

Baptist World Alliance Heritage and Identity Commission Paper July 2001 Charlottetown PEI

JAMAICAN AND BRITISH BAPTISTS IN WEST AFRICA, 1841-1888

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Abstract

This article surveys West Africa outreach between 1841-1888 by the London-based Baptist Missionary Society (hereafter BMS) and the Kingston-based Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society (hereafter JBMS). Documentation focuses on responses of mission board leaders, missionaries, the local Creole community and African Christians to the reality of growing interference by European powers and the imposition of colonial rule on the region. This case study elucidates the complex role of missionaries in the process by which the West came to exercise political and economic domination of Africa. It complements a survey of the role of black Americans in the Protestant missionary movement in Africa.(1)

Introduction

This study explores the complex role of missionaries in the process by which the West came to exercise political and economic domination of Africa. As a case study, the article surveys West Africa outreach between 1841-1888 by the London-based BMS and the Kingston-based JBMS. The period encompasses crucial dates, including

- * 1841: initial work on the island of Fernando Po twenty-two miles off the Cameroon coast;(2)
- * 1844: the BMS secured land to establish work at Bimbia and Douala in 1845;
- * 1858: abandonment of Fernando Po;
- * 1884: partition of Africa, when Cameroon came under German control;
- * 1888: completion of the transfer of the BMS field to the Basel Mission.

Hostile images abound of missionaries who participated in the global spread of Christianity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Philosopher George Santayana expresses disdain for missionaries as follows. "A missionary sermon is an unprovoked attack; it seeks to entice, to dictate, to browbeat, to disturb, and to terrify; it ends, if it can, by grafting into your heart, and leaving to fructify there, an alien impulse, the grounds of which you do not contain understand [sic], and the consequences of which you never have desired" (1951: 203). Literary critic Edward Said charges missionaries with collusion in crimes:

An immense wave of anti-colonial and ultimately anti-imperial activity, thought, and revision has overtaken the massive edifice of Western empire, challenging it ... in a mutual siege. For the first time Westerners have been required to confront themselves not simply as the Raj but as representatives of a culture and even of races accused of crimes--crimes of violence, crimes of suppression, crimes of conscience (1994: 195).

Recent historiography of Africa has sought to free missionaries from such charges. African and western historians alike acknowledge that western missionaries carried cultural baggage to various mission fields in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, we find that the record is ambiguous and not uniformly negative.

One of the central and enduring characteristics of Christian history is the rendering of God's eternal Word into daily speech. Through Bible translation, African believers and missionaries valorize African languages and cultures. African historian Lamin Sanneh writes, "The missionary sponsorship of Bible translation became the catalyst for profound changes and developments in language, culture and ethnicity, changes that invested ethnic identity with the materials for a reawakened sense of local identity"(1998: 5).

In some instances missionaries have championed justice and human liberation. Specifically, the Baptist movement emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the face of persecution and martyrdom. It has produced missionaries who, motivated by outraged Christian conscience, champion the cause of freedom. For example, Baptist missionaries offered leadership in nineteenth-century campaigns to eliminate monstrous evils such as slavery; footbinding in China; and caste, infanticide and sati in India.(3)

Background and Development of the Work on Fernando Po

In the late fifteenth century, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to visit Fernando Po. The Portuguese tried but failed to settle the island. In 1778, Portugal formally ceded any claim to the territory to Spain. The first Spanish attempt to settle the island also failed, as did an attempt by the British between 1827-1832. A graveyard for Europeans, the island nonetheless continued to be an object of attention. Between 1839-1843, the British government based a squadron there for the purposes of suppressing the slave trade, encouraging legitimate trade in non-human exports, notably palm oil, and expanding British interests in the area. Motivated in part by humanitarian concerns, this short-lived occupation failed. However, it led to creation of a Creole society and attracted the attention of the BMS to Fernando Po as a possible center for a new undertaking in West Africa (see Brown; Liniger-Goumaz; Lyon, 1984 and 1990).

Liberation of Jamaican slaves at midnight on August 1, 1838 was a source of great joy for Jamaicans and Baptist missionary anti-slavery activists. However, emancipation in the British West Indies did not end the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The desire of some freed Jamaicans to return to Africa to assist in the anti-slaving cause as well as to be instrumental in the spread of the Gospel sparked a wave of enthusiasm for further humanitarian activity.

