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God, Glory, and Expansion: The English Missionary in East Africa

by James J. Cooke

The role of the Victorian, English-speaking missionary in east Africa has been consistently misunderstood and misinterpreted. Too often the picture of the missionaries was one of middle-aged, slightly balding men and graying spinsters with Bibles in hand, singing militant hymns, and calling on the unconverted to alter their religious life. While certainly these people existed in Africa they did not represent the activist Christian who ventured to an unknown and dangerous continent to spread the Gospel and to aid, in great, direct measure, the course of Great Britain's colonial expansion. It was impossible to separate the man of God from the milieu in which he lived. That society was Victorian and English. Victorian society manifested its humanitarian concerns in many ways, and the civilizing mission in Africa was a manifestation of that state of mind. Some clerics, writers, and statesmen believed that Britain should carry the benefits of European technology and civilization to the newly opened continent. One British historian wrote, "Concern for Africa flowed from some of the most vivid experiences of Victorian religious and political life. . . . The chains had to be struck from the African's neck. He must be converted. He would be civilized."¹ The natives, the missionaries hoped, would become willing subjects of two sovereigns—the King of Heaven and the Queen of England, but often spiritual work was damaged by an overindulgence in annexationist politics by the clerics who were fully committed to English imperial expansion.²

While many later Victorian politicians were lukewarm on the issue of African expansion, many zealous churchmen were certainly not. Filled with a zeal to eradicate black slavery, a large number of clerics

in England urged more and more direct action. In 1787, William Wilberforce and a few antislavery colleagues formed an association to pressure the British Parliament into legislating against the African slave trade. This legislation, passed in 1807, did not go so far as Wilberforce wanted, but it did focus attention on Africa. It brought to the front, however, the issue of slavery and the slave trade in Africa which caught the attention of many youthful romantics and idealists within the church. To rid Africa of slavery via the introduction of the “sound doctrines of Christianity” became a strong motivation force in the English missionary effort. A century later George L. Pilkington, a famous British missionary to Uganda, echoed Wilberforce’s angry comments about slavery in Africa.\(^3\) Frederick Lugard, a soldier who explored both east and west Africa in the 1890’s, wrote that the introduction of the Christian mission into Africa had a profound effect on the struggle to eradicate black slavery. At one point, the missionaries in east Africa who were exasperated at futile attempts to abolish both the lucrative trade and the institution prepared for war against the Arab slavers. The Christians raised a battle flag, Lugard related, emblazoned with the word Freedom, and, in fact, an anti-slavery war raged in east Africa in 1888 and 1889.\(^4\)

The missionaries alone could not stamp out human bondage. The abolition of slavery could only be accomplished by the European powers who had military, diplomatic, and political force. The nations of Europe had the irresistible might to end slavery, if they wished to act in concert; however, in the late nineteenth century each state had its own idea of how to open Africa for expansion and, if practical, for economic exploitation. What had to emerge, by necessity, was an alliance of the missionaries and state with the cleric’s ultimate goal being the “civilization and Christianization” of Africa. But not every European state professed the same faith. France was Catholic, as was Belgium and Italy. Great Britain remained on the whole protestant and English missionaries came to Africa from every section of the island. From Uganda, Pilkington wrote to his father

\(^3\) George Pilkington, Diary entry Fere Town, east Africa, June 17, 1890, quoted in Charles Harford-Battersby, \textit{Pilkington of Uganda} (New York: Revell, 1899), pp. 75–76.

that African missionary efforts demanded "Cambridge men—Experience has convinced [me] that educated gentlemen are absolutely needed for Africa."\textsuperscript{5} Pilkington simply could not separate himself from the society which he knew, be it English and Protestant, French and Catholic.

