and Congregationalists are considered alongside each other partly because, at the start of the century, they worked together, despite the fact that little else united them. Interestingly, Unitarianism in North America emerged largely from Congregational rather than Presbyterian roots, a different development from that in England. "Methodists and Holiness", "Baptists", "Unitarians, Shakers and Quakers", "Restorationists and New Movements" follow, with an additional chapter on "Colonial Contexts and Global Dissent".

Section three, "Reflection" contains chapters on "The Bible and Scriptural Interpretation", "Theology" and "Preaching and Sermons"; section four, "Activism" covers "Evangelism, Revivals and Foreign Missions", "Politics and Social Reform in Britain and Ireland" and "Social Reform in America"; section five, "Congregations and Living" has chapters on "Gender", "Ministers and Ministerial Training" and "Spirituality, Worship and Congregational Life".

A number of themes recur throughout the book. At the beginning of the century, Old Dissent was made up of disparate groups joined by a sense of theological consensus and ecclesiological practice rather than by anything more formal. Over the course of the century, they transformed into recognisable denominations with local, national and even global networks, some concerned with maintenance of the cause and others vitalised by a sense of responsibility for mission both at home and abroad. As they became more respectable, so there emerged many "New Religious Movements", some clearly Christian and others apparently not, which separated from existing denominations, some of them *Dissenting* from existing Dissenting traditions. So, Dissent "changed as it travelled" and came to be "a leaking umbrella noun" (p. 3). What were English traditions which developed different approaches to religion and to the State than the religion established by law, in other parts of the world developed differently because that sense of establishment did not exist. It is not always clear, as a result, why members of these movements were, in themselves, *Dissenters*. Consequently, the volume implicitly draws attention to the way in which Dissenters were compelled to reinvent themselves during the course of the century. In Britain, legal changes, especially the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, the various Reform Acts and the gradual removal of social restrictions on those who were not in communion with the Church established by law, all contributed to this transformation and, by the turn of the century, they had replaced reference to "Dissent" and "Nonconformity" with the more positive, even powerful, appellation of "Free Churches". Some groups looked, in varying degrees, to reason, respectability and a mission located within their given culture, while others looked beyond that to something counter-cultural which offered an experience of the supernatural and emphasised conversion rather than assimilation. They saw opportunities at home and abroad and the nineteenth century saw the further development of Missionary Societies as "Empire" offered possibilities to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Alongside the development of denominational structures, theology developed, moving away from the arguments within Calvinism of the previous century and, by the end of the nineteenth century, some parts of Dissent had incorporated both biblical criticism and theological liberalism into their system, while evolution and philosophical idealism also became dialogue partners, if not also the framework for constructing "new theologies". That being said, the volume gives attention to revival movements, to the change in the approach to revivals which saw them as, in a sense, manufactured events leading to mass conversion. Revival is clearly considered to be a defining characteristic of nineteenth century Dissent as confirmed by the choice of image for the cover (William Booth preaching to thousands at Mile End in 1865). At the very least, the reference to revival reminds us that belief and practice among Dissenting groups was diverse during the nineteenth century.

The way the world was viewed and how worldly matters should be considered also changed during the nineteenth century, not least through the gradual extension of the franchise. Slavery, perhaps, was the first issue which both demanded a response and, in the North American situation, caused serious division. But the course of the century saw developed a "Nonconformist Conscience", characterized here as "a passion for emancipation to the authoritarian pursuit of virtue" (p. 12), in part concerned with temperance (which gave to women leadership roles for the first time), and then also a "Social Gospel", the latter in particular providing links between the common concerns arising from industrialization in North America and in Britain. The growing respectability of the Nonconforming and Dissenting traditions as they transformed into "the Free Churches" could perhaps have been reflected on a little more in the book. Dissenters "faced the twentieth century with the disarming confidence that they were not the victims of history but its architects" (p. 8), suggesting a march into the mainstream. Despite the fact, easily viewed in retrospect, that their confidence was misplaced, it nevertheless raises the fundamental question of what it means to be a *religious dissenter.*

