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## 1

# 'One Blood': The 'Heathen' at Home and Overseas in Late-Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth-Century Missions

The national impulse to mission which saw the emergence of a popular missionary movement in England in the early decades of the nineteenth century was shaped both by long-term cultural and theological trends and by the immediate and intense anxieties of the 1790s. Most fundamentally, English Protestantism had undergone a profound change during the course of the eighteenth century, as congregations within Old Dissent and the Church of England were transformed by their encounter with an intrinsically missionary Methodist movement. By the 1790s, Baptists and Independents, as well as the Anglican Clapham Sect, were leading the missionary movement at home and overseas. Their missionary strategy was further consolidated by the dynamic secular theory of cultural change which, developed by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, saw all societies moving through distinct stages of development. In particular, the polarity of the 'civilised' and the 'savage' within Enlightenment thought mapped onto the Biblical dichotomy of the 'Christian' and the 'heathen', emphasising the capacity for progress and salvation of all peoples and providing a framework for missionary intervention. More immediately, the years following the French Revolution saw an urgency to marshal new forces of order and authority in Britain. The Terror in France, the dislocation and distress exacerbated by the French Wars, and the rise of domestic radical political activity generated a social crisis which engulfed the nation. Such localised alarm was compounded by global

anxieties: worries about Britain's overseas power following the loss of the American colonies, fears of French colonial expansion, the 'ignoble savagery' of newly discovered parts of the world, and expressions of the ideology of the Rights of Man in Ireland and among enslaved peoples of the Caribbean.

This chapter examines the relationship between the domestic and overseas missionary movements in England in the late-eighteenth century. Despite their emergence in tandem, the two movements have rarely been considered together. Missions overseas tend to be explored in terms of their relationship to imperialism: whether or not they were a 'handmaiden' to colonial authority and their role in the creation of an imperial culture in Britain. Philanthropy in Britain, on the other hand, is usually discussed vis-a-vis issues of class and gender relations and identities and the emergence of a social sphere.<sup>1</sup> Yet, their emergence together in the writing and practice of prominent evangelicals in the 1780s and 1790s raises important questions which are key to our understanding of cultural formation in this period: of the relationships between home and empire, race and class, and men and women. Focusing on the missions of Methodists, Independents, Baptists and the Clapham Sect within the Church of England, the chapter introduces some of the most influential missionary practices which, disseminated throughout the nation via sermons, reports and the evangelical press, came to shape local missionary cultures and practices.

The first concern of the chapter is to establish the close relationship between the evangelising of the 'heathen' at home and overseas in the early missionary movement. The Methodists, both in the 1730s–1740s and as a mass movement in the 1780s and 1790s, pioneered missions to the British poor and to non-Christians in America and the Caribbean. By the 1790s, the Baptists and Independents within Old Dissent were, under the influence of Methodism, emerging from decades of quietism with a commitment to take the gospel to the 'heathen' at home and, via the conduits of the newly formed Baptist Missionary Society (BMS hereafter) (1792) and London Missionary Society (LMS hereafter) (1795), to peoples in India and the South Pacific. At the same time, members of the evangelical Anglican Clapham

Sect, disquieted by some aspects of nonconformist practice but sharing many aspects of their missionary impulse, launched new projects at home and overseas. Their abolitionism, support for the Sierra Leone scheme (1786), the Church Missionary Society (CMS hereafter) (1799) and the ultimately successful campaign to open up India to missionaries (1813) were complemented by the leading roles taken by evangelical Anglicans in a range of societies at home: the Sunday School Movement, the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor (1796), the Religious Tract Society (1799), the Vice Society (1802) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS hereafter) (1804).

The chapter then considers the consolidation in the mid-1790s of a missionary solution as the driving force for the reform of class relations at home and 'primitive' cultures overseas. This was an elite-led Christian cultural revolution, which emerged from a range of encounters and clashes of denomination, Scriptural interpretation, and attitudes to irregularity and respectability. The Clapham Sect and, especially, Hannah More (1745–1833), the Somerset-based philanthropist and writer of didactic literature, drew upon Biblical exegesis to transform aspects of Pauline theology into a model for missionary practice. Focusing on religious, cultural and moral reform led by the middle class, this accorded a central role to middle-class women. Proponents of the new missionary practice sought, through Bible teaching, domestic visiting and school teaching, to instil in their missionary subjects Christian knowledge and practice, virtues of cleanliness, industriousness, frugality and moral independence, a commitment to the 'separate spheres' of men and women and an acceptance of the ordained nature of social hierarchy. Through the wave of overseas missionary activity in the 1790s, the values and practices of the mission to the poor at home were extended to all peoples throughout the world.

### **'Like Cherokees and Mohawks, but more wicked': early Methodist missions**

Overseas expeditions and voyages of discovery, and the social theory that issued from such travels, formed an important

context for the missionary movement throughout the eighteenth century. Prior to the appearance on western horizons of the Pacific and Australasia in the 1770s and 1780s, the more established 'new world' of the Americas formed the focus of overseas missionary attention. A site of considerable excitement and potential for Enlightenment theorists and evangelicals alike, America and the Native Americans formed a crucible for ideas about the origin and progress of humankind and the possibilities for Christian conversion.<sup>2</sup> The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (1699) and the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701), both formed in the new climate of religious toleration which (following the Act of Toleration of 1689) allowed dissenters to worship but not to hold public office, promoted missions in America alongside those in Britain.