Here was perhaps the missionaries' greatest challenge: to divorce themselves from the political, social, and economic milieu of Europe. Could they, in fact, serve two masters, and by doing so still remain free of European colonial conflicts in Africa? That they failed to disengage themselves from European conflicts and prejudices was shown by their political efforts in east Africa. The formation of the \textit{wa-Fransa} or French speaking Catholic party and the establishment of the \textit{wa-Inglasa}, or English-speaking Protestant party, in the same area were clear evidences of the missionaries encouraging colonial rivalry.\textsuperscript{6} They did so simply because they were human, endowed with emotions and loyalties which they learned in the mother country. The spread of language, learning, national patriotism, culture, and the faith became the goal of every missionary, and only rarely could servants of the church totally subordinate patriotism to the concepts of Christian oneness in a nonbelieving land. Many American missionaries, for example, because of their protestant beliefs and their usage of the English language, bound themselves to British imperial policy as well as to protestant missionary goals. Samuel N. Lapsley from Selma, Alabama, a Presbyterian missionary to the upper Congo, went so far as to wish to convert French and Belgian Roman Catholics to the protestant faith before leaving Europe for Africa.\textsuperscript{7} These examples of chauvinism and national prejudices did not mean that Pilkington of Uganda, Lapsley of the upper Congo, or Mckenzie of east Africa were hypocrites or fanatics. They were simply men who lived and interacted with their times, and to see them as more is unfair; less is unjust.

Most of the English-speaking protestant missionaries to east Africa began their service either in Zanzibar, or before 1895, in Madagascar.

\textsuperscript{5} Letter from Pilkington to his father, Cambridge, November 3, 1889, as quoted in Harford-Battersby, \textit{Pilkington}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{7} Letter from Lapsley to a Ladies' Church Group, Brussels, March 24, 1890, quoted in James W. Lapsley (ed.), \textit{The Life and Letters of Samuel N. Lapsley: Missionary to the Congo Valley, 1866–1892} (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1893), pp. 46–47.
Most Roman Catholic clerics started their service on Madagascar. However, for both the prize was neither of the two islands—it was the vast hinterlands of east Africa. Zanzibar played the larger role in the protestant movement into the hinterlands simply because, unlike Madagascar where French influence was strong, the British, since the Anglo-German convention of 1890, had a preponderance of power on the island. Official French opinion was not especially pleased over British control of Zanzibar, and French-speaking Catholic clerics seemed inclined not to accept the 1890 colonial arrangement. To counter French influence, the British Consul in Zanzibar took stern measures to limit Catholic, non-English activities. Since 1888, the Sultan of Zanzibar, who was by the 1890’s under the control of England, gave yearly donations to French missionaries to aid them in their work. Late in 1894 the British representative on Zanzibar pressured the Sultan into ending the contributions which had the effect of slowing down Catholic activities on the island. Also, the British East Africa Company refused to give special rates to the Catholics for goods sent to their missions in the interior of Africa, especially in the hotly contested Uganda region. To make matters worse, British agents on Zanzibar began expelling French missionaries as subversive agents, and these acts caused a good deal of irritation between London and Paris. The French Catholics appeared stronger colonialists than were some of the official representatives of the Paris government, and many British officials and missionaries wrote that the French were more determined to win territory for France than souls for Christ.

8 Arthur H. Hardinge, A Diplomatist in the East (London: Jonathan Cape, nd), p. 128. Hardinge was, for many years, the British Resident on the island of Zanzibar.

9 Ibid.

10 Note from Baron d’Estournelles de Constant to Hanotaux, French Foreign Minister, Paris, November 21, 1894, as found in France, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archival Volume 899.

