Early Protestant Missions to the Americas

Professor Alec Ryrie

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> *The Devil could invent no worse pestilence to destroy all the world and to kill all the people there … than … the institution used to distribute and entrust Indians to the Spaniards. This was like entrusting the Indians to a gang of devils or delivering herds of cattle to hungry wolves … the most cruel sort of tyranny that can be imagined, most worthy of infernal damnation. The Indians were prevented from receiving the Christian faith and religion. … Since the Indians regard our God as the most cruel, unjust and pitiless god of all, the conversion of the Indians has been hindered, and it has become impossible to convert infinite numbers of infidels.*

So wrote the Spanish friar Bartolomé de las Casas, bishop of Chiapas in Mexico, in 1552. It was written for a Spanish audience, with the aim – partly successful – of persuading the authorities back home to rein in these abuses. But his book also found an audience he did not intend. All of Spain's many enemies reveled in his book, especially the Protestant readers of unauthorised editions of his book published in Latin, French, English, Dutch and German until deep into the 18th century. Those readers took his lessons to heart. When they too ventured out into the New World, they were determined that would not repeat Spanish mistakes or commit Spanish crimes. They were determined that they would show native peoples, by the justice and generosity of their behaviour, that their Protestant Gospel was different, so that where they had been driven away from Catholicism, they would be drawn freely to the light of Protestantism. In this lecture we will find out how those earnest, noble intentions fared when they actually made landfall across the ocean and began to encounter Native American peoples for real.

European settlement and conquest in the Americas was indeed led by two assertively Catholic kingdoms, Spain and Portugal, but before long other would-be imperialists were vying for a place in the sun. My story begins just a few years after Las Casas' book, with a project rather wonderfully called Antarctic France: no penguins, I am afraid, Antarctic here simply refers to the southern hemisphere. In 1555 a flamboyant, swashbuckling and unreliable French nobleman named Nicolas Durand, sieur de Villegagnon, led a party of colonists to an island in Guanabara Bay, at what is now the site of the city of Rio de Janeiro. And this was an encroachment, not on the Portuguese empire, but also on the Catholic presence in the Americas. Protestantism was on the march in France in the 1550s, especially amongst the nobility, and no less a person than the Admiral of France had recently converted. Antarctic France was his project, and Villegagnon, the colony's leader, was at least sympathetic to the new movement, which aimed at least in part to establish a Protestant foothold in the New World. It was in this spirit that in 1556, soon after the colonists' arrival, Villegagnon wrote to John Calvin, the French Protestant leader in Geneva, asking for support. The first wave of colonists had mostly been convicts who had chosen to risk their lives across the ocean in return for an eventual promise of freedom, and it turned out that not all of them were very salubrious characters. Villegagnon, who seems to have known Calvin from his student days, hoped that the next boatloads would bring some moral improvement with them. The Genevans sent 14 colonists to join the next flotilla, two of them ordained Calvinist ministers, giving thanks for 'the extension of the realm of Christ into so distant a country, even … among a nation that was indeed completely ignorant of the true God.' For that of course was the other aim of this project. Thanks to Bartolomé de las Casas, everyone now knew how atrociously Catholics treated native Americans. Here was a chance to show the world how it should be done.

They arrived on 10 March 1557, and the very same day, with Villegagnon's blessing, they led the colony in worship: to the best of our knowledge, the first Protestant service ever held in the western hemisphere. And

almost as quickly, they established contact with the Tupi Indians on the mainland. One of Genevans, a man named Jean de Léry, wrote a detailed and vivid memoir of their work. Léry was impressed by the Tupi: strong, healthy, brave and skilful, masters of their world. Like every European who met native Americans, Léry was shocked by their customary nudity or near-nudity, but he argued that the effect of the paints, wigs and frills of France was far more lascivious, whereas, as he put it, 'this crude nakedness … is much less alluring than one might expect'. But he also made it his business to speak to them, through interpreters, about Christianity. 'In our conversations with them, when it seemed the right moment, we would say to them that we believed in a sole and sovereign God, Creator of the World, who, as He made heaven and earth with all the things contained therein, also now governs and disposes of the whole as it pleases Him to do.' This news, he says, amazed them, and he tried various ways to build on it, promising, for example, that the Christian God could deliver them from evil spirits. He believed they were making progress. The Tupi liked hearing the psalms he sang. On one occasion, he and his comrades were received in a Tupi village and, before they ate, the Frenchmen said grace. One of their hosts asked them, 'What does this mean, this way of doing things, taking off your hat twice, and remaining silent except for one speaker? To whom was all that addressed?' Léry seized the moment, and 'explained they were praying to the invisible God, who knows what is in our hearts, who created the world, who brought them safely across the sea and who spared them from fear of the devil'. This led to a two-hour long discussion, by the end of which, Léry believed, 'by the efficacy that God gave to our words, our Tupi were so stirred that several of them promised to live as we taught them, and even to leave off eating the human flesh of their enemies.' Ritual cannibalism was, unsurprisingly, one of the indigenous customs which the Christians found most problematic. So they retired to bed. But during the night, they were awakened when 'we heard them singing together, that in order to avenge themselves on their enemies, they must capture and eat more of them than they ever had before'. This seemed to Léry to exemplify 'the inconstancy of this poor people'. But still, he wrote, 'I am of the opinion that if … we had stayed longer in that country, we would have drawn and won some of them to Jesus Christ.'