How should we understand religious dissent? The series editors conclude their introduction noting "the extraordinary range of positive effects and influences flowing from a family of Christian believers that began with a negative protest" (p. xix). Despite the willingness of those such as Thomas Binney to consider Dissent to be "that protest against the system which caused it" (p. 1), is this not to judge the dissenting groups from the perspective of the conforming majority? While in some ways the unwillingness to submit to the clauses of the Act of Uniformity (1662) brought religious dissent to a head, while the so-called "Act of Toleration" (1689) gave legal recognition to a tightly defined and controlled "religious dissent", the name was applied by those content with the *status quo* to those who believed that there was more to be done. In appropriating the name, the Dissenters subverted it. Though some of this was extreme – eccentric even – a lot of it concerned what was seen as obedience to God whose will was discerned through scripture. To call this an "effect" of "a negative protest" assumes there was nothing positive about the stand taken by Dissenters. They did not merely reject conformity as some stubborn and unyielding individuals might do in a church meeting or synod; their decisions and commitments were based on deeply rooted principles about

how they should understand the relationship between God and human beings, the nature of "religion" and – crucially – the relationship of the church and the state and the power claimed by some people to compel others to relate to God in particular ways. While different bodies with different polities developed differently in different parts of the world, they all held these things in common: true religion stands between God and the human conscience and nothing should interfere with that relationship. While not always willing, at least in the early days, to acknowledge this as something relevant to those with whom they disagreed, and articulated more in terms of what they believed a "true" and "false" church to be, they at least were able to see this as a matter of conscience when others sought to impose belief and practice on them.

The book highlights, even if unconsciously, that many Dissenters, in the nineteenth century were not entirely sure what *dissent* now meant. Some of the chapters seek to explore this more explicitly than others. The sentiment is more complicated when translated into other contexts than the English, which possibly asks too much of the different chapters looking at specific traditions across a broad geographical area. Nevertheless, there is much of interest to be found in this book, especially because it reminds us of the significance of these "non-Anglican" traditions. Given the broad definition of dissent adopted by the series, the range of subjects contained, analysed and evaluated is more significant and noteworthy than any other issue. There are errors: Andrew Martin Fairbairn, not Alexander (p. 27); the Restoration occurred in 1660 not in 1662, though it is from the latter date that the "humiliation" of Puritan Dissenters began in earnest (p. 407). Interestingly, legislation excluded Nonconformists specifically from local government, rather than parliament itself (p. 408); it is the West Riding rather than Ridging (p. 458); Carmarthen is in south-west Wales rather than the north (p. 474) while Spurgeon becomes Sturgeon (p. 484). Nonconformists could both matriculate and graduate at Oxford and Cambridge from 1854 and 1856 respectively; it was the fellowships (apart from those in Divinity) which were opened to Nonconformists by the Religious Test Act (1871).

The cost of the book will mean it will find a home in public and university libraries more than personal ones. But this is a significant work and those who are interested in these traditions are encouraged to seek it out and read it. There is much to be gained from so doing.

ROBERT POPE

***The Labour Church: The Movement and its Message.* By Neil Johnson. London and New York: Routledge, 2018. Pp. x + 233. £120.00. ISBN 978-1-13823-551-9.**

There can be little doubt that the emergence of a labour movement, informed by Socialism in its various hues, was one of the more significant developments in late nineteenth century England. Labour leaders claimed Christianity as one of the

motivations for their activity as well as a source for their political ideology; chapel leaders bewailed the "loss" of the working class from the pews, partly because of their morbid fear of theoretical Socialism's godlessness and partly because they acknowledged their failure to connect with a significant part of society (despite the probability that they never had the allegiance of that particular social group). The situation was complex. There were a number of possible relationships between religion and the labour movement ranging from committed partnership to complete divorce, though it seems that, at least initially, many leaders, as well as rank-and-file members, were able to retain both, either in dialectic tension or through some form of syncretism. Over time this seemed to become a less tenable position, and it is possible that the emergence of the "Labour Church" was one reason for this. The "Labour Church" was inaugurated in October 1891 at a service in Chorlton Town Hall, Manchester. Its leader was John Trevor.