In 1839, Jamaican Baptists proposed the establishment of a mission to West Africa. When the proposal ran into opposition, BMS missionary William Knibb (1803-1845) and two Jamaican Baptists, Henry Beckford and Edward Barrett, took the matter directly to BMS officials in the United Kingdom.

Known for his anti-slavery views, Knibb envisioned starting a BMS field along lines proposed by Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners or Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society. Leading missiologists of the day, Anderson and Venn promoted self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating churches under native leaders. Their ideas strongly influenced Baptist practice.⁽⁴⁾ "There is no doubt that for Knibb, the establishment of the faith in Jamaica, was part of a 'providential design' which gave to the African slave the boon of Christianity, in order that he might be an instrument for the spread of the gospel to the homeland of Africa before the 'last days'" (Russell, 1993: 46; Cox, 1842, 2:355-56, Hinton, 1847: 348).

For their part, the Jamaican Christians shared an interest in establishing a Jamaican undertaking independent of the London-based BMS. The Jamaican Baptists envisioned a self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating mission, but they sought inter-confessional support rather than limiting the appeal to the Baptist constituency alone. The idea of giving authenticity and purpose to a newly emancipated people was crucial. The freed Jamaicans would assume a particular role in the advance of Christ's cause in Africa. As well, the mission would provide a stimulus for the repatriation of African-Caribbeans to Africa (Russell, 1993: 58).

At a meeting on May 22, 1840, Knibb, Beckford and Barrett made their appeal for the creation of a mission to West Africa. Their appearance provided the impetus for the BMS to open a new field in western Africa staffed primarily by Jamaicans. The BMS resolved to follow "what we apprehend to be the clear indications of Providence." Agreeing in principle to commence work in West Africa, the BMS funded a scouting party of "at least one brother with a few negro evangelists" to the field (Missionary Herald July 1840: 389-90).⁽⁵⁾ The BMS would be responsible only for white and black missionaries that it appointed, not for freed Jamaicans who went to Africa as settlers. At the same time, the BMS committed itself to strengthening its work in Jamaica and commissioned ten new missionaries for Jamaica. Two years later, in 1842, Jamaican Baptists formally created the JBMS to promote ministry and mission in the Caribbean and West Africa.

As an advance party, the Reverend John Clarke (1802-1879), a BMS missionary to Jamaica and George K. Prince (d. 1865), a medical doctor and former slave owner, sailed for West Africa. On January 1, 1841 they arrived at Clarence on the island of Fernando Po. This was to have been a stopping-off point en route to the Nigerian interior, but Clarke and Prince received a warm reception from the head of the British naval squadron. Freed slaves and other black immigrants pleaded for the establishment of a Christian presence. Clarke and Prince advised that the BMS respond positively, thus providing a catalyst for an undertaking that ended in 1858 when the BMS transferred its base to Cameroon.

In 1842, Thomas Sturgeon (1810-1846) arrived on Fernando Po from England. This freed Clarke and Prince to leave the island to visit their families and recruit volunteers for the new mission from England and Jamaica, as well as Jamaican settlers. They expected leadership of the new

venture to devolve to the Jamaicans. Notable among the recruits were Joseph Merrick (1818-1849), Alexander McCloud Fuller (d. 1847), and his son Joseph Jackson Fuller (1825-1908). In 1843 Prince and his wife returned to the island with Merrick, Elizabeth Knowles Merrick and the elder Fuller. In early 1844, Clarke followed with his wife Margaret, several British missionary recruits including Alfred Saker (1814-1880) and Helen Jessup Saker, thirty-seven Jamaican settlers including the younger Fuller, aged seventeen and a trained mason. Fuller reported the spirit of Jamaican recruits in words of a hymn sung as they sailed:

*Yes! My native land I love thee!
All thy scenes I love them well.
Friends, companions, happy country,
Can I bid you all farewell?
Can I leave you
For in heathen lands to dwell?
Yes! I leave you
For in heathen lands to dwell* (Fuller, Recollections).