That first account of the encounter between Protestants and Native Americans almost contains the whole story of the next two and a half centuries in microcosm. The way the relationship mixes both wary pragmatism and idealism, fear and hope. Léry's warmth towards his hosts is striking, but there are darker undercurrents. If Europeans kept commenting on native Americans' nudity, that was not simply a matter of prurient fascination. These people, like all humans, were descendants of Adam and Eve, who had been naked in the garden and had not been ashamed. Columbus himself, finding near-naked people living in a tropical paradise, had wondered if he had found a new Eden populated by incorrupt humanity. No-one exactly believed that anymore, and Protestants certainly believed these people were sunk in sin and error, but there was a persistent tendency to idealise them, both their physical perfection and their simple virtues. There was a strong element of condescension in all this, in which native Americans were seen as childlike, both pure and primitive. Worse, to put them on a pedestal like this set them up for a fall. When, inevitably, they turned out not to be two-dimensional paragons of noble savagery, those who had idealised them could feel betrayed, and swing rapidly to the opposite view: that these were scarcely human beings at all. Mixed in with that idealistic condescension is a similarly double-edged emotion, namely pity. 'This poor people', Léry called them, and that is a note that would be struck again and again for centuries. Europeans pitied their plight, ravaged by disease, oppressed by the Spanish, exploited by traders. They pitied their material degradation, as they saw it: nakedness in the Biblical tradition is a sign of poverty and need as well as of innocence, and Europeans were forcibly struck by what seemed to them abject poverty, people scrabbling a bare living from the forests, who did not realise how much better their lives would be in every way if they abandoned these savage ways, farmed like Europeans, and modelled themselves on their newly-arrived saviours. But most pitiful of all was their spiritual darkness, unable or unwilling to open their eyes to see the light of the Gospel that would save them. Christian hearts cried out to see it. I do not mean to mock the compassion behind these sentiments. The instinct to offer help to those who need it and to share your own blessings is a good thing. But compassion was alloyed with blithe self-satisfaction and self-importance, and quite untroubled by the other, less fashionable Christian virtue of humility. As a result, the effects of this pity could be cruel indeed.

Léry's encounters with the Tupi set a pattern in another, much more obvious sense, however: they were cut short. Villegagnon soon fell out dramatically with his inflexible Calvinist newcomers, who were expelled from the colony, and then in 1560 the whole experiment was snuffed out when the Portuguese retook it. This was to be a repeated pattern for Protestant colonial ventures. We think of the European colonisation of the New World as an unstoppable force, but for a long time it felt very shaky. Formidably difficult physical environments, persistent hostility from the Spanish and Portuguese, and periodic resistance from Native Americans meant that every colonial settlement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries struggled, and

many failed. Two further attempted French Protestant colonies in the early 1560s, in what are now South Carolina and Florida, proved short-lived, one of them abandoned within a year by colonists on the brink of starvation, the other found and almost entirely massacred by the Spanish. The first English settlement, at Roanoke in Virginia in the 1580s, disappeared in circumstances that are still mysterious. The next attempt, at Jamestown in Virginia in 1607 did endure, but it was a close-run thing: over 80% of the first colonists had died from starvation and disease by 1610. At that time assistance from the Powhatan was decisive in saving the colonists, but by 1622 relations had soured the point when the Powhatan made a concerted attempt to wipe them out: a quarter or more of the colonists were killed in co-ordinated surprise attacks. Further north in New England, fully half of the famous group of so-called Pilgrims who arrived at Plymouth Rock on the *Mayflower* in 1620 died in the first winter. The colony of New Sweden in what is now Delaware was conquered by the Dutch; their colony of New Netherland in turn was conquered by the English. The prize Dutch colony, however, was in Brazil, where the Dutch established a very substantial and lucrative territory from the 1620s on – before the whole territory fell back into Portuguese hands by the mid-1650s. Most quixotic of all, in the 1690s Scotland sunk an unwise amount of money into a colony at Darien in modern Panama, where the tempting prospect of controlling porterage across the isthmus led them to overlook the unforgiving climate and the even more unforgiving Spanish. Two and a half thousand settlers set off; as many as two thousand of them died from epidemics, malnutrition and war. One of the survivors, a minister sent with the colonists, wrote an account strikingly similar to Jean de Léry's narrative a hundred and forty years earlier. He and his colleagues travelled out to visit the villages of the Guna people and described the hospitality they received despite the lack of any common language. They made a point of holding collective Presbyterian worship in the presence of their native hosts, 'which,' he wrote, 'they did not disturb, but sat with grave silence all the time.' The Guna learned that the Scots kept one day in seven with pious solemnity, and, he remembered, 'several of them come to our Sermons to see our fashion and carry themselves very decently. There might be some hope of doing good among them, if we had any that had their language.' But the Spanish snuffed this incursion out before it could properly begin. In their surrender, the Scots tried hard to secure an agreement that the Guna who had helped them would face no reprisals: but the Spanish general refused to give more than vague unwritten promises and became angry when the Scots tried to press the point.