By the 1730s and 1740s, the mantle of missionary pioneer had passed to the Methodist movement. Beginning as a religious society in Oxford in the 1720s, Methodism was inspired by Welsh and trans-Atlantic revivalism and by Moravian missionary enthusiasm in continental Europe. John Wesley and George Whitefield engaged in missionary tours across the nation, holding prayer meetings, visiting the sick and distributing religious literature as a means of regenerating the Church of England from within. Wesley had served a missionary apprenticeship in America, travelling to Georgia with the SPG in 1735. There he met David Brainerd, the celebrated missionary to the Native Americans, and Jonathan Edwards, leader of the Great Awakening in Massachusetts, who had provided a powerful stimulus to Wesley's own missionary work in Britain.<sup>3</sup> Wesley took evangelical Christianity to the people by means of open-air and field preaching and cottage meetings. Services in meeting rooms and chapels were similarly accessible: seating arrangements depended upon early arrival, not the purchase of a pew, and hymn singing and a rejection of sermonic essays reiterated the emphasis on popular participation. The missionary impulse shaped the movement's distinctive religious calendar of prayer meetings, love-feasts, watch-nights and visiting; open to all, the one requirement was the desire of converts 'to be saved from their sins'.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these early adventures, Wesley's was a domestic mission. With George Whitefield, and assisted by itinerant preachers, Wesley paid particular attention to those inhabitants of the industrial villages, mining communities and market towns located on the routes between Tyneside, Bristol and London. In its bid to educate, discipline and reform the populace, the Methodist missionary strategy was at once authoritarian and democratic, and as such pre-empted that of later missions.<sup>5</sup> The policing of members was often undertaken by Wesley himself: questions to be discussed at meetings dedicated to self-examination were set by him, and his *Directions given to Band Societies* (1749) banned smoking and the consumption of alcohol, the use of the pawnbroker and the wearing of jewellery, and promoted a 5 a.m. call to worship.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the cellular or 'class' system of organisation, whereby small groups of same-sex converts met regularly to examine their souls and assess their spiritual development, promoted lay responsibility. Those class members who failed to submit themselves to the rigorous programme of discipline could be expelled from the Connexion.<sup>7</sup>

The nature of this 'reform', in particular its capacity to provide an alternative to the revolutionary politics of the century's end and instil a work discipline which fitted workers for capitalism, or conversely, to bolster the burgeoning radical movement through the development of moral and social discipline, has formed one of the most contested issues in the history of the movement.<sup>8</sup> There was certainly widespread belief among contemporary Methodists that the rules, discipline and promotion of literacy and education had a civilising impact on the membership. Wesley's favoured colliers of Kingswood, near Bristol, were known prior to their introduction to Methodism for 'neither fearing God nor regarding man; so ignorant of the things of God that they seemed but one remove from the beasts that perish.'<sup>9</sup> At a meeting in Whitehaven in the 1780s, Wesley concluded his assessment of the well-to-do congregation by comparing them favourably with the miners whom he now so obviously esteemed: 'they behaved with as much decency as if they had been colliers.'<sup>10</sup> According to Thomas Bewick, drawing on contemporary notions of savagery, Methodism on Tyneside

had 'greatly civilised a numerous host of semi-barbarians, the pit-men and others employed in the pit works. These seemed like Cherokees and Mohawks, but they were more wicked.'<sup>11</sup>

While Wesley agreed that the Cherokees and Mohawks did indeed require 'civilising', he was reluctant to pursue overseas fields.<sup>12</sup> This was left to Thomas Coke, author of the 1783 pamphlet *Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathen* and superintendent of Methodist missions in America (1784) and Antigua (from 1786).<sup>13</sup> Coke's desire was to bring into the mission a range of different 'heathen' peoples. His 1786 *Address to the Pious and Benevolent* proposed an annual subscription for the support of missionaries in 'the Highlands and adjacent Islands of Scotland, the Isles of Jersey, Guernsey and Newfoundland, the West Indies, and the Provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec.'<sup>14</sup> Similarly, his *Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Methodist Missions* (1804) placed the 'Negroes in the West-Indies' alongside the Scots, Welsh and Irish. None were sufficiently civilised: while 'myriads' among the Welsh were 'still in spiritual darkness' and Irish Catholics only gradually emerging from the 'depths of superstition and vice', Scottish highlanders and islanders, Coke wrote, were 'little better than the rudest barbarians'.<sup>15</sup>

### Old Dissent and 'all the world'

Thomas Coke's catholic missionary enthusiasm reflected the surge of interest in the 1780s in peoples overseas. Nevertheless, the formalisation of missions within Methodism came some years later, with the formation in Leeds in 1813 of the first Methodist Missionary Society and the establishment of the (national) Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1819.<sup>16</sup> Wesley's lack of support meant that, prior to 1813, overseas missions were generally the province of the Baptists and Independents. These denominations, traditionally characterised by insularity and quietism, had been profoundly changed through their encounter with Methodist enthusiasm to become the leaders of the revivalism of the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>17</sup> The combined

influence of Philip Doddridge and Isaac Watts; the greater openness promoted by ministers from the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire Association and the Baptist Bristol Academy and Western Association; and the example offered by Jonathan Edwards in America: all contributed to the extensive debate among Baptist congregations on the 'Modern Question': the extent to which the converted were responsible for taking the gospel to the unconverted. Andrew Fuller, minister in Kettering from 1782 to 1806, preached on *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of all Acceptation* (1785), later developed into a lengthy book, in which he rejected the hyper-Calvinist belief that the unconverted were depraved and therefore could not be expected to repent in response to the gospel.<sup>18</sup> Fuller, along with William Carey, a shoemaker from Paulesbury, Northampton, who ministered at chapels in Northamptonshire and Leicester, and John Ryland, also a minister in Northamptonshire before his move to the Bristol Academy in 1793, participated in monthly prayer meetings which assumed individual moral responsibility for salvation, for one's own and for that of others.<sup>19</sup> As members of Baptist associations embarked on preaching tours in England, William Carey's *Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) extended evangelical principles to all non-Christians.<sup>20</sup> The BMS was formed in 1792 and Carey made his subsequent journey to India to found the Serampore mission in 1793.<sup>21</sup>