On what basis was the mission amongst the so-called heathen to be established? Clarke and Prince were to explore the coastal area and proceed to the hinterland. They were also to facilitate introduction of Christianity chiefly by native agency. As this would entail work in areas outside the parameters of British authority, Joseph Angus, BMS secretary between 1841-1849, informed the team that they would be responsible in some measure to govern the island. "As the people at Clarence are without a local government, it will be desirable that some steps should be taken to preserve peace and good order amongst them. For these, they depend upon themselves, and the most you can do will be to advise and persuade them." Angus went on to propose that the Creole community elect two of its own, to serve as magistrates and establish civil order. "It will be desirable to give all encouragement to members of churches and others of good character who may emigrate from Jamaica. Plots of land should be sold to them at a low price, and every facility afforded them to engage in agriculture and trade." In correspondence with John Beecroft, a British trader who had the titular title of Spanish Governor from 1843-1854, Angus finalized arrangements for the purchase of land and buildings.(6)

Through preaching, teaching, and translating the Bible into the local language, the newly arrived Jamaican and English missionaries tackled the work energetically. As early as November 1841, on their first visit, Clarke baptized some islanders. By March 1844, only a month after his return, the congregation at Santa Isabel numbered forty-four members, 190 inquirers, and over 300 Sabbath scholars in nine classes.

The mission on Fernando Po reached its apex by 1846. One reason for early success was the approach of the Baptists. In order to make possible the realization of the three-self missiological goal [self-support, self-government, self-propagation], the settlement made an all-out effort to promote the two "C's" [commerce and civilization]. The Jamaican settlers formed a trading elite. Culturally and spiritually, they were European. Those who joined the church at Clarence expected members to live exemplary lives. They disciplined members who strayed and routinely called people to prayer, and spiritual revival, purification and humiliation.(7)

While practices of the mission suited the inclinations of the Jamaican settler elite, they had little impact on the island's native population. Despite early success, the mission did not thrive and soon failed for four reasons.

The first reason for the decline of the work on Fernando Po had to do with physical health. The Jamaican settlers were presumed to be immune to diseases that had decimated the English settlers. Contrary to this expectation, Jamaicans fared no better. Joseph Jackson Fuller wrote that he was not led Africa by any "overmastering enthusiasm" (Recollections 6). It is likely that many volunteered without comprehending the hardships they would face. Soon, many were eager to return to Jamaica. Moreover, in the view of British missionaries, those who remained did not manifest spiritual health either.

Second, in early February 1843, Spain asserted its long-standing claims to the island. The captain of a Spanish fleet planted the Spanish flag at Clarence, renamed the city Santa Isabel, and proclaimed his intent to establish the Roman Catholic Church as the official religion of the island. Writing in his journal on June 9, 1844, Clarke expressed concern regarding Spanish intentions. Despite his confidence that "all is in the hand of a Holy, and Wise, and Powerful God," Clarke reported developments of crisis proportions. The British navy abandoned the island. The pace of Spanish involvement quickened. On January 5, 1846 virtually the entire community at Santa Isabel, including newly arrived recruits such as Joseph Jackson Fuller, petitioned Queen Victoria stating that they believed they were under British protection when they immigrated to West Africa.(8)

The appeal by Christians for Britain to intervene on their behalf resulted in sporadic correspondence over the next few years. Though officials assured the Christians that they could preach and itinerate, Spain never formally confirmed the rights of the Christian community at Santa Isabel. Sturgeon was the only white missionary allowed to perform some functions at Santa Isabel. His death on August 13, 1846 provoked understandable concern.

Racial attitudes of the day constituted a third barrier to the advance of the work. The Jamaicans thought they were equals to the English and were disappointed when this proved not to be the case. While the white missionaries expressed enlightened attitudes at some points, for example, in permitting inter-racial marriages, they manifested disdain for African customs, paternalism towards Jamaican counterparts and a sense of cultural superiority. The lack of financial support on the part of the BMS only reinforced a sense of discontent. In notes on the mission's early years Joseph Jackson Fuller wrote:

... a mistaken idea entered into the mind of those that were Teachers, viz. That they ought to have the same position as the European Missionaries which they were made to feel they had not while the Settlers on the other hand felt that they were in the same position as the Teachers. At last this grew to such a pitch that the whole band became dissatisfied (Fuller's Comments, 3).

