Missions and Historical Memory

Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd

Andrew F. Walls

The Missionary Movement and Western Christianity

The missionary movement was a result of the shock impact upon Europe of the worlds beyond the West; in the religious sphere it was the most important outcome of that impact, not least because it occurred at the high point of the Europeanisation of Christianity. Over the centuries in which Christianity was being honed to the conditions of Europe, and taking a distinctively Western form, the once buoyant and expansive forms of Christianity that had been characteristic of much of Asia and parts of Africa were going into eclipse. The form of Christianity that Europeans knew, and seemed to them normative, was territorial in expression. Conceptually, Christendom consisted of contiguous territory ruled according to the law of Christ by Christian princes subject to the King of kings, with no public place for idolatry, or blasphemy, or heresy.

When Europe emerged in the late fifteenth century from its long isolation into a much wider world, the first instinct of Western Christians was to seek to incorporate the lands they now came upon into Christendom. For this purpose the already established model of crusade was adapted. In the Spanish Americas and some other places conversion followed conquest and the boundaries of Christendom were thereby enlarged. A few places—the Congo kingdom of Soyo, for instance—entered Christendom voluntarily. But in most of the new world now open to the West, especially in the great Asian land mass, conversion was at best a distant dream, and conquest an impossibility.

This reality produced differing reactions among European Christians. Economic and political considerations now tied the Western powers—first Spain and Portugal, then the powers of northern Europe—to ongoing involvement in the non-Western world; but the concept of the maintenance and extension of Christendom, originally integral to the enterprise, gradually receded from view. The public policy of the states of Christendom no longer actively pursued it as a goal desirable in itself. Europeans settlers or working in the non-Western world could ring-fence their own Christian profession, and get on with the business of war, or settlement, or simply making money, without much concern about the religious systems of the host societies.

It was radical Christians, what one might call totalitarian Christians, those for whom the religious imperatives overcame the economic and political, who found this state of disengagement unacceptable. And it was among the radical Christians that the missionary movements, first Catholic and then Protestant, arose. The missionary principle differed from the crusading principle in that it was based on demonstration and persuasion rather than coercion. It did not in itself extend Christendom (though for a long time, many, perhaps most, missionaries hoped that it eventually would do so). It operated outside the sphere of Christian law and beyond the concept of a Christian civil society.

Relations with the non-Western world, and the colonial relationship in particular, helped to undermine the Christendom principle in Europe. At the same time, largely through the agency of the missionary movement, new Christian communities developed in the non-Western world, communities which did not embody the territorial Christendom principle. The missionary movement was rarely a primary concern of the official Western church, and usually involved the energies of only a minority among those in Europe who professed and called themselves Christians, but it did much to change the demographic and cultural composition of the Christian church. What began as an attempt to extend Christendom ended by superseding Christendom.

The extent of the revolution effected through the missionary movement was not visible until the second half of the twentieth century. Since European minds were shaped by the experience of centuries of Christendom, Western missionaries held to Christendom concepts even when the logic of their activities and of the situation pointed in other directions. For a long time after the beginnings of the movement the only instruments, intellectual or logistical, that missionaries and their sponsors had were instruments that had been forged in Christendom. The very concept of a missionary had to be built from European patterns of Christian ministry; and those patterns were conditioned by territorial concepts, such as the parish. (It was fortunate that there were additional structures available in Western Christianity—Catholic orders and societies, Protestant voluntary societies, Methodist itinerancy—that had arisen where parochial and other territorial models had manifestly failed). The message that the missionary was expected to proclaim, the duties which he (inevitably "he")
since the foundation on which the missionary concept was raised was that of the male territorial ministry within Christendom was expected to carry out, were in all essentials those thoroughly tested by experience in Europe. The responses to be expected to the missionary’s message and the result of his activities were similarly shaped by the experience of Christendom. Radical Christians, who sought reformation and renewal and were dissatisfied with the normal standards of attainment in Christendom, had particularly clear expectations about the forms of response, both positive and negative, that would follow faithful proclamation of the Christian message. Missionaries began by doing what they had always done, usually in the way they had always done it, expecting the patterns of response that had emerged in the experience of Christendom. They entered upon the great learning experience of Western Christianity when, as representative Western Christians, they discovered the limitations of the confident encyclopedia of knowledge, theology, and practice that had been built up over the centuries of Christian interaction with European cultures, and sought to expand or transcend it. In the process they found themselves cultural and theological brokers between two worlds.