Independent congregations had been undergoing a similar transformation. This shift was influenced by Philip Doddridge's acquaintance with Whitefield, the contribution of Calvinistic Methodism to the general expansion of Congregationalism, and a more outward-looking approach, evident in a changing style of preaching and the popularity of the hymns of Isaac Watts.<sup>22</sup> Local associations, encouraged by individual ministers such as George Burder, David Bogue and Rowland Hill, had promoted prayer meetings from the early 1780s. Future directors of the LMS, Bogue and Burder were originators of the 'Plan for Promoting Knowledge of the Gospel in Hampshire' and the 'Warwickshire Association of Ministers for the Spread of the Gospel, both at Home and Abroad' (1793). They evangelised also 'through the

dark corners' of Dorset, Cornwall and much of southern England and the Midlands.<sup>23</sup> John Eyre, Joseph Hardcastle and Rowland Hill were also involved, variously, with the Village Itinerancy Society (1796), which aimed to evangelise towns and villages throughout the country with the support of the newly formed Hackney Seminary, the BFBS (1804) and the Hibernian and Irish Evangelical Societies.<sup>24</sup> The London Itinerancy Society began as an LMS representative became acquainted with 'the benighted state of the village of Dullwich'.<sup>25</sup> Old academies were revitalised, and new ones, such as that at Rotherham in 1795, were formed.<sup>26</sup> By the 1790s, theological shifts had seen the emergence of 'moderate Calvinism', adherence to the Armenian belief that grace was available to all rather than just to a chosen elect.<sup>27</sup> This, alongside the emphasis on the doctrine of assurance, whereby believers enjoyed the security of knowing, rather than struggling with, their individual commitment, ensured that an increasingly activist and inclusive Congregational practice shared a great deal with that of the Particular Baptists and Methodists.

The Scriptural passages cited by Carey in his *Enquiry* (1792) invoke the missionary duty of the true Christian in an expansive world. The text is prefaced with St Paul's statement of spiritual equality:

There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and shall they hear without a Preacher? And how shall they preach except that they be sent?

(Romans 10: 12–15)<sup>28</sup>

Other passages, drawing on Matthew's Great Commission and the gospel of Mark, refer to the duty of Christians to address peoples, or nations, of the world: 'Go and teach all nations' (Matthew 28:19); 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15); 'Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world' (Matthew 28:20). Carey adheres to the Biblical

and monogenist framework favoured by evangelical and Enlightenment theorists alike: the various ‘heathen’ overseas and the poor at home shared moral qualities bestowed upon them by a God who had ‘made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth’ (Acts 17:26). Affirming Paul’s message to the Athenians, Carey takes his self-justification from the words of the apostle: ‘Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace...’ (Acts 18:9). He evokes the patriarchal examples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and even finds evidence that the heathen were to be found by travelling over the seas by ship.<sup>29</sup> Such themes were taken up in the Autumn of 1795 by Independent founders of the LMS, or the Missionary Society, as it was known until 1818.<sup>30</sup>

Although Calvinists had moved away from the notion of the ‘chosen’ in strictly theological terms, the missionary movement had implications for the self-understanding of English Christians. To the Reverend Thomas Raffles, the young preacher recently arrived at Great George Street, Liverpool, who gave the LMS anniversary sermon in London in 1814, the nation – and here Britain and not just England – had been placed by God in the privileged position of missionary to the world:

Whilst all the political world teems with wonder; whilst tyrants, the victims of unbounded ambition, have been unconsciously fulfilling the divine decrees; whilst the groans of slaughtered thousands have reached us from afar, who has not turned with rapture to Great Britain, the Missionary, - the Bible Society, - the Instructress of the globe, - the Ark of freedom, - the Asylum of liberty, - the Couch on which out-cast monarchs may recline at ease? Who does not cherish the delightful hope that God is about to make Great Britain, by her Bibles and her Missionaries, the herald to prepare the way for the second coming and universal reign of the Messiah?<sup>31</sup>

In the 1790s, the status of the British nation as ‘chosen’ was in the process of becoming apparent. But despite being placed closer to the apex of civilised life as a nominally Christian country with so many inhabitants who had been chosen for the purpose

of saving souls, 'civilisation' in Britain was by no means guaranteed. Indeed, while peoples overseas might be more depraved, they were frequently seen by missionaries as more rewarding subjects than the domestic poor. The mere ignorance of the former was contrasted with the wilful refusal of many among the poor to achieve respectability, despite having advantages bestowed upon them on account of their easy access to a Christian education. In the words of a London Itinerancy Society representative, 'the transition from the view of the deplorable state of the Heathen abroad to that of the Heathen at *home* is easy and affecting.'<sup>32</sup> As stated by William Carey four years earlier, 'there are multitudes in our own nation, and within our immediate spheres of action, who are as ignorant as the South-Sea savages'. This was not proof against extending overseas. Indeed, 'our own countrymen have the means of grace, and may attend on the word preached if they chuse it . . .', whereas others had no Bible or ministers, 'nor any of the advantages which we have', but were quite clearly capable of improvement.<sup>33</sup> Carey included in his volume tables detailing the numbers of pagans in the world, and argued that barbarism was no good reason for leaving them alone, and in fact might be a good reason for taking the Gospel to them; 'Gauls, Germans, Britons – all barbarians at the times of apostles' had all become Christian only through being evangelised.<sup>34</sup> All peoples were fallen, whether heathen or nominal Christian, and were thus at the mercy of God's wrath and in need of His redemption. All were capable and worthy of help. Through their own good will and the guiding hand of the missionary, whose duty it was to go out into the world and spread the 'good news' of Jesus Christ, the importance of justification by faith and the knowledge of the wrath of God, they were to be made fit for the great occasion of judgement day.

### **The missionary impulse: collaborations and conflicts**

As Andrew Porter has recently argued, missionary enthusiasts of different denominations were members of overlapping networks. Carey's *Enquiry* (1792), taken by many to be the starting point of modern missions, brought Baptists into the evangelical

missionary community already inaugurated by the Methodist Thomas Coke.<sup>35</sup> Carey and fellow members of the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire Association and the Bristol Academy were connected, by ties of family and friendship, to prominent Anglicans; Wilberforce and Thornton were amongst the early subscribers to the BMS. Carey's letters from the first Baptist mission station at the Danish settlement of Serampore, north-east India, were read by Thomas Haweis and David Bogue, inspiring the two Independents to join discussions with other interested parties and so begin the meetings which led to the formation of the LMS in 1795.<sup>36</sup> Haweis later participated in the meetings of the Anglican Eclectic Society, a forerunner to the CMS, while Thomas Coke and John Ryland exchanged thoughts on missionary matters with members of the Clapham Sect and the Church of Scotland.<sup>37</sup> Independents worked alongside Calvinistic Methodists and Presbyterians in the London-based Missionary Society; Methodists were recruited to the LMS with the first party of missionaries to the South Pacific in 1796–1797, and missionaries reported considerable support from members of other denominations. For Bogue, this coming together of Church and Dissent represented the 'Funeral of Bigotry', the title of his sermon at the opening meeting of the LMS in 1795.<sup>38</sup>