A final obstacle prevented the mission from realizing its original mandate on Fernando Po. The work on the island was part of a larger dream of penetrating the interior along the Niger River. This, however, proved impossible. In July 1843, Prince and Sturgeon visited Old Calabar in the Niger Delta. They discovered that Scotch Presbyterians were preparing to launch work there.

The Baptists abandoned the Niger project and subsequently focused their energies at Cameroon. By 1845, Merrick had moved to the mainland. Other promising workers followed, including Joseph Jackson Fuller and Thomas Horton Johnson, a freed slave from Sierra Leone and Alfred Saker's first baptismal candidate on Fernando Po.

As the mission on Fernando Po grew, a clash with the Spanish seemed inevitable. In 1858, Spanish authorities and Jesuit missionaries arrived in significant numbers. The BMS immediately began negotiations to sell the property at Clarence, with the intent to base its West African work on the Cameroon coast.

Historians generally record that Spain expelled the Baptists from the island. More accurately, the authorities severely circumscribed the work. In a proclamation of May 27, 1858, Spanish governor Carlos Chacon stated, "Those who profess any other religion which be not the Catholic should confine their worship within their own private houses or families and limit it to the members thereof (Keller, 1969:3)." The Baptists believed that the governor's proclamation violated their freedom to worship and evangelize without interference. They protested. In words reminiscent of earlier Baptist calls for religious liberty, they stated, "The law of our God binds us to obedience to magistrates" except in such circumstances as this, in which obedience to God was required as the higher calling. Promising to send the petition on to Madrid, Chacon assured the community that he desired to afford as much benefit to the people of Fernando Po as it lay in his power. In subsequent correspondence with the mission, Chacon warned that any violation of his decree would lead to the expulsion of the missionaries.(9)

Primitive Methodists and Presbyterians from the United States maintained a Protestant presence in the colony. The Primitive Methodists functioned on Fernando Po. Presbyterians served nearby at Corisco. By contrast, the Baptists withdrew to Victoria at Ambas Bay. Three factors influenced this decision. First, disease had decimated the Jamaican and British missionary ranks. As expectation that an indigenous church would emerge dimmed, prospects brightened along the Cameroon coast. Joseph Jackson Fuller, a gifted leader among surviving Jamaicans, and Thomas Horton Johnson, the most promising convert among freed Sierra Leoneans, were successfully building on the effective work of Joseph Merrick.

Second, memory of past persecution led the missionaries to prefer to work unmolested. They envisioned creating "a refuge and a home for those who cannot continue where liberty of worship is denied" as not only the sole Christian mission in Cameroon, but also the primary expatriate community (Victoria Agency Office 1858).

Finally, decades of contact between Europeans and coastal leaders made Cameroonians amenable to developing Christian villages from which the interior might be penetrated. At Bimbia, King William was becoming "a very good friend as well as of the Mission" (Fuller's Comments 12). In words of one explorer, Captain William Allen, the Duala possessed "such a degree of civilisation as to render them ... highly interesting ... a connecting link between the civilised and the less advanced natives of the interior (Allen, 1843:1)."

In summary, the permanent contribution of the BMS on Fernando Po was limited. The BMS had helped create a Creole society on the island. It had introduced to the island some Jamaican

plants. It had helped to lay the foundations for later anthropological and linguistic work. John Clarke's Introduction to the Fernandian Tongue (1848) and Specimens of Dialects (1848) were important early publications. It had not, however, created a strong church.

Background and Development of the Work in Cameroon

During their first year on Fernando Po, Clarke and Prince contacted Duala chiefs along the Wouri River estuary and King William of Bimbia. Probably due to the presence of Portuguese or Spanish slave ships in the area, King William received them in a cautious manner. On a later visit he was less co-operative. He told Prince, "he and his head people had had enough of God's palaver; that he would not interrupt their trading by repeating the call for assembling them, nor would they obey it. He frankly said that he had other business, and that he indulged himself with his women (MH 33 December 1841: 672)."