The Historical Memory of the Missionary Movement

The missionary movement had its own historical memory and a highly developed sense of pedigree. As it was a product largely of peripheral forces within Western Christianity, few of the central, norm-setting figures of church history figure prominently in it. Its main dynamic always came from radical Christians, and among radical Protestants the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival always held a high symbolic place in the memory. But attempts to detect a serious concern for mission in the non-Western world in Luther or Calvin have never looked convincing, and it might be argued that John Wesley (despite meanings imported into his famous phrase “The world is my parish”) did as much to restrain Methodists from activity outside the Western world as to promote world mission.

Jonathan Edwards was in this respect rather unusual, a central, norm-setting figure whose place in the historical memory of the missionary movement is secure. He, like John Wesley, he held to have been personally a participant in missions, even if largely by default, through his Stockbridge exile. More significantly, he was an important theological influence on early Protestant missionaries from the English-speaking world. A stream of thinking passed from Edwards through Hopkins and watered the soils in which the early American missionary recruits grew and flourished. Edwards’s theological principles on the freedom of the will and the religious affections also helped to liberate English (and perhaps Scottish) Calvinism and to make a dynamic theology of mission possible for Calvinists. The greater number of the English-speaking missionaries whose service began in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first three decades of the nineteenth had their background in that liberal Calvinism.

A good representative of Edwards’s indirect influence is David Bogue, a Scot who influenced a whole generation of missionaries. The Missionary Society, as the body later known as the London Missionary Society was originally called, initially demanded no theological education of its would-be missionaries. The assumption was that most candidates would come from the shop or the forge, rather than from the usual sources of supply of the ministry, and that the manual skills of such people would fully compensate for any inadequacy in the dead languages which underlay conventional theological education. There were enough unmitigated disasters among missionaries recruited on this principle to persuade the Missionary Society otherwise, and from 1800 until his death in 1825 the Society entrusted the theological education of missionaries to Bogue. Candidates continued to come from the shop or the forge, but they were put through a demanding course of study. Bogue did not lecture; he wrote an outline of a topic, leaving several inches of space under each heading, and gave a reading list. Students were expected to copy the outline, fill in the intervening spaces, and enter into oral dialogue with Bogue on the results. The readings were from books in his own library, and Edwards is prominent in the lists. That the system was judged effective by those who went through it is shown by the fact that a group of his students compiled to publish the outlines (without the intervening spaces) after his death, and by the appearance of an American edition immediately thereafter. When a college was established in the 1840s in Karatonga for the training of Polynesian evangelists for service in the Pacific, the resident missionary, Aaron Buxton, took the students through Bogue’s lectures, and eventually translated them into the vernacular and printed them. Under such circumstances a somewhat diluted version of Edwards’s teachings was spreading in the South Pacific long after his death.

But great as his direct and indirect influence undoubtedly was, Edwards the theologian, with one well-known exception, does not figure greatly in the historical memory of the missionary movement. Individual missionaries, as Stuart Piggot has shown, read him avidly, but not all missionaries were avid theological readers. And the mentor that a generation of LMS missionaries remembered was not Edwards, but Bogue.
The exception, the one element in the Edwardsian theological inheritance that entered into the collective missionary memory is, of course, the *Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer*. More than forty years after its composition, this tract helped to inspire the Baptist circle to which William Carey belonged, and was thus instrumental in the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society, despite the fact that the book’s eschatological scheme was by then demonstrably flawed. One of the circle, John Sutcliffe, produced a cheap new edition, and Carey himself cited the work in his *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.