11 Ministerial Note from Hanotaux, Paris, February 6, 1895, as found in Ibid., Archival Volume Aden, 1885–1895.

12 Dispatch from Lord Dufferin, British Ambassador to France to Lord Kimberley, Foreign Secretary, Paris, November 27, 1894, as found in Great Britain, Archives of the Foreign Office, Public Records Office Carton 405/222. For an interesting French account see André Lebon, La Pacification de Madagascar, (Paris: Plon, 1928). André Lebon was the Minister of Colonies during this period, and was instrumental in annexing Madagascar. Also, James J. Cooke, “Madagascar and Zan-
In the long run, however, the English-speaking missionary delved into the same sort of imperial politics in the areas where he worked, regardless of the political control of the region. William E. Cousins, a member of the London Missionary Society and a missionary to Madagascar, wrote in his *Madagascar of Today* (New York: Revell, 1895) that the Catholic faith was the predominant western religion on Madagascar. The dominant position of the Catholics strengthened by the large numbers of French colonial, administrative officials on the Island. Cousins concluded, "To Englishmen this [French, Catholic victory] may be a disappointment. There are friends of Madagascar who would heartily rejoice in the establishment of a British protectorate. It may be our national vanity that leads us to believe that we could so govern Madagascar as to benefit greatly the people themselves and to aid them in their upward progress; but there are facts as to British influence in other parts of the world that seem to warrant such a belief." Cousins, in his religious and patriotic zeal, stated what was on the minds of many British protestant and French Catholic missionaries—secure territory for the mother country. Cousins, in the conclusion to his book, wrote that the protestant converts on Madagascar would stand firm in the face of great persecution by the French. Implying that the British government would not allow wholesale persecutions of English sympathizers, he prayed for British intervention of some sort.

Political and religious confrontations on Madagascar and Zanzibar were restricted to small, defined territories. Religious conflicts became extremely heated when they passed to the east African mainland where vast tracts of territory were very much in question. From the islands off the coast came missionaries embued with two distinct goals: annex territory for Britain or France and convert the natives to their particular form of Christianity. As it appeared, both desires went hand in hand, but it appeared that often colonial politics came

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*Note: The references at the bottom of the page are not part of the natural text.*
before religious conversion. Uganda was the region where the opposing missionary groups directly confronted each other, and in the early 1890s it seemed likely that Uganda would fall to the power who would simply seize it. The British East Africa Company had commercial interests in the region but was rapidly losing money. There were rumors that the company, because of her financial difficulties, was planning to withdraw from Uganda. The company’s administration was economically bolstered by a gift from the Church Missionary Society which for all practical purposes tied the English-speaking protestant missionaries to the fate and future of the commercial company and Uganda. The British clerics were determined not to lose in Uganda what they believed they had lost on Madagascar.  

The obstinate determination of the English missionaries to hold Uganda led to a number of thorny problems for the administrators of the East Africa company. Pilkington and his colleagues tended to view any attempt to normalize relations between the Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims as a sign of near treason. Consequently, there was continual bickering and bad relations between the British administrators and the clerics. Pilkington and Lugard reached a point where they continually argued, and finally they decided not to speak to each other. At one point in the spring of 1892, Lugard informed the churchmen that, as a representative of the east African Company, he tried to avoid an overemphasis on politics. Pilkington exploded and told Lugard that the British missionaries did indeed take part in partisan politics, and that they must do so when, “... politics and religion were so intimately connected.”  

To his diary the English explorer confided, “Never in my life had I met so difficult a set of men to deal with. Even my most friendly remarks were twisted and distorted until I found the only way of not falling foul of them was to leave them alone.”  

Pilkington and his coworkers firmly believed that they had to be almost fanatical in their devotion to the British imperial and reli-

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16 Diary entry April 12, 1892, as found in Margery Perham and Mary Bull (eds.), *The Diaries of Lord Lugard: East Africa, January 1892 to August 1892, III* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1959), 167–68.  
gious efforts in Uganda because in 1892 and early 1893, they feared that the English presence in Uganda was in danger. Pilkington wrote long letters complaining of Lugard’s administration of the British East Africa Company. The missionary believed that Lugard’s policies in regards to the three religious sects was not in keeping with company’s policy. The cleric wrote, “The [religious] policy has always been rather favorable to the Papist party; most careful had been both Captains Lugard and Williams to let no national or religious prejudice seem in any way to influence them in their administration.”

During the later part of April, 1892, Lugard began to receive reports of atrocities in the interior. True to form, the Catholics blamed outrages on the Protestants and the Protestants complained about the Roman Catholics committing criminal acts. The agents of the East Africa Company were indeed hard pressed to deal with the situation, which was rapidly deteriorating into a civil war. When fighting developed in 1892, Lugard tried to make peace. He believed that it would be necessary to separate the factions, if possible. To complicate matters the financial situation of the East Africa Company became more and more serious because of a number of factors, and since the company was financially collapsing, Lugard decided on a policy of ending the fighting and separating the rival factions as quickly and as cheaply as possible. Lugard was convinced of the necessity to maintain peace in order to save the company in Uganda.