In 1844 Merrick found King William more accommodating (MH 36 September 1844: 484-87). The following year, Merrick initiated work along the coast, opening a station among the Isubu of Bimbia and two stations at Aqua Town and Bell Town along the Wouri River estuary. Unaware of difficulties that made the river largely unnavigable, he hoped that the system of creeks might ultimately provide access to the interior. However, Merrick's first task was to "prepare the way for the preaching of the gospel among the Isubu and the Dualas." This he did by forming churches and schools and learning the Isubu and Duala languages. A gifted linguist, he soon was able to preach in both tongues. He arranged to print some texts and scripture (Clarke, 1850; Aka).

Recognized as the pioneer of Christian work in Cameroon, Merrick's sojourn was brief. In October 1849, he died at sea on his way to Jamaica. However, his contribution endured through the excellence of his linguistic work. Among those who pioneered the work at Bimbia was Alexander Fuller, a "worthy man--a native of Jamaica, but in parentage and complexion an African, himself a fruit of missionary labour." He too died prematurely on April 23, 1847.(10) It remained for missionary son Joseph Jackson Fuller to carry on his work. Alfred Saker wrote, "I cannot speak too highly of brother Fuller's zeal and devotedness. He had indeed clutched with a firm hand the sword which his father dropped on his dying bed, and by his superior intelligence and knowledge of the native tongue promises to be still more efficient than his sainted father" (MH, 1849:326; E. M. Saker, 1929: 118-19).

Much of the credit for securing the work at Cameroon belongs to Fuller. Initially, he moved to Bimbia where he ran the station's print shop and bindery. When Merrick died, Fuller based himself at Douala where he taught, supervised printing operations and did itinerating work. In 1858, when the Baptists transferred their work to Victoria from Fernando Po, Fuller conducted most of the negotiations with King William.(11) Ordained in 1858, Fuller served in the field until 1888. In 1881 he completed a translation into Duala of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Between 1884-1888, Fuller supervised the transfer of the mission to the Basel Mission Society. During forty years of service, Fuller provided a stable Christian presence.

In addition to Merrick and Fuller, African converts provided leadership at Bimbia, Victoria and Douala. Thomas Horton Johnson, the first African baptized by Saker, was an ex-slave who

moved from Fernando Po to the Cameroon mainland in 1849. In 1855, Johnson was ordained and given charge of a congregation of fifty members. He baptized the first Duala Christian, Bekima Bile, who took the Christian name Smith. In 1866, when Johnson died, a Jamaican-born BMS missionary Francis Pinnock described him as follows,

He was a truly good man, and was especially remarkable for his patience and forbearance, and love of peace. Some twenty years of his life were devoted to the service of Christ and of the society, the greater part of which time was spent at Cameroons, where he was mainly instrumental in the formation of the Church there. . . . his family consists of a widow, a son 11 or 12 years old; and three grandsons, the oldest of whom is about the same age as that of his uncle.(12)

Freed West Indians and Africans such as Fuller and Johnson formed a cohesive group at Victoria and Douala. In effect, they were cultural intermediators, middlemen and women who concretely embodied the ideals of the BMS. They created two model Christian villages best described as theocracies. In addition to their BMS responsibilities, they helped establish a prospering system of plantations of cash crops, including some introduced from Jamaica. They provided European trading firms mundane services such as translation and printing. Though they learned African languages, they used English routinely in the schools and in worship. In theory, they were equal to the British missionaries. In practice, the BMS did not treat them as such, as their salaries indicated: in 1863, Saker received 250 pounds. By contrast, Fuller received 125 pounds. Johnson received 100 pounds.(13)

Among early Cameroonian converts, two stood out: Joshua Dibundu and George Etonde Nkwe, co-pastors of the large Bonaku congregation by the 1870s. A freed slave probably from the Bamileke interior, Nkwe was a charter member of a school Merrick opened in 1845 in Douala for former slaves. Subsequently, Nkwe played a role similar to that of Fuller and Johnson. He aided in the translation of the Duala Bible. In 1888, at the time of the transfer of the BMS holdings to the Basel Mission Society, Nkwe received recognition as a former pastor of the Bethel congregation. As a middleman and trader, he gained a reputation for healing many disputes amongst the Duala. As for Dibundu, he played a leadership role in the Bethel congregation at Duala and succeeded Nkwe as pastor. In 1888, he led a revolt against the imposition of Basel Mission Society authority and established an independent Native Baptist Church (Osteraas 1972:36; Joseph, 1980:9; Barrett, 1968:25).