The story, involving as it does contact and interaction between Congregationalists in New England, Presbyterians in Scotland, and Baptists in the English Midlands, illustrates the informal networks that linked practitioners of evangelical religion across barriers of geography and confession. It also offers a study in the application of ideas. The *Humble Attempt* is not a book about missions; it is a book about prayer. It became a book about missions because the group of people who were reading it already had the germ of the idea of an overseas missionary enterprise. Edwards’s expansive ideas of the sovereignty of Christ and the post-millennial eschatology which these latter day Puritans inherited served to enrich, inform, and confirm an enterprise already conceived.

The Life of Brainerd and the Missionary Movement

Despite legend, the work of Carey does not mark the beginning of the Protestant missionary movement, only the significant entrance of British Christians into it. The movement had begun almost a century earlier in Germany and central Europe. But in one sense it had begun earlier still. The missionary movement as it developed was essentially maritime in its thinking. Christians and the non-Christian world were divided by oceans. But in North America Protestant Christians for the first time lived side by side with a non-Christian people. As happened elsewhere, the initial desire to bring these peoples into the Christian fold, while never abandoned, receded before temporal considerations. Theological principle—the Redeemer’s throne set up in America where Satan had once ruled—sat uneasily with the practical realities of daily relations between Western Christians and Native Americans. The latter were not a distant people to be evangelized by specially devised means; they were the neighbors, and neighbors with whom relations were, to say the least, ambivalent. It is from this borderland of Christendom, a mission field without the missionist element that came to be an essential ingredient in Western thought about missions, that Edwards’s greatest impact on the historical memory of the missionary movement was made.

Incomparably the fullest and most direct influence of Edwards on the later missionary movement lay in his making available the journal of David Brainerd, missionary to the Native Americans of the Society in Scotland for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Many hundreds of missionaries and prospective missionaries read the book in some shape or form, and many were stirred by it. By the early nineteenth century Brainerd had become the Protestant icon of the missionary, its ideal type, as a result of the published journal. Every new missionary—typically, a man in his twenties, was taught thereby to see this young man as the pattern for what his own life ought to be.

Brainerd’s status as the icon of the Protestant missionary was perhaps attained by only one other figure, the English clergyman Henry Martyn, who ironically was not in the technical sense a missionary but a chaplain of the East India Company. Martyn was himself deeply influenced by Edwards’s presentation of Brainerd’s journal. And Martyn’s story had much in common with Brainerd’s—young, cultured, articulate, consumptive, depressive men, marriage unfulfilled for the gospel’s sake, burning themselves out in the work. The portraits elided; Martyn was Brainerd for a new generation.

Martyn felt Brainerd coming alive from the page, so that he entered into a sort of conversation with him. He confides, “I feel my heart knit to that dear man, and really rejoiceth to think of meeting him in heaven.” On another occasion he says, “That dear saint of God David Brainerd is truly a man after my own heart. Although I cannot go half way with his spirituality and devotion, I cordially unite with him in such holy breathings as I have attained unto.” When his ship put into Cape Town en route for India, and he made the acquaintance of James Read of the London Missionary Society, his mind again went to the book: “I was so charmed with his company that I fancied myself in company with David Brainerd.” For Martyn, born more than thirty years after Brainerd’s death, Brainerd had become a contemporary.