If such connections point to an emergent common culture, motivated by a 'pan-evangelical impulse'<sup>39</sup> and desire to co-operate, they should not suggest a completely homogeneous movement. Denominational antagonisms continued to be important, especially between Anglicans and Methodists, the latter finally breaking from the Church of England on John Wesley's death in 1791. Despite Hannah More's predilection for Methodist Sunday School teachers (see below), many Anglicans expressed a continued unease with aspects of Methodist practice. Most notable were their objections to 'enthusiasm' and to the breaches of parochial obligations involved in itinerant preaching and outdoor assemblies. With frequent incursions by itinerant preachers into their parishes, these had long disturbed the established church. From the 1790s, the rapid growth of the Methodist Movement and its appeal within the lower orders caused considerable alarm.<sup>40</sup> Methodism's overlapping

constituency with political radicalism and the apparent proximity of popular religion to the language of the 'Rights of Man' raised concern over the movement's 'irregularity' and the potential disloyalty of its adherents.<sup>41</sup> Such fears occasioned the withdrawal of Anglicans from the Wesleyan-dominated mixed-denominational Sunday schools in the early 1790s.<sup>42</sup> Many evangelical Anglicans continued to be cautious and denominationally defensive; they were soon to be insisting on the inclusion of the Catechism in the BFBS Bible, as well as establishing the Religious Tract Society (1799) and the Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (1809) as *Anglican* bodies. While sharing a core of beliefs about evangelicalism and missionary practice with most Independents and Baptists within Old Dissent, as well as most Methodists and General Baptists within the New Dissent, Anglican and Claphamite missionary politics were much more intricately involved with the politics of loyalism and the need for social cohesion after 1789.

Antagonisms extended beyond the Methodist/Anglican breach. Unitarians, while keen supporters of philanthropic initiatives, were consistently opposed by all Trinitarians. Many Wesleyans, Particular Baptists and Anglicans declined to give support to the (London) Missionary Society, the latter deterred by the early sympathies of some Independents with French Republicanism, while the former were hostile to Congregationalists collecting money from Methodists.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the years following the French Revolution saw continuing suspicion on the part of the Establishment of any reforming project; this extended beyond alarm at the radical sympathies of some Methodists, to also challenge the wisdom of any evangelicals, including Anglicans, engaged in projects for the education of the masses.<sup>44</sup> Old and New Dissent, including the leadership of the BMS and LMS, were situated in a more uncertain relationship to the social hierarchy. This was not only through the need to deal with radical sympathies among the rank and file, but because of their criticisms of the Test and Corporation Acts, among other Establishment practices.

The early missionaries who travelled to India in 1792 and Tahiti and Tongatabu in 1796 were also on the receiving end of considerable criticism,<sup>45</sup> although here denominational issues were frequently conflated with those of social class. As befitted

their lower middle-class or artisan backgrounds,<sup>46</sup> most men (and their wives) had usually been involved in missions to the 'heathen' at home prior to their recruitment to serve in foreign climes. Many had experience as Sunday school teachers, while some were lay preachers. These men, who had not the advantage of the missionary culture that galvanised the next generation of missionaries, felt themselves to have received a particular calling, maybe inspired by the lives of David Brainerd or Jonathan Edwards or by the preaching of a particular minister.<sup>47</sup> Most among them were not ordained, but saw themselves as 'godly mechanics': respectable men who, while having skills to impart, were primarily concerned with Christian conversion; many intended to become ordained once they were established as part of the mission.<sup>48</sup> While their domestic missionary experience was considered good practice for their work with the 'heathen' overseas, their unequalness to the task was widely recognised, not only by critics of evangelicalism but also by directors and fellow missionaries. The first mission to the South Pacific was a dismal failure, with some men abandoning the mission. Zachary Macaulay was exasperated by Methodist missionaries he encountered in Sierra Leone, expressing his alarm at their eccentric preaching and ridiculing their wives for their 'doleful lamentations' and 'bitter complaints' that they could not find pastry shops nor gingerbread for their children in Freetown, contrary to the promises of Dr Coke.<sup>49</sup>

A more 'respectable' missionary practice had been forged by the 1810s, a result of education prior to departure and, increasingly, the selection of missionary couples. For this to happen, however, a shared missionary project had to emerge from the tensions and denominational differences of the 1790s. As I discuss below, events of the 1790s allowed moral reform and the civilising mission to be newly articulated during that decade.

### **'A sort of Botany Bay experiment': Hannah More and the missionary solution**

The shared missionary solution that emerged during the 1790s took shape in the context of the very particular anxieties presented by the French Revolution and the pressures of

war-time. Led by the Evangelical Clapham Sect, Christianity was promoted as a bulwark of national security and Anti-Jacobin morality.<sup>50</sup> The 'Claphamites' were a group of powerful and influential men associated with the Clapham congregation ministered by John Venn. They included among their number local residents Henry Thornton, William Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay, extending to Josiah Pratt, editor of the *Christian Observer* (1802) and the *Missionary Register* (1813) and to more distant brethren such as Thomas Gisborne in Staffordshire and Thomas Babington in Leicestershire. Hannah More, currently developing her missionary philanthropy in the Mendips, was the sole independent female of the group.<sup>51</sup>