Despite the importance of the contribution of African and Jamaican converts, Alfred Saker was the key figure in the mission. Trained and recruited as a millwright, naval draughtsman and engineer, Saker proved to be the most durable of the British Baptists to serve in West Africa. In addition to pastoral work, at Victoria Saker served, in effect, as governor of a Christian colony (Victoria Rules and Regulations).

Saker's first challenge was to supervise the removal of the Christian community from Fernando Po to Victoria. By January 1859, Saker was able to report that the process was complete. "My heart is joyous indeed for my heavy toil in removing from Clarence is over ... God has opened a wide door at Victoria, Amboize Bay ... its swelling hills and noble mountain range tell of freedom, fertility and health (Victoria, Southern Cameroons 1858-1958 20)."

Despite this success, a controversy that would dog Saker throughout much of the balance of his career surfaced. Alexander Innes, a Scots recruit from Liverpool, arrived at Victoria. Within months, Innes was protesting Saker's cruel behavior towards black colleagues, mistreatment of natives, and mishandling of mission funds. This was not the first time that a missionary found himself in conflict with Saker, nor was it the first time that serious charges had been directed against Saker. Earlier, Thomas Horton, a Duala convert, and sixteen others had complained of harsh treatment at the hands of Saker. The BMS had to take such complaints seriously. It named a committee of inquiry that responded by recalling Innes for consultations. The sub-committee interviewed Innes in February 1860 and reported to the BMS. The BMS reassured Saker of its support and dismissed Innes. At the same time, the committee suggested to Saker that he consider modifying the manner by which he treated natives.

These actions did not end the affair. Saker's conduct continued to arouse suspicion. In 1862, Innes published a pamphlet repeating his charges. Innes claimed that Saker's translation efforts were overrated, and that much of the credit belonged to Merrick and Fuller. He further stated that these activities were a waste since the Bibles did not find their way into the hands of the people. Finally, he accused Saker of running a slave establishment. Instead of devoting himself to mission work, Saker was, in the words of Innes, "a complete tyrant" engaged in secular work and monopolizing the legitimate trade of the nations (Innes, 1862:6).

Twice, in 1864 and 1869 the BMS recalled Saker to London. Finally, it sent a delegation headed by Edward Bean Underhill, BMS secretary from 1849 to 1876, to investigate first-hand the situation in Cameroon. The sudden death of Underhill's wife in Cameroon undermined any expectation that Underhill could conduct a thorough inquiry. In the end, the committee cleared Saker of most of the charges (MH 62 May 1870): 333-36). This did not placate Innes. He published a second, scathing attack on Saker (Innes, 1895).

Scholars have reviewed the case (Ardener 1968:9-11, Stanley 1992:110-14).(14) For our purposes, the missiological aspect of the Innes-Saker controversy is of interest. Innes, who held up the three-self policy and the centrality of native agents, compared Saker unfavorably with Merrick, a "much beloved and respected" evangelist, and Dibundu, a "self-denying" model for other African Christians. Again in contrast with Saker, Innes stressed the effective evangelical outreach of native Cameroonian Baptists who established eighteen new mission stations, with a schoolmaster and a preacher at almost every one in the aftermath of partition (Innes 1895:59).

In short, Innes made a striking case that Saker's secular activities undermined the specifically religious mandate of early BMS policy, which emphasized preaching, teaching and translating. Innes challenged the integrity and worth of three alleged achievements of Saker: Bible translation, printing work and the creation of Victoria. According to Innes, credit for each of these rested, with Merrick and Fuller, even though Innes faulted each at some point (Innes 1895:9-15).

For his part, Saker was the architect of a model Christian village of which he was governor. In part an entrepreneur, Saker established the mission because he afforded access to converts to the benefits of encroaching European rule. In part a survivor, he maintained the mission through force of will and personality. Reflecting discouragement with the results of the native agency, the

BMS sanctioned Saker's secular work and surrounded him with young missionaries who would be the primary agent in propagating the gospel in the interior. Among his secular work was exploration and some scientific work (Burton, 1863).