And at the end of the nineteenth century, the high peak of the missionary movement, Brainerd’s life was still being set before missionary recruits. Eugene Stock, the historian of the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society, writing in the 1890s after referring to the great Native American in-gathering at Crossweeksung in response to Brainerd’s preaching, goes on: “But Brainerd did less in his lifetime than his biography, by President Edwards, did after he was gone. In its pages is presented the picture of a man of God such as is rarely seen. No book has, directly or indirectly, borne richer fruit.”
The spiritual fathers of late Victorian times who pointed new missionaries toward Brainerd recognized that we know Brainerd only because of Edwards. When Sereno Edwards Dwight produced an enlarged edition of the Brainerd journals in 1822, he described Brainerd as the person "who would probably be selected by all denominations of Christians as the holiest missionary, if not the holiest man of modern times," and he suggested that the time was near when Brainerd "would be better known all over the world than Alexander, Julius Cæsar, or Napoleon." Nevertheless he did not include the book in his collected works of Jonathan Edwards, his reason being that so little of the work was by Edwards himself. The fact remains that the book owed its origin and its shape to Edwards, and it probably had a more profound effect on a wider range of people than did many of the master's weightier treatises. But there was a dash of gall mixed into this spiritual elixir, and every reader could taste it. It is impossible to disguise the depressive strain in Brainerd's journals, and Edwards does not attempt to do so. He reproduces sections where the writer is "filled with sorrow and confusion," "distressed by a sense of spiritual pollution," and so confused by inward anguish that he lost the track of his sermon.

Edwards actually warns the reader against this "melancholy," which he did not regard as a necessary ingredient of proper self-examination. He reflected that it might have been contained had Brainerd gone with a companion; after all, the Lord sent his disciples in pairs. He also identified a physical element and thought Brainerd wilfully reckless in putting his life into danger. Martyn, with depressive tendencies himself, takes up the hint. He concludes it was improper for Brainerd to attempt what he did at a time when he should have been in medical care—was Brainerd perhaps extravagant to obtain his own good opinion? The editor of an early short version advises the reader to discount the melancholy as "purely animal," that is, arising from Brainerd's distressing physical condition. Others found its origin in the theological and pastoral inadequacies of Calvinism. "How much of his sorrow and pain had been prevented!" cries Wesley, "if he had understood the doctrine of Christian perfection!" For the spiritual mentors of the Student Volunteers, deeply influenced by the doctrines and experiences of the Keswick Convention, Brainerd's melancholy was a theological puzzle. "I know nothing more resembling Pente-cost than the scenes following [Brainerd's] preaching at Crossweckusng," says A. J. Gordon of Boston, but how did someone who manifestly displayed the indwelling of the Holy Spirit not know the exultant spiritual liberty that was part of the Keswick message and a regular ingredient of much contemporary evangelical teaching?
regard to fasting. Only with the seventh reflection, a short one, do we reach what one might call the specifically missionary dimension of Brainerd’s career: how it encourages God’s people to prayer and endeavors for the advancement and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ in the world, and in particular for the conversion of the Indians “on this continent.” Edwards surely has to consider how Crossweekeuk might be the forerunner of something much more glorious and extensive of that kind. But the visionary pause is brief; he quickly passes to practical matters like sending missionaries in pairs (we have already seen that he believed this might have kept Brainerd’s depressive tendencies in check) and to a consideration of the special providences attending Brainerd’s last illness and death.

For people building up a library for an infant mission agency, the life of Brainerd was a rare example of Christian preaching among people of another language and culture, or, as they would have said, other manners and customs. For Edwards, who made that life known to the world, it was primarily a demonstration of the true character, authentic experience, and proper doctrine of a Christian minister. An almost contemporary throwaway remark by John Wesley suggests a similar conclusion. Wesley believed that "even so good a man" as Brainerd overestimated his own work. "The work among the Indians, great as it was, was not to be compared to that at Cambuslang, Kilbryth, or Northampton.” For Wesley, who made the first of the hosts of popular abridgements of the memoir, it was valuable not because it would call people to the mission field, but because it would teach them devotion and acceptance of harsh conditions in their service in England. For Wesley and Edwards alike, what we would call the cross-cultural aspect of Brainerd’s work was coincidental. For them, Crossweekeuk is of one kind with Cambuslang and Northampton. A generation later, in the historical memory of a missionary movement that saw its task as the establishment of the Church of Christ among non-Western and hitherto non-Christian peoples, Brainerd, as presented by Edwards, was recognized as the missionary par excellence.