Claphamites are perhaps most famous for their overseas projects and abolitionist commitments. Wilberforce, Thornton and Zachary Macaulay were key figures in the Sierra Leone scheme (1786), the Sierra Leone Company (from 1791) and the CMS (1799). Wilberforce, the mouthpiece of abolition in Parliament, was assisted in his political campaign by Macaulay who, as governor of Sierra Leone in 1794–1795 and 1796–1798 and secretary of the Sierra Leone Company from 1799, gathered evidence about slave operations in West Africa.<sup>52</sup> Macaulay also facilitated the early work of the CMS, which saw the arrival in West Africa of the first (German) missionaries in 1804. Fellow Claphamites Charles Grant and John Shore (later Lord Teignmouth) used their positions within the East India Company to ensure the prominence of the campaign for missionary extension to India, which gathered momentum in the lead up to the renewal of the East India Company Charter in 1813.<sup>53</sup>

A number of prominent Claphamites had been involved in domestic reform initiatives in the 1780s. Wilberforce had with Thornton been a patron of Robert Raikes' interdenominational Sunday School Society, formed in 1785. Wilberforce was also a member of the Philanthropic Society and had encouraged King George III's proclamation against vice (1787–1788). A prelude to the formation of the Society for the Suppression of Vice (1802), this society supported measures to end practices such as duelling, drunkenness, the lottery and some of the more violent and bloody popular sports and amusements,

and to promote Sabbatarianism, and drew support from Lord Teignmouth, Macaulay, Thornton and John Venn and others.<sup>54</sup>

Most importantly for this chapter, the year prior to the French Revolution had also seen the onset of Hannah More's missionary activism. The former actor, playwright and bluestocking was at this time distancing herself from the London theatre scene which had provided the context for her earlier work, to create a new social circle. This included the evangelical Reverend Thomas Scott, the Bedfordshire Sunday school teacher Sarah Trimmer, slave trader turned evangelical abolitionist John Newton, the abolitionist essayist Thornton, and Wilberforce, who soon became an intimate friend.<sup>55</sup> In 1788, More assisted Thomas Clarkson in a canvas of Bristol opinion, his first mission for the newly formed Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Her poem, *Slavery*, was published alongside Newton's *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* to coincide with the first Parliamentary debate on the trade in the spring of that year.<sup>56</sup> More's *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great*, similarly intended to spur readers to activity, was also published during 1788. This was explicitly addressed to those 'persons considerable in reputation, important in their condition of life, and commendable for the decency of their general conduct' who, More believed, could remedy the absence of 'real religion' within society. Hoping to urge to action the 'multitudes of well-meaning people who would gladly contribute a mission of Christianity to Japan or Otaheite, to whom it never occurred that the hair-dresser whom they are every Sunday detaining from church, has a soul to be saved,' More pressed for reform among all sectors of society:

Reformation must begin with the GREAT, or it will never be effectual. *Their* example is the fountain whence the vulgar draw their habits, actions, and characters. To expect to reform the poor while the opulent are corrupt, is to throw odours into the stream, while the springs are poisoned.<sup>57</sup>

The evangelical mission was to the wealthy and powerful as well as the poor.

The Cheddar School, encouraged by Wilberforce's expressions of horror at the situation of the villagers and enabled by his financial support,<sup>58</sup> was the first of a range of schools and other projects which sought to restructure community relationships. Its aim was not to abolish poverty; More adhered to the Scriptural insistence on the necessity of the poor in society. Rather, the school aimed to promote dignity in poverty, to turn people away from radicalism and towards a Christian understanding of social hierarchy, and to revitalise relationships between the well-to-do and the poor. Teaching children to read the Bible (they were not to learn to write<sup>59</sup>) was a gift, which was good for the rich to give and for which the poor were to be grateful. Hannah and her sister, Martha (Patty), deployed an unsophisticated pedagogy in their bid to elicit improved behaviour: clothing, food and Sunday school anniversary prizes were given to children, while white woollen stockings (hand-knitted), five shillings in money and a Bible were given to women of 'good character' upon their marriage, as well as the more traditional lying-in benefit to those pregnant women who could offer proof of their married status. The Friendly and Benevolent Societies for women, which provided some practical relief and a caudle (a hot and spicy drink of ale or wine mixed with egg yolks) after childbirth, encouraged domestic skills and more general wifely virtues.<sup>60</sup> Treats of tea and cakes and similar 'Simple pleasures' were believed to 'have their use in civilising them'.<sup>61</sup> Club Feasts and children's dinners were held annually, at which sermons were given by the local clergy and 'Charges', either praising the women or reprimanding them for their bad behaviour were, in punitive maternal fashion, read out by More herself.<sup>62</sup>

We have seen that the More sisters considered their philanthropy in the Mendips as a colonial project which they compared to both Botany Bay and Sierra Leone.<sup>63</sup> They were shocked by the depravity and wretchedness of the people; they were 'savages', 'brutal in their natures and ferocious in their manners', and with no more knowledge of Christ than would be encountered in Africa.<sup>64</sup> Importantly, it was not only the very poor who were deserving of the appellations of savagery. Hannah More was upset at the coarseness and vulgarity of the farmers, and the

absence of any civilising influence among them in the form of a resident gentry or middle class. On visiting Congresbury in 1791, More's ethnographic discourse identified the enlightenment and evangelical scales of progress: 'we made a visit, and found the poor divided into two classes – the very poor, and what is called gentleman farmers, wealthy, unfeeling, and hard; and, though not in the same state of *barbarity* with our other villages, yet quite as far from *Christianity*.'<sup>65</sup> In order to gain permission to set up a school, the sisters had to woo the farmers, especially the 'chief despot' of each village: in Cheddar this was a man 'who is very rich and very brutal; so I ventured into the den of this monster, in a country as savage as himself...'.<sup>66</sup> Another of these 'rich savages', a Mr Hydes, More described as a 'profligate, abusive, depraved... proud man [and] haughty sinner'.<sup>67</sup> During the later Blagdon controversy, as farmers obstructed her missionary ventures, she felt herself to be 'battered, hacked, scalped and tomahawked' after their brutal and un-Christian assaults.<sup>68</sup> Farmers who broke this mould were the exception. At Yatton, for example, an unusual farmer sent his children to Sunday school; he 'was the phenomenon – a pious farmer, well behaved and sensible'; his 'civil behaviour was extremely new to us'.<sup>69</sup>