Lugard used the force at his command, including Maxim machine-guns, to inflict several defeats upon the *wa-Fransa* forces. Pilkington, after watching the bloody fighting and casualties wrote, “... it has been God's doing. You know very well that this [violence and bloodshed] is not the sort of thing we count success, or care for, except in so far as it opens the door for the Gospel... The English flag at last is really hoisted on Mengo.” By April 5, 1892, Lugard finished a treaty with the Catholic forces which was, in the British Commissioner's eyes, very moderate. However, no sooner was the treaty signed than the *wa-Inglesa* forces and the British missionaries, especially

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18 Letter from Pilkington to an unnamed correspondent, Uganda, January 31, 1892, as found in Harford-Battersby, *Pilkington*, pp. 169–70.
20 Letter from Pilkington to an unnamed correspondent, Uganda, April 1, 1892, as found in Harford-Battersby, *Pilkington*, p. 182.
George Pilkington, began to complain bitterly about the agreements.\textsuperscript{21} Outrages, committed by both sides, continued in Uganda, and Lugard became extremely disgusted. At one point, he wrote in his private diary that he was utterly ashamed of the actions and the attitudes of the Protestant missionaries.\textsuperscript{22}

As Lugard realized, pressure was building in England's missionary circles for a wholesale replacing of the Imperialist East Africa Company with total British control. Certainly, as clerical pressure increased and the East African Company became insolvent, the stage was set for some formal and forceful action in England. In their struggle to maintain Uganda as a British area the missionaries were quite fortunate to have on their side Lord Rosebery, who was known as a militant annexationist. Rosebery, Foreign Secretary in Gladstone's fourth cabinet, was one of the few in that government who favored holding Uganda in the British empire. Under Rosebery's guidance and private orders an official mission was dispatched to the area in 1893 under the command of Captain Gerald Portal.\textsuperscript{23} Portal's mission was hampered by the same problems which plagued Frederick Lugard's expedition during the violent days of 1892. The government, except Rosebery, was not overly inclined to support an annexation of Uganda despite the growing requests from protestant missionary groups in England. There were great difficulties in dealing with Muslims and, from Lugard's point of view, most importantly with the Roman Catholic missionaries and their supporters in the \textit{wa-Inglesa}. If the experiences on Madagascar and Zanzibar could serve as an example, the British would find the process of pacification to be difficult indeed, and there were many in the Gladstone government who were openly opposed to any African venture. It fell to Rosebery, Portal, and the missionaries to push the Uganda question as quietly as possible.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} Diary entries for April 11 and 12, 1892, as found in Perham, \textit{The Lugard Diaries}, III, 163–71.
\textsuperscript{22} Diary entries for April 14 and 15, 1892, as found in \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 174–81. It was during this period that Lugard became totally frustrated with the British missionaries and the \textit{wa-Inglesa} chieftains. Also, during this period the explorer planned an expedition. He was accused by the \textit{wa-Inglesa} chieftains of leaving the protestants in favor of Roman Catholics. On April 10, 1892, Lugard wrote in his diary that he was sick from the whole affair.
Portal, who had with first-hand knowledge of the political and religious condition in Zanzibar, gathered his staff and marched as Rosebery ordered into the interior of Uganda. In Great Britain the Foreign Secretary was making every effort to insure the eventual success of the mission since Rosebery now viewed Uganda as a personal question. Without fully informing Parliament or the Cabinet of his actions, Rosebery began to rely heavily on the power of religious groups in Britain to pressure for a permanent British colonial administration in Uganda. There was a fear, in England and in Uganda, that the Catholic Party was again preparing to resist violently efforts by the British to replace the now moribund Imperial British East Africa Company with regular English colonial officials. It was rumored that the Catholics were purchasing arms from German sources in the region.  

Also of distress not only to Rosebery but to the Protestant missionaries, was the fact that French colonial politicians and the Quai d'Orsay were openly championing the cause of the Catholics in East Africa, particularly in Uganda. In the French Chamber of Deputies, colonialist oriented representatives rallied to the support of the French Roman Catholic Missionaries in Uganda. Ironically, many annexatonists who were openly anti-clerical vocally demanded that the French government, especially the Foreign Ministry, take steps to insure the safety of French clerics. An alliance had been born between the militant expansionists and the missionaries, as was the case in Britain, when it became obvious that both groups had the same expansionist goals in mind.