Trevor was a complex character whose experience of personal tragedy at a young age, nurtured in strict Calvinism, an attraction to, but ultimate rejection of, organised Unitarianism, and a journey of discovery which incorporated visits to Australia and North America (among other things) led him to believe that, because of their failure to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth, the Christian churches had been superseded by the labour movement. For Trevor, the Kingdom of God was a utopian society, wholly within the grasp of human beings, international rather than parochial in scope, which would be inaugurated through a sense of the value of all people and so establish a just society. He had no detailed plan, and it was not clear what this utopian society would look like, or how it would be achieved (other than through the labour movement). More significant for the author of this book, the primary theological claim of the Labour Church was that "God is in the labour movement". This was not a platitude, or an acknowledgement of "common grace", but the assertion that the divine was no longer at work in the churches. Instead, the "Power" behind the universe was leading people towards establishing a better society through the rise of labour not only in Britain but in other countries as well. This Johnson characterises as the "theology of Socialism" rather than the "religion of Socialism", a phrase prevalent at the time and one on which Trevor and the Labour Church movement could undoubtedly draw.

This book traces the origins of the movement and outlines its primary characteristics. Trevor's life is described as essential in understanding the movement he inaugurated, though the author also demonstrates how the movement moved away from its roots while Trevor gradually withdrew, marginalising himself in part through his advocacy of rather dubious views regarding sexual morality. The author's meticulous research allows him to challenge the prevailing wisdom that the Labour Church virtually disappeared by the outbreak of the Great War and to offer an analysis of its revival especially in the Birmingham area in the 1920s. In fact, the Labour Church was prominent only in particular localities, the emphasis on Birmingham confirming such a claim. Particularly noteworthy is the author's sense of the labour movement, and the Labour Church possessing an international character, even when the links between the two are not entirely clear. It is this which allows an analysis of the movement's revival in Canada also in the 1920s

(though it is not entirely obvious that there is a real connection between the two, apart from the use of the name). Johnson also raises a significant point that labour history is in fact religious history.

This latter point has not been lost on previous commentators, though it remains one most explicitly made here. Johnson suggests that it is because politics was, for the labour leaders, "the defining purpose of their lives, their divine calling: a vocation" (p. 14), alongside the almost apocalyptic sense that a better world was on the horizon, that the connection between the two is confirmed. This is probably fair, but perhaps more could be said about the distinctive context of the late nineteenth century which made this, and the appeal to religious teaching, as well as the appeal to Jesus as an authoritative figure, (common among labour leaders but, interestingly, eschewed by Trevor in favour of "free religion"), possible in a way which would be untenable a century later. Despite the importance of Christian faith to political leaders such as Tony Blair, Gordon Brown – even Margaret Thatcher and David Cameron – they deliberately avoided faith-specific references in part because they perceived Christianity to be more a personalised and individual faith than social and communal religion or even a public policy (as hinted by the author in his conclusion).

This is a well-presented and detailed account of the Labour Church which adds to our understanding of the interaction between religion and working class politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It certainly contributes something new to our knowledge of labour history, the religious nature of the labour movement and our awareness of the Labour Church itself, a phenomenon which has not received much attention (though, ironically, a further study was published virtually at the same time, namely Jacqueline Turner's *The Labour Church*, published by I. B. Taurus). The rather prohibitive cost of the book means that it would be cheaper to invest in a Kindle, the edition suited to that medium being by far the more affordable.

ROBERT POPE

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