It was no accident that More embarked on her domestic philanthropic adventures among the Somerset poor in 1789. Comparisons of the poor at home with peoples of Botany Bay and Sierra Leone drew not only on the wider colonial context but expressions of 'savagery' across the Channel. The language of savagery and civilisation continued to inform More's loyalist didactic literature of the 1790s. Her first pamphlet, 'Village Politics' (1793), sought to deter working men from joining radical societies in expression of their support for French revolutionary principles. Republicanism is represented and undermined through the character of Tom Hod, a politically naïve labourer, ignorant of the demands of a successful, commercial, civilised society.<sup>70</sup> In this key pamphlet of the Loyalist backlash of 1792–1793, More deploys the humorous counter-arguments of Jack Anvil to argue that civilisation was necessarily founded on tradition and on inequalities of property: it was 'for every man to pull down every one that is above him, till they're all as low as

the lowest.' Telling Hod that he 'quarrel(s) with Providence and not with government', Anvil asserts that hierarchy is natural and ordained by God: '... the woman is below her husband, and the children are below their mother, and the servant is below his master.'<sup>71</sup> In this she entered into debates about the deserving and undeserving poor, about 'want', wage levels and the motivation to work, which were reinvigorated in the writings of Burke, Bentham, Eden, Paine and Malthus and others in the context of the poor harvests, high prices and high rates of poor relief of the 1790s. The poor were essential to the national good through their hard work and, in a Smithian sense, their ability to buy consumer goods. If they failed to pull their weight or had their incentive to work further undermined by poor relief, they were a threat to individual prosperity and to the nation.<sup>72</sup>

As with More's philanthropy, the Cheap Repository series extended beyond the concern to counter political radicalism to develop an extensive programme of cultural reform.<sup>73</sup> A wide range of tracts present young men and women indulging in plebeian customs and pastimes that were believed to be incompatible with civilised society. Their fate lay either in a happy moral reform or an unhappy end, as suggested by the subtitle to 'The Story of Simple Sally: ... shewing how from being Sally of the Green she was first led to become Sinful Sally, and afterwards Drunken Sal; and how at last she came to a Melancholy, and almost hopeless end; being therein a warning to all young women both in town and country'. 'Black Giles the Poacher', subtitled 'Some Account of a Family who had rather live by their Wits than their Work', ends with the death of Giles, an idle thief who accuses a good and honest man of poaching apples from the garden of the respectable Widow Brown. A companion story, 'Tawny Rachel', is the tale of Giles's gypsy wife who, representative of all 'cheats, impostors, cunning women, fortune-tellers, conjurors and interpreters of dreams', connived her way into farmers' kitchens, playing on people's ignorance and superstitious fears in order to extract money and silverware; she is despatched to Botany Bay for her punishment.<sup>74</sup> Botany Bay features again in the story of Betty Brown the orange seller, in which a greedy employer tries to persuade the honest Betty to cheat her customers.<sup>75</sup> While undoubtedly part of the

same project as her *Thoughts* of 1788, More now has a double audience: the missionary subjects themselves and the middle class, whom she encouraged to become leaders of a national missionary philanthropic movement.<sup>76</sup>

While the Cheap Repository Tracts were undoubtedly aimed at a poor readership, their reception is almost impossible to gauge. Certainly More went to a great deal of trouble to understand the techniques of those 'vulgar and indecent penny books' of popular literature, in order to make her stories more attractive to their audience. She even went so far as to encourage some future authors to meet with hawkers to learn their selling and distribution strategies.<sup>77</sup> From 1796, the tracts were further distributed through charity schools, the army and navy, prisons, workhouses and factories. We know little about what the poor actually made of them: whether they were read with interest, or indeed whether they were read at all, or merely left on a shelf, used as door-stops or became the focus of ale-house derision for their simplistic portrayal of poor people.<sup>78</sup> What is clear, however, is that the tracts were popular with members of the upper and middle classes. Some were addressed specifically to them, presented in nicely bound volumes.<sup>79</sup> More took just as much care in the delineation of their civilising roles. The irresponsible, vain, superficial, philosophising Mr Fantom, for example, is contrasted with the kind and charitable Mr Trueman, his tax-paying, church-going, Bible-reading friend.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in 'The Two Wealthy Farmers', it is the family of Farmer Bragwell who come to the sticky end. Unlike Mr and Mrs Worthy, whose household was a model of good order and organisation, and who were regular attenders at Church and attended to their servants' education, Bragwell was interested in little beyond making money while his wife dedicated herself to ensuring their daughters had sufficient accomplishments to marry well to become gentlewomen.<sup>81</sup>

### Philanthropic women and the Corpus Christianum

The most positive and indeed pivotal role in More's missionary vision is accorded to middle-class women, the activities of many of whom reflect her own bid at a female-led missionary cultural

revolution in the Mendips. Although the poor were to take responsibility for their own uplift and improvement, their reform required that they be visited, scrutinised, taught to read the Bible and to acquire simple housekeeping skills. As wives and domestic managers, middle-class women were best placed to perform this role: they had skills to impart, and their maternal roles provided the requisite balance of sympathy and discipline. In this, as Kathryn Sutherland has pointed out, More was influenced by the emphasis on the relative roles of the sexes in the 'histories of civilisation' of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>82</sup> Women's active domesticity was seen to be an essential component of civilisation. As Adam Smith had argued, women's responsibilities for private domestic consumption and the rearing of responsible male citizens placed them in a central role in the negotiation of the competing demands of self-interest and civic duties which characterised commercial society.<sup>83</sup> In polite society, reading circles, salons and tea parties were all believed to contribute to the reform of domestic manners which was deemed essential to the improvement of public and political life; the 'domestic' was a civilised social space which allowed women to be involved – on certain terms – in current affairs.<sup>84</sup> 'The Cottage Cook; or Mrs Jones's Cheap Dishes', later titled 'A Cure for the Melancholy; Shewing the way to do much good with little money', 'The Sunday School', and its sequel, 'The Story of Hester Wilmot' all recruited the active civilised Christian domesticity of middle-class women to a central role in the reform of poor women (and through them, their husbands and families) hitherto lost to slovenly habits and immoral ways.<sup>85</sup>