In 1870, in his report exonerating Saker, Underhill reflected two emerging trends: first, a shift in mission theory from the three-self policy to support for western commercial interests and western civilization as the foundation for a Christian society; and second, a push to open the interior. The appointment and practice of new recruits, notably George Grenfell (1849-1906; served in Cameroon 1875-1878) and Thomas Lewis (1859-1929; served in Cameroon 1883-1886) confirmed these trends. They opened the interior to the Gospel, rather than native evangelists. They represented civilization to the unchurched rather than the emerging native elite. They championed the expansion of empire, as the following excerpts from their biographies indicate. In 1877, Grenfell wrote: "The prejudice against adopting anything like the habits of civilized countries, is jealously fostered by the Ngambi men or witch-doctors. This state of affairs would be quite altered upon British occupation. Civilization would be at a premium then, and the people not afraid of mending their habits" (Hawker, 1909:86; cf.. Stanley, 1997). As for Lewis, he did not oppose about German annexation of Cameroon in 1884. He wrote, "The military rule did not commend itself to many of us, but after all Africans can with advantage do with some discipline, and the government under the guidance of Baron von Sodan was altogether to the good ... I found him very favourable to our work as missionaries" (Lewis, 1930:79).

Grenfell and Lewis reflected a more aggressive BMS policy that had, as its principal motive the rapid penetration of the interior of Africa by European missionaries. With a goal of establishing stations in the Cameroon interior Grenfell and another new missionary Thomas Comber concentrated their attention on exploring the Wouri River.(15) When the Duala stymied their plans, they responded quickly to the promise of a new field, the Congo.

As for Lewis, he reflected the complacency of the English and assumed the senior missionary was governor of a colony under English protection. He was unprepared for the circumstances by which, in 1884, the Germans successfully outmaneuvered Britain and claimed Cameroon as a colony.(16)

As in 1858, the BMS found itself in a difficult position. Weakened by conflict, its ranks decimated by ill health, apparently surrounded by alien forces, the BMS first turned to British authorities for protection. Britain renounced any claims it might have had to Cameroon. The main concern in the minds of BMS officials shifted not to maintaining a native ministry, but to recovering their financial investment in Cameroon while finding an alternative place to continue its missionary activity. The BMS turned its attention to a new mission field which had opened up along the Congo River and, over a two-year period, negotiated with a German-speaking Basel Mission Society for transfer of the field. Fuller was left to assist in the transition, completed in 1888.

As has already been mentioned, the nascent Baptist communities resisted imposition of authority by both German government and mission officials. Unwilling to forfeit the autonomy of the local congregation, Bethel Baptist Church, Douala, followed by the Victoria Baptist Church under the leadership of Pastor Joseph Wilson, Jr. declared their independence. The principal issues turned

on questions of how the congregations would be organized, the nature of the worship and congregational self-government. The German government and the missionaries insisted on asserting European authority. When the Baslers failed to gain the support of the local Baptists, the German government permitted German Baptists to enter the field, which they did in 1891. One of the incoming Baptist missionaries summarized the prevailing European attitude as follows, "The work cannot be left completely without the supervision of Western missionaries, even if an effort should be made to have the larger congregations become independent. Black tribes are so used to authority that, if left to themselves, they will feel abandoned and disintegrate."(17)

The new missionary societies never completely brought the native Baptists under their sway. Dibundu especially continued to exercise his prerogatives as pastor until the early 1900s, when the German Baptists charged him with fraud. Dibundu served a jail term of five years. Upon his release, Dibundu, unrepentant, persisted in seeking his former position and was arrested again. Though the German Baptists finally found a successor in one of its loyal workers, the independent-minded native Baptists found a new leader in Lotin Same, who led them to the Second World War.

Conclusion

Nearly five decades after an auspicious beginning in West Africa, the London-based Baptist Missionary Society left Cameroon as it had Fernando Po, not so much expelled as unprepared to work in a situation where it felt it had no guarantees of religious liberty. Unwilling to champion a self-governing Baptist church, unwittingly the BMS left as its principal legacy a truly independent Baptist church.