Evangelical Preaching, Christendom, and the Missionary Movement

The missionary movement, with its requirement to live on terms set by the life of a society other than one’s own, marked a breach with the centuries-old idea of Christendom. This posed a civil society in nominal allegiance to Christ, and a pastoral duty of the Church to bring that civil society into true harmony with its Christian profession. There is very little sense of such a breach in Edwards, very little to indicate that he saw any particular significance in the missionary office that was not already present in the ministerial.

Edwards and Brainerd—and for that matter Wesley—are transitional figures in the history of the missionary movement. They operated before the movement emerged in the English-speaking world as a distinct element in Protestant consciousness. They thought in terms of Christendom and the traditional responsibility of the Christian ministry within it. But they thought as evangelicals, that is, as radical, "totalitarian” Christians. Evangelical consciousness saw all humanity as one in sin, misery, and loss, one in redemption and holiness in Christ. There was thus a single message for the moneymaking merchant in Massachusetts and those whom merchant and minister alike might describe as "rude savages.” Brainerd refers to "white heathens" being affected during the movement among the native peoples at Crossweekeuk. Heathenism was not a religion but a state of mind, and it had nothing to do with race. Evangelical religion was a product of Christendom. It assumed a civil society that nominally accepted Christian symbols and Christian norms, but which fell drastically short of those norms in reality. Evangelicalism was thus about "real Christianity” over against the formal and the nominal profession of it, about the inward religion of the heart turned toward God. Evangelicalism was by its nature protest religion, a protest movement against a society that claimed to be Christian but denied that claim in its practice. Classical evangelicalism required nominal Christianity in order to define itself, and assumed the presence of a Christian (even if defectively Christian) civil society.

The Native Americans that Brainerd and Edwards knew lived on the margins of Christendom. These damaged, dislocated, partially demoralized, and perpetually alcoholic communities had lost the integrity of traditional life. Their whole existence was a marginal one, on the fringes of white society. Brainerd calls them "poor pagans,” but his own journals reveal that they were not mere pagans. A whole spectrum of attitudes toward Christianity can be discerned in what he says about them. Brainerd’s interpreter, Moses Tinda, though at first "a stranger to experimental religion” was nevertheless very desirous that his people should "renounce heathenish notions and practices and conform to the customs of the Christian world.” These are very much the principles on which Christendom operated. Among those converted in the movement at Crossweekeuk were people whom Brainerd described as "secure and self-righteous,” which suggests that they were at least regular church attenders. Among these was a man who claimed to have been a Christian for ten years. Brainerd was clearly not working in entirely virgin territory but among people where gradual and uneven accommodation to white society had produced
at least a degree of Christian profession and absorption of Christian ideas and practice. The native community was also well aware that there were "white heathens" who paid little or no heed to the religious norms of white society. Brainerd was working in a frontier district of Christendom, and that district responded to the radical, totalitarian evangelical preaching of Brainerd in a way similar to that in which contemporary white society in other parts of Protestant Christendom responded to similar preaching. Crossweelung saw the mourning for sin and the testimonies to personal experience of the love of Christ that characterized revivals in the nominally Christian areas of old Christendom, according to the recognized evangelical paradigm of conversion. Brainerd the missionary is thus seen by Edwards as the model of a young minister, working under conditions of exceptional hardship.

Not surprisingly, the early Protestant movement, which was principally evangelical in character, initially brought to the non-Western world the same message and the same methods that it brought to the nominally Christian world which produced evangelical rationalism. And it expected the responses (and evangelicals had plenty of experience within Christendom of hostile or indifferent response) to be along the same lines.

This had an important and often overlooked outcome. It meant that the early missionary movement was not racist, however "culturist" it might be. Evangelical conviction about the solidarity of humanity in sin and in grace meant that even those viewed as "rude savages" or "poor pagans" were open to the highest operations of divine grace, just as "white heathens," not to mention "secure, self-righteous" churchgoers, were open to the same condemnation as the "savage heathens."