But while influenced by Enlightenment thought, More's female domesticity was primarily Scriptural. Women's roles as missionaries drew upon a contested interpretation of the Bible, taking as role models Lydia, Priscilla, Tryphena, Tryphosa and other women known to have played an important part in the promotion of Christianity, in the circles of St Paul. As More undoubtedly discovered, finding female role models in the New Testament was more than a case of just 'searching the Scriptures'. Feminist theologians have argued that the difficulties of presenting Jesus to the patriarchal cultures of Jews and pagans

meant that the second-century apostles played down the role of women in his ministry.<sup>86</sup> Women's presence is scanty, much diminished from their historical involvement in the fellowship of Jesus; a diminution epitomised by apostolic treatment of Mary of Magdala who, through her presence at the resurrection and commissioned by Jesus to missionary work, fulfilled the criteria of apostleship, but was all but written out of the Gospels.<sup>87</sup> Paul nonetheless referred to missionary women: Junia and Priscilla were members of established missionary couples; Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis were commended by him for having 'laboured' for the cause; Euodia and Syntyche also 'contended' beside him. He made reference to wealthy converts who were patronesses; to Chloe, the 'purple manufacturer'; and to various leaders of church-houses: Apphia in Colossae, Lydia from Thyatira, a businesswoman who began a church in Philippi, and Nympha of Laodicea who led 'the church in her house'. In giving Phoebe the titles of *diakonos* and *prostatis* which, when used for men, meant minister or deacon, Paul indicated that she was his co-missionary.<sup>88</sup>

Similarly, the controversial injunctions, issued by Paul and Peter, which represent women as subservient to their husbands, also require interpretation.<sup>89</sup> New Testament scholars have argued that the Bible was not written to 'tell it how it was', but to convince an audience of Jesus' message; as such it produced particular representations of the role of women. Gerd Theissen has insisted that Paul's mission to a socially differentiated, urban world (in Corinth) provided him with church communities and potential converts that were fundamentally different from those receiving the Jesus movement in Palestine. His co-missionaries were not itinerant charismatics but community activists, and the churches themselves were mixed in terms of wealth and status. Theissen suggests the term 'love-patriarchalism' to denote the household and congregational structure promoted by Paul to accommodate such complexity. In this, all were spiritually equal, but there were accepted inequalities and women, children and slaves were governed by male members of the household; any potential friction was reduced by 'an obligation of respect and love' on the part of the dominant

partner. As Theissen notes, this was not based on theology but on a slippage into the language of nature.<sup>90</sup> Feminist theologians have tended to place rather more emphasis on 'patriarchalism' than 'love', however, noting that this system represented a development of early Christianity, away from the egalitarian and counter-cultural characteristics of early communities and other cultist associations, to become from the second century the orthodoxy.<sup>91</sup>

More addresses these issues in her two-volume biography of St Paul (1815). In a short section, she sought to counter the disenchantment expressed by some women with Paul's teachings; a friction which, she (no doubt rightly) assumed, was based on his emphasis on women's subordination, silence and shamefacedness.<sup>92</sup> Not only did Paul have many valued female friends, she argued, but his views proved that he held women in high esteem. Referring to his statements about women's dress, she wrote that Paul seemed to be 'of the opinion, that the external appearance of women was an indication of the disposition of the mind; and this opinion, it is probable, made him so earnest in recommending these symbols of internal purity.' He objected to certain personal decorations because they were 'the insignia of the notoriously unworthy females of his time.' More concludes that 'it may be fairly presumed, that he never thought it could be construed into a hardship' to be cautioned against such garments and decorations.<sup>93</sup> Sometimes 'modern' women required such a dressing-down. In 'The White Slave Trade' (1805), More indicted the slavery to fashion of 'the wives, daughters, aunts, nieces, cousins, mothers and grandmothers even of these very zealous abolitionists themselves'.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, it is fascinating that More, a nineteenth-century Bible Christian, can insist in terms very similar to those of modern theologians, that Paul's injunctions need to be understood in their cultural context.

St Paul's popularity with More and other evangelicals lay in his illumination of daily Christian conduct and the development of a Christian moral system and social body, the *Corpus Christianum*.<sup>95</sup> Paul had occupied an interesting position, as a converted Jew and missionary in a complex, urban world. It is quite possible that the issues he faced as a community

leader, arising from the social differences among the congregations and his struggles with conscience, imperfection, clashes of interest, resistance and conflict, both communal and internal, account for his popularity with late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century evangelicals. Hannah More was particularly concerned to elucidate a blueprint for a Christian society, found in Paul's missionary practice and everyday Christian observances: his morality and strictness and his emphasis on 'searching the Scriptures' for spiritual influences and guidance in personal activity.<sup>96</sup> She assumed that such day-to-day expressions of Christian faith were distinguishing characteristics between Christian and heathen cultures. While 'heathen' belief systems were merely concerned with intrigues between deities, Pauline Christianity supplied a body of morals and a governing system, thus ensuring that 'the meanest believer' was at an advantage over the 'most enlightened heathen philosopher'.<sup>97</sup> Women had a particular role to play in the development of the Corpus Christianum. As mothers and missionaries they could ensure that the spheres of politics and culture and ecclesiastical matters were not separate but were overlapping, and that Christian principles directed all areas of society.

More's body of work between *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) and her only novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), all share similar concerns with the role of women in the shaping of a Christian society. *Strictures* reaches back to the arguments first presented in *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790), with its emphasis on domestic decay, the dangers of the 'World' and public amusements, of imagination and an 'ill-directed Sensibility'. Here More argues that women should 'come forward and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of the country'.<sup>98</sup> Her *Hints towards forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805) extended to the (future) sovereign her concern with the 'Importance of forming the Mind' and henceforth the Christian character of 'women of rank and fortune'. Here, More argues the mind of the leading royal ('even [that of] a female sovereign') 'should be trained to embrace a wide compass', including deportment, domestic habits, choice of society and raising the tone of conversation;

extending to a sense of morality developed through knowledge of history and geography; and an understanding of the relationship between Christian principle and the laws of the land. An appreciation of the 'Necessity of religion to the well-being of States', and the importance of religious institutions and especially the Church of England, would ensure that (in an interesting choice of phrase) '“Kings become nursing-fathers, and Queens nursing-mothers” of the visible Church'. For women, in families and at the head of the nation, More's emphasis was on 'Christianity as a Principle of Action':<sup>99</sup> the day-to-day striving for a Christian character, both personal and national, inspired by the doctrines and duties 'searched for' in the Scriptures.