As a case study in mission history, this is not a glorious account of the advance of religious liberty or of separation of church from state. It is rather the story of a mission society that, wittingly or unwittingly, welcomed the imposition of colonial rule. The BMS did not adequately credit the efforts of Jamaican missionaries to undertake an evangelistic mission. Generally, even those Baptist missionaries who did advocate on behalf of the Jamaicans did not undertake structural analysis, nor did they sustain broader action for God's coming realm of justice and peace.

By contrast, native Baptists, descendents of the efforts of Jamaican and African converts, provided a model which would re-assert itself throughout the colonial era. They resisted the devolution of the Baptist work to colonial societies and provided an effective and dynamic alternative to compliance to the imposition of colonial rule. This proved to be an early manifestation of a developing wave of independent African Christianity.

Endnotes

1. The Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, houses the BMS archives and JBMS material. Librarian Sue Mills and former BMS archivist Elizabeth Doull have assisted me on

three occasions. This account of Jamaican enthusiasm for West Africa missions is set within the broader picture of pan-African black Christian identity (Jacobs, 1982). I am grateful to Joe Carpenter and Marcel Oyono for comments on a draft of this article. Mistakes are mine.

2. For the period under study, Cameroon refers chiefly to the area near the Wouri River estuary. Douala refers to the city. Duala refers to the people of that name and their language. Place names derive from Duala chiefdoms (Bell Town, Akwa Town). Some place names have changed. Victoria is now called Limbe. For the period of study, see Austen and Derrick.

3. Sati is the custom of burning of Hindu widows on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. In addition to Sanneh see Bediako, Dekar 1993, Hastings, Pierard, Stanley 1990 and 1992.

4. Executive secretaries of leading mission societies of the day, Venn (1796-1873) and Anderson (1796-1880) fostered mission ideas that shaped the BMS (1843, 1852, Underhill 1896). BMS missionary James Mursell Phillippo (1798-1879), who served alongside Knibb in Jamaica, strongly supported the idea that Jamaican Christians were ready, like the Israelites, to return from their land of captivity with the ark of God, the Bible, prepared to further the task of civilizing and Christianizing Africa (Phillippo 1838:458). The assumption that Jamaicans were native agents warrants more detailed consideration than is possible in here. Of the Jamaicans recruited, only three were born in Africa or remembered anything of their African background.

5 During most of the nineteenth century, *The Missionary Herald* was bound as a supplement to the *Baptist Magazine*. Many articles are without author or title. Hereafter: MH.

6. Angus, letter to outgoing missionaries, 31 May 1843; Angus to Beecroft, 13 Sept 1843, in "Correspondence on Spanish Occupation of Fernando Po," BMS Archives.

7. Church Book of Clarence, Fernando Po, BMS Archives A/11. The commerce and civilization theme owed much to the thought of Buxton (1839).

8. While the petition text is undated, Clarke, Journal and "Correspondence on Spanish Occupation of Fernando Po" confirm its date.

9. Petition of May 28, 1858 and correspondence with Chacon are among the letters of Alfred Saker, BMS Archives A/3.

10. "Death of Mr. Fuller", MH 39 (September 1847): 590-92.

11. While Saker worked out some of the final arrangements, Fuller did all the negotiations for the land. Indicative of an authoritarian pattern that was emerging, Saker did not consult Fuller. Fuller observed, "I suppose it was because he was Senior, and he did not think I had any claim to be consulted in the matter; however, I was glad it was settled. I had now the land and my concern was to begin my work (Autobiography 41)."

12. MH 58 (August 1866):526 and van Slageren 1972:25-26, provide biographical details.

13. West Indies and Africa Sub-Committee Reports, BMS Archives, IN/35; Osteraas, 1972: 31-33.

14. Stanley, ch. 4; Shirley G. Ardener, *Eye-Witnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon 1883-1887* (Buea: Government Press, 1968).

15 Comber (1852-1887) served in Cameroon from 1876-1878 and subsequently in the Congo.

16. Lewis and Fuller provide two of the best eye-witness accounts. Among secondary literature, see Ardener, Osteraas, van Slageren, and, among general histories of Cameroon, Engelbert Mveng, *Histoire du Cameroun* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963).

17. A missionary's comment in 1897 quoted by Osteraas, p. 118. The discussion that follows derives from Osteraas and van Slageren.

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