Gabriel Hanotaux, the chief of the French Foreign Ministry, while not overly fond of the Catholic efforts, threw his support to the missionaries. His powerful ally in the Chamber, Eugène Etienne, deputy from Oran, Algeria, and chief of the imperial activists in the Chamber, echoed Hanotaux's ideas pertaining to support for the efforts of French missionaries in Uganda. Seeing the Uganda question in the contest of a larger colonial question on the whole of east Africa, particularly the Nile, the colonialists in Paris preferred to keep pres-

25 Ibid., pp. 540-53.
26 That the Uganda question was part of the larger Nile question was the opinion of most English and French politicians. Hardinge, Diplomatist, p. 123. Also see Alf A. Heggy, The African Policies of Gabriel Hanotaux (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 65.
sure on England. Etienne went before the Chamber to make an important policy statement on African questions in general. Few could doubt that Hanotaux approved what Etienne would say, and few could question that the address was aimed not only at the Chamber but also at Lord Rosebery, who had become the British Prime Minister on March 4, 1894.

During a very serious debate, Etienne addressed the Chamber on France’s colonial policies, with special reference to the situation in east Africa. Attacking Britain for her concept of a Thin Red Line stretching from Cairo to the Cape, Etienne stated that certainly Britain coveted Uganda. However, he argued, for many years France had had Roman Catholic missionaries in the region. Once England discovered this fact, she dispatched protesters to the continent to subvert the work of the Catholics. Despite Rosebery’s actions, Etienne argued, French missionaries, especially the ultra-imperialistic White Fathers, would continue to work for the Church and for France. To place the speech in the proper context Etienne ended his defense of the Catholic efforts by saying, “Gentlemen, it is the Egyptain question which thusly opens before you.”

Throughout 1894 the situation in Uganda deteriorated as French Catholics increased their pressure and British protestants continually demanded that the English government do something to bring about a final solution to the problem. In 1893 Sir Gerald Portal had tried, with notable success, to bring religious stability to Uganda by forcing a conference with Roman Catholic and protestant leaders in April of that year. According to the British officer, the meeting was a stormy one in which in the long run it was decided to allow Portal to try to settle the outstanding political and religious differences. Portal simply decided to segregate the two feuding factions and to restrict missionary activities to a certain area. In a letter Portal wrote,

All’s well that ends well, but I don’t wish ever again to have three and a half hour skermish with two angry bishops—one not understanding English,

29 Letter from Sir Gerald Portal to his Mother, Kampala, April 7, 1893, as found in Portal, *Mission to Uganda*, pp. 222–27.
and the other knowing no French. The whole history of Uganda for the last ten years is more worthy of the Middle Ages, or the days of the Edict of Nantes, than the end of the nineteenth century; but I don't think either side is more to blame than the other.\textsuperscript{30} 

Portal was fortunate in having the Protestant Bishop Tucker aid him in the final draft of the agreement,\textsuperscript{31} and despite some general translational confusion, the protestant and Catholic officials slowly came to view it as an acceptable, if not palatable solution to a very bloody problem.\textsuperscript{32} 

Not overlooked in the process of Portal's mission was the fact that the British officer was slowly replacing East African Company authority with direct English imperial rule. The British missionaries approved of the transfer of authority to colonial officials as they had approved of Portal's actions in dealing with the Catholic missionaries.\textsuperscript{33} The English-speaking ecclesiastics had every reason to be pleased, since they were certain that Portal's actions in replacing company authority would become a permanent imperial situation, and that Uganda would eventually be made a full-fledged member of the British empire.