More's anti-revolutionary politics have given her a reputation as an arch-conservative defender of the *status quo*, and as a consequence she has suffered neglect among historians. Most recently, Anne Mellor has rightfully, if simplistically, rebutted claims by social historians that More's work can be reduced to a simplistic class-based oppression.<sup>100</sup> More subtly, and in a less celebratory vein, Christine Kruegar suggests that More should be seen as a social prophet, in the mould of other eighteenth-century women preachers such as Mary Bosanquet and Mary Elland.<sup>101</sup> Her enthusiasm for St Paul and ability to draw from his writings a set of principles of action which would give shape to the Christian social body support this view. But More's vision was wider than this. Her missionary practice was informed by theories of civilisation and by the Bible to promote cultural reform, the development of a Christian social body and the domestic reform of women as a missionary solution to national and international ills. More was, therefore, more than a locally based methodistical woman prophet. Her model for missionary reform was to be extended throughout the world, by abolitionists, the Cheap Repository Tracts<sup>102</sup> and members of the missionary societies. Without leaving Britain's shores, Hannah More was a global missionary.

More's missionary writing and reform projects in Avon and Mendip villages provided a blueprint for a new generation of evangelical philanthropists. By 1798, as the Cheap Repository Tracts wound down, More's version of missionary reform was

promoted across a number of sites. The Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor (1796) prioritised cultural reform, Bible reading and female domestic reform, concerns that were soon evident in the practices of Sunday schools, the monitorial system of education (1797 and 1798) and the BFBS (1804). Bolstered by the writing of Bentham and especially Malthus, these were all, in Eileen Yeo's words, 'systems for the mass production of improvement'.<sup>103</sup> To this end, a proposed 'narrow utilitarianism' sought to inculcate discipline and self-sufficiency with a broad concern for inspection and surveillance and an emphasis on domestic reform and 'moral restraint', which equated the comfort, happiness and survival of the poor with the progress of the nation.

Whether located in Britain, Tahiti or the rural areas surrounding Calcutta, early missions adopted a very similar structure, combining methods of Christian education with a programme for 'civilisation', or cultural reform. Overseas missionary communities would begin by holding public meetings, providing Biblical instruction, Sabbath schools and Benevolent Societies and building churches and chapels to accommodate the new congregations. Solid houses with windows and with separate living and sleeping quarters were built, often as part of new village settlements, in West Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean. Improved habits concerning dress, deportment, eating and sleeping, were also encouraged and appropriate gender roles were promoted, involving the acquisition of artisan and agricultural skills for men, and domesticity, in skills, dress and demeanour, for women and girls.<sup>104</sup> Detested practices, including promiscuity, homosexuality, infanticide, cannibalism and human sacrifice in the South Pacific, and sati, idolatry, pilgrimage and the exposure of the sick and dying in north India were also to be rooted out.<sup>105</sup> For most within the missionary movement, there was no clash of interest between Christianity and civilisation. Enlightenment and civilisation were unthinkable without Christianity and moral reform. Christian conversion, it was believed, would necessarily lead to the abandonment of savagery and the adoption of civilised cultural practices, and thereby to the progress of civilisation and Christianity on a global

scale.<sup>106</sup> At home, missionary subjects were also seen to suffer not only from an absence of religious knowledge, but from a more fundamental cultural deficit. Programmes for reform involved a thorough-going assault upon aspects of the traditional culture: attendance at fairs, participation in blood sports and the practice of St Monday; pursuits and pastimes such as dancing, miming, music, wrestling and boxing, were all deemed to encourage ungodly behaviour. Domestic reform was of paramount importance, as women were encouraged to be frugal and clean, moral and industrious, to send their children to Sunday school and keep their husbands from the public house.

### Conclusion

While missions were not new to the 1790s, moral reform and the civilising mission were newly articulated in that decade, as a groundswell of grassroots missionary activity drew in all Protestant denominations. Global evangelising of the 1790s and early 1800s was the outcome of a Biblical imperative: extension overseas, enabled by new opportunities for visiting hitherto remote regions of the world, was a natural development once the conversion of the poor at home was accepted as an intrinsic part of Christian duty. In Britain after 1789, the missionary solution was successfully steered by Hannah More and other members of the Clapham Sect. Working in conjunction with evangelicals and social reformers of other denominations, they popularised the belief that a missionary movement could inculcate moral restraint and domestic reform, and perform a role in the surveillance of the poor, thus contributing to social cohesion. The Claphamites and their supporters were able to appropriate the more positive aspects of Methodism while simultaneously engaging with their anxieties about popular religion. In so doing they forged a polarity in popular evangelicalism, between the 'respectable' on the one hand, and the 'irregular' and 'disorderly' on the other. At the same time as differences fractured the movement, the shared missionary impulse enabled points of connection and places to work together. The existence of equivalent societies across and within denominations suggests that

denominational loyalty was compatible with shared beliefs and principles for action.<sup>107</sup>

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the missionary solution was widely adopted in the English provinces. While it began as a movement of elite members (although never, as Roberts suggests, driven entirely from the homes of the Gurneys and Frys in Spitalfields and Earlham)<sup>108</sup> missionary philanthropy soon became a mass provincial movement. As will be shown in Chapter 2, respectable evangelical men and women leaped aboard the missionary project. Alongside the swelling congregations which saw the flurry of church and chapel building in the 1790s and early 1800s, the formation of missionary societies provided important sites of collaboration for those – largely middle-class – evangelicals anxious to address the concerns of global irreligion and of Methodist and working-class ‘irregularities’. Missionary practice came to create new networks through which a broad middle-class culture began to take shape.

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