Brainerd was as "culturist" as his contemporaries in general. He had little sympathy for Native American ways of life and was puzzled that the unregenerate actually preferred those ways as superior to the unwieldy busy-ness of white society. Even the regenerate were not eager to start cultivation and the more laborious lifestyle that would accompany it. When one group refused to abandon a noisy dance despite the presence close by of a very sick man, Brainerd attributed the decision to the callous inhumanity of the heathen heart. But justice immediately forced him to add, "Although they seem somewhat kind in their way," even if it was a different way.

No doubt Brainerd took for granted that regeneration would dispose converted Native Americans to adopt "civilized" ways. He was engaged in moving his converted people to conditions where this would be easier when he was overtaken by his last illness. But he was in no danger of identifying regeneration and civilization.

Pastoral experience within Christendom suggested that there was a recognizable pattern of authentic response to the gospel, a paradigm of genuine religious experience. It also recognized certain common deformations of that experience, and some blind alleys that prevented its attainment. Neither Edwards nor Brainerd had any reason to doubt that the paradigm was universal, and Crossweelung appeared to prove the point.

If the Native American community there was already reflecting a fair degree of acculturation, the high degree of conformity to the paradigm established among whites is not altogether surprising. A substantial section of the Native American community may have had sufficient knowledge of and nominal adherence to Christianity to be shatteringly convicted of their deficiencies and delightedly responsive to the hope of "an interest in Christ."

Moses Tinda

Brainerd does reflect a degree of puzzlement about how the paradigm worked within his Delaware society in at least one instance. We have already seen that his interpreter, Moses Tinda Tautamy (or Tatamy), was, even before he met Brainerd, strongly in favor of "civilized" ways and wanted his people to renounce idolatry. Presumably this was at least part of the reason that Brainerd offered him the post, and that Tinda accepted it. Nevertheless, Brainerd believed him to be without experimental knowledge of the gospel. Already distressed to find that the language had no words for the staple terms of evangelical preaching—salvation, grace, justification—and disposed like some later missionaries to blame the language for this, Brainerd was thus further frustrated by an interpreter who showed no fervency. All this changed a short time before the striking events at Crossweelung. The interpreter, who had already shown signs of genuine concern for his soul, fell seriously ill. Brainerd recognized the signs of conviction of sin, and the evidence of the changed life that followed his recovery. Tinda's style of interpretation also changed; he conveyed Brainerd's fervor as he became fervent himself. He became so committed to spreading the gospel that he hardly knew when to stop. Brainerd found that when he himself had left a place, Tinda would stay behind to explain or reinforce what the missionary had said. The Crossweelung movement with its flood of conversions, baptisms, and communions followed Tinda's transformation.

And yet Brainerd was never entirely satisfied about Tinda's personal experience. It was clear that he had known awakening, conviction of sin had been evident—his conduct was exemplary, his fervor unbounded, and no one could have been more devoted to the work of the gospel. It was through his effectiveness that the missionary had become effective. But Brainerd felt unhappy that
Tinda could not give distinct views of Christ, nor a clear account of his soul's acceptance "which," concludes Brainerd sadly, "makes his experience the more doubtful."

It is fair to assume that Tinda played a critical role in the movement that led to the ingathering at Crossweekeesong. Yet his own experience conformed only in part to the paradigm of conversion that had emerged from evangelical preaching in Protestant Christendom.