The British missionaries did not have to wait any length of time for action in Uganda. Already Rosebery planned to relieve the East African Company of its financially burdensome responsibilities in the region and replace it with a British protectorate, not that that particular action would alter the situation in east Africa. Rosebery believed also that the Uganda situation was tied to the Egypto-Nile question. The Prime Minister believed that it was vital to hold the east African territory to protect the English presence in Egypt. For these reasons Rosebery wanted a stronger, more direct rule, over the territory. The British for all practical purposes ruled there already. Lugard had represented British imperial power and had sided, as he was ordered, with the \textit{wa-Inglesa} and English missionaries, despite his overt disgust with Pilkington and his ecclesiastical colleagues. Lugard had even planned, at one point, to return to England to lobby for official British action in Uganda. He realized that the East Africa

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 226.  
\textsuperscript{32} Diary entries for April 8, 11, 13, 22, 23, 24, and 25, 1893, as found in Portal, \textit{Mission to Uganda}, pp. 227–29.  
Company planned to evacuate the area for financial reasons, and he hoped that the government would take concrete steps to annex the region.

Rosebery, in 1894, was moving toward establishing a protectorate in Uganda. Many British colonial officials in east Africa agreed with the activist Prime Minister’s action in expelling some Catholic missionaries. The English in the east African area prepared for the declaration of the protectorate, which came in June, 1894, and there was little change in Uganda after that date since imperial administration had been in effect for some time. Charges placed on Catholics for the importation of goods, imposed by the East Africa Company, for example, remained in full force despite official protest from the Paris government. To reinforce the colonial English rule, officials in east Africa expelled some Catholic missionaries as subversives. In 1895, when the conservative Lord Salisbury replaced Rosebery as Prime Minister, British policy in east Africa continued. In the final analysis, the British missionaries and their Church Missionary Society supporters in Great Britain and in Uganda were successful in their attempts to bring the area into the empire.

As has been seen, the declaration of the Uganda protectorate in 1894 and the declaration of the East Africa protectorate a year later did not change much so far as British administration in the area was concerned. However, nowhere was the full force of the missionary pressure seen so clearly as in Uganda. How much time the missionaries devoted to British imperial politics and how much effort was expended to the cause of religious conversion was hard to tell. The ecclesiastics themselves wrote about great numbers of conversions, and, on the other hand, explorer-administrators like Frederick D. 

84 Perham’s introduction to Perham, Lugard Diaries, III, 11–18.
85 An important secondary work on this area is Roland Oliver and Gervaise Mathew, A History of East Africa, I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 420–482. The authors presented a clear, chronological discussion of the Uganda annexation. Of special interest is also Robinson and Gallagher’s Africa and Victorians, chapter XI.
86 Hardinge, Diplomatist, p. 123.
87 Ministerial Note by Gabriel Hanotaux, Paris, February 6, 1895, as found in France, MAE, volume Aden 1885–1895. The French Foreign Minister instructed his consul in Aden to prepare for the passage of Catholic missionaries from all of east Africa to France. Catholic missionaries were expelled from Zanzibar, East Africa, and Uganda.
Lugard recorded numerous incidences of clerical meddling in colonial, political matters.

The British Victorian missionaries did engage heavily in expansionistic politics which retarded inter-denominational cooperation and often encouraged all out violent conflict. The French missionaries did the same thing with the same bloody results in other areas of Africa. But were those individuals untrue to the faith which they professed? In the Victorian sense of the ideal they were not, since men like George Pilkington of Uganda saw colonial politics and imperial expansion as intertwined. What was good for Great Britain’s imperial expansion was good also for the English religious effort. The religious chauvinism and national prejudice were part of the society in which the missionaries were raised and the society in which they existed. The British and French missionaries were human and were unable to separate themselves from the world, the only world with which they were familiar. The English-speaking missionaries played a strong role in the acquisition of Uganda, and in fact in all of the British East Africa. In this respect they were vitally important, but often times simply irritating to the colonial and company officials in the area. The pressure placed on Rosebery to act in a direct manner in respect to Uganda fell on receptive ears since he was already committed to that course of action, and a brief unofficial political alliance was formed between the activist Prime Minister and the missionaries in Uganda and in Great Britain. The missionaries left behind language, religion, and bits of British culture. In this respect they were also important. But they were men, existing in an historical and cultural time period and to see them as more is unjust, as less is not to comprehend at all the Victorian religious and colonial mind.