The Later Missionary Movement and the Paradigm of Conversion

Such mismatches with expectations increased as missionaries crossed the seas and proclaimed their message in settings where there was no trace of the Christian civil society that was characteristic of Christendom. The evangelical paradigm of conversion was shaped by the distinction between real and nominal Christianity. Missionaries, converted people themselves and true to their evangelical heritage, declared a single gospel for all humanity without distinction of race or religious profession. They continued to recognize conversion as a requirement for all. But attitudes to indigenous culture softened as acquaintance deepened. A key factor in deepening acquaintance was language. Brainerd did his best, but he never mastered the Delaware vernacular, hence the crucial position of his interpreter. Beyond the boundaries of Christendom the only way of proceeding was by agonizingly, and for a long time ineptly, struggling with someone else's language. At first language seemed, as it had to Brainerd, to be simply a barrier to be overcome in order to communicate the gospel. Gradually language was seen to be the outer gate to an inner world in which the gospel must take root if meaningful conversion was to take place. Sometimes that conversion did not follow the paradigm, yet appeared to missionaries to be the work of God. Beyond Christendom people might respond to the gospel without responding to the missionaries' experience of the gospel. And this was sometimes particularly evident where the communication took place through indigenous people—through the likes of Moses Tinda, in fact.

In the Pacific, for instance, Calvinistic evangelical missionaries of the London Missionary Society who had learned Edwardsian theology through study under Bogue saw mass movements to the faith in Tahiti and Raratonga. In the latter case, indigenous preachers had been particularly important in bringing the movement about. Kings and chiefs sought baptism, multitudes threw their cult objects into bonfires, whole villages crowded into church and school and demanded to be taught the Christian way. What was happening appeared to match the New Testament phrase "turned from idols to serve the living and true God." No missionary could fail to rejoice at such events, yet elements of the paradigm of conversion were missing. Sometimes there was little sign of conversion of sin, despite an obvious break with idolatry; and frequently what Brainerd called "views of Christ" were vague, even though there might be signs of conviction of sin. What was undeniable in Pacific Christianity was the re-nunciation of traditional cult and public allegiance to Jehovah.

In Tahiti the perplexed missionaries waited six years after the first professions of faith—when the names of those who declared their faith were written down—before baptizing anyone. During that time they studied all the theological authorities available to them, and they concluded that none of the theological works they could envisage the circumstances of Tahiti. They worked out a position for themselves, distinguishing between church members, who had renounced idolatry and declared their allegiance to Jehovah, and communicants, who showed the marks of regeneration.

Protestant missionaries were beginning to discover what their Catholic predecessors had found two centuries earlier: that a theology, however comprehensive, which had been shaped by the experience of Christendom was not extensive enough or flexible enough to cover the unprecedented situations that arose from the preaching of Christ in the worlds beyond the West. That David Brainerd himself perhaps had some inkling of this is suggested by one curious incident.

Brainerd had no doubt that Satan ruled in the howling wilderness, with complete sway over the Native Americans in their natural state. He speaks of their religious practices as foolish, puerile, and depraved, and of their notions of the divine as confused and indistinct. One day he encountered that religion in its full Satanic horror: a shaman advancing toward him, in colored mask with hideous mien, dancing with calabash rattle in hand. "Of all the sights I ever saw, none appeared so frightful, so near akin to what is imagined of infernal powers." Involuntarily, he shrank away, even though it was broad daylight and he knew the identity of the person behind the mask. But sitting down with the same shaman, he found in him a reforming prophet who believed he had been called by God and claimed that he had come to know God. His task was to summon his people to repentance. Those people were sinking into alcoholic demoralization because they were forsaking God and the old ways under white influence. Brainerd went through with him some of the themes of Christian teaching: "Now that I like," or "So God has taught me," was the shaman's
response on several occasions. Their main item of difference was not over the work of redemption but over the existence of the devil. This, the shaman said, was not to be found in traditional cosmology; he evidently had less difficulty over the work of Christ. "Some of his sentiments seemed very Jun," Brainerd notes, and he adds, "There was something in his temper and disposition which looked more like true religion than anything I have ever discovered among other heathens."60

One senses a strange fellow-feeling between reforming shaman and evangelical missionary, both seeking to turn a people to God, both converted men after their respective fashions, both assured of their divine calling, both outsiders ("precise Zealots," as Brainerd puts it) in their own communities.

Brainerd had lived long enough among the Native Americans to qualify some easy assumptions about the nature and results of the devil's role in the wilderness. He knew that the Native Americans had suffered robbery, dispossession, and exploitation at the hands of his own kindfolk, though his vivid apprehension of the transitoriness of early life and the transcendence of the eternal may have blinded him to the depth of the consequent trauma. He could see that the experience of mistreatment by whites was a serious obstacle to conversion, and he sought to explain the matter in evangelical terms—such deeds were the work of nominal, not real Christians. After his initial frustrations at having no words for the standard themes of preaching, and despite his not acquiring competence in the vernacular himself, he began to break down such abstractions as grace and justification into translatable language, a first step beyond Christendom, a first movement toward living intellectually and theologically on terms set by others.

Here again we see Brainerd's and Edwards's transitional status in the Protestant missionary movement. They stand within the bounds of Christendom and work as agents in Christendom's revival. Brainerd stretches these bounds to the limit as his preaching embraces the most marginal people in Christendom. The movement as it developed was to go much farther. Its historical memory acknowledged its debt to Edwards. The debt to Edwards the theologian, indeed, was scarcely remembered, for it was an inheritance shared with evangelical theology as a whole, and largely mediated to the mission field through others. What the historical memory retained was the impression of the life, work, and death of young David Brainerd, as Edwards had presented him from his journals. Brainerd was not remembered in the movement as Edwards remembered him, the model of a Christian minister whose ministerial charge happened to be among Native Americans; he was reinterpreted for the new century, a model missionary pioneer of the maritime age of missions.

The resetting of the image is not illegitimate. Brainerd is a transitional figure linking the revival in Christendom with the evangelization of the non-Western world and showing early traces of the way the missionary movement became the learning experience of Western Christianity.

NOTES


16. The Congregational divine R. F. Horton, addressing student volunteers on "The Spiritual Preparation of the Missionary," says "so far as I know the history of missions, whether I read the life of Henry Martyn who learned the secret from David Braine-

er, or the life of Mackay who learned the secret from Henry Martyn... their success and that power and their Christlikeness in service are all accurately measured by their powers and Christlikeness in prayer" (*Students and the Missionary Problem: Addresses Delivered at the International Student Missionary Conference* [London: Student Volunteer Missionary Union, 1900], 161). At the same conference a High Church Anglican, Leonard Dawson, remarked of Martyn's life, "Although there is a certain melancholy tone about that life, yet personally, I found it in my first inspiration as a missionary" (ibid., 533).


18. Ibid., 200.

19. Ibid., 133.


21. Sereno Edwards Dwight, *Memoirs of the Rev. David Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians... by Rev. Jonathan Edwards... including his Journal, now for the first time incorpor-

ated with the rest of his diary in a regular chronological sequence* (New Haven: S. Convec-

ter, 1822), 9.

22. Ibid.


24. Ibid., 7:278.

25. Ibid., 7:284.

26. Ibid., 7:95.


33. Ibid., 7:531-34.


38. Ibid., 219.

39. Brainerd had particular difficulty with a group influenced by Quakers, who seemed to him to be treating in sobriety and sincerity for salvation (Edwards, *Works*, 7:346).

40. See Dwight, *Memoirs of the Rev. David Brainerd*, 210-11, 213. Edwards preserves few of the references to Moses Tinda Tsatamy in his version, though he refers to the interpreter's awakening (Edwards, *Works*, 7:277) and to his being "amazingly assisted and I doubt not but the Spirit of God was upon him, (though I had no reason to think he had any true and saving grace, but was only under conviction of his lost state)" (Edwards, *Works*, 7:279). On Tinda, see also Edwards, *Works*, 7:254 and note.

41. Brainerd refers to the frustrations of having only a pagan interpreter in a place (Jumna Island) where the traditional religion was intact (Edwards, *Works*, 7:236).

42. 1 Thessalonians 1:9.


45. Ibid., 7:330.