Even the established colonies were fragile. In the 1670s there was a real possibility that the Massachusetts colony would be destroyed in the so-called King Philip's War, in which the Wampanoag chief Metacom, whom the English called Philip, led a coordinated attack in which over a dozen settler towns were completely destroyed. And into the eighteenth century, the growing French presence in North America, moving south from Quebec and north from Louisiana, with Jesuit missionaries in the vanguard winning Native peoples over to the French and the Catholic interest, threatened the British presence on the eastern seaboard. The war of 1754-63 that Americans remember as the French and Indian War was well named: the Native allies of the French were formidable, and a British defeat was very possible. This history of vulnerability, in which the Native peoples could turn on a dime from being poor, pitiable wretches and exemplars of childlike virtues to being potential saviours whose help was desperately sought or a mortal threat capable to a colony's survival, is a vital context for understanding Protestant missions among them. Protestant settlers arrived keen to win converts among the native people, and to it with respect and kindness, not like the Spanish. But their first priority, inevitably, always had to be how to survive the next winter and the next wave of attacks. In dealings with the Native peoples, security was inevitably the first concern: both to win them as allies and to ensure that, if a conflict did arise, the settlers would be able to make those godless wretches pay for their barbarism and treachery towards good Christians who had only ever shown them friendship.

We can put the policies adopted by these Protestant colonists towards their Native neighbours, especially in relation to the hope to convert them, into three broad phases. The first is the phase of alluring. These settlers had, remember, been raised on a diet of Las Casas and other atrocity stories about the Spanish, and arrived determined to do the opposite. They would come not as conquerors, but as traders and as allies, ready to support the oppressed Native peoples against their Spanish oppressors. Protestants knew, almost intuitively, that the New World must be filled with people yearning to throw off the Spanish yoke. An alliance with those people, sealed with the true Protestant gospel, might achieve almost limitless things. It would break the power of Spain. It would spread God's kingdom to the New World. It would give the Protestant powers a privileged place in trading with their grateful allies – allies who could probably be persuaded to submit themselves to English or Dutch sovereignty, since in their childlike barbarism they were plainly incapable of ruling themselves. And all at minimal up-front financial cost. Protestant expeditions to the New World often described their ambitions as 'liberation'. Perhaps the most quixotic example is the pair of Dutch attempts to spark an anti-Spanish revolt in western South America. A fleet of eleven heavy warships sailed for Peru in 1623, armed with letters from the Dutch government offering a comprehensive alliance to more or less

anyone who was interested. The expedition failed either to make contact with any Native Americans or to seize any Spanish treasure ships and returned with heavy losses after fruitless three-year circumnavigation. Undeterred, the Dutch began planning a second expedition, which after many delays and accompanied by sky-high expectations set sail in 1642, under the command of this gent. They rounded Cape Horn and making landfall in Chile, where there had recently been violent resistance to Spanish rule. A group of Chileans come aboard the Dutch ships, bringing the head of a Spaniard as a token of their goodwill, and asked for transport two hundred miles up the coast for a group of some 500 of them. The Dutch were happy to oblige and, on arrival, proposed a formal alliance this, stressing the commercial benefits to both sides, offering to sell their new friends' firearms, and soft-pedalling the religious question. But they made the mistake of mentioning something about access to gold mines. The Chileans, who had heard this song from Europeans before, promptly pulled the plug on the whole arrangement. Two ruinously expensive expeditions had achieved precisely nothing.

That is the extreme version; the pattern in the early French and English colonies in North America is more typical. Here the Spanish were a more distant threat, and the allurement the colonists proposed to offer their new Native neighbours was of a more idealistic kind. The regulations of all of these early colonies insist that colonists are to treat Native peoples with scrupulous regard, and that anyone who steals from or injures them is to be receive public and exemplary punishment. They also insist that land for settlements should be leased or bought from Native peoples, never simply seized, even if Native peoples did not quite understand what Europeans meant by owning land. Part of the reason for this punctilious fairness was mere pragmatism – fragile colonies could not afford to make enemies – but it was also how they understood their purpose. They would allure Native Americans into alliance and ultimately into conversion by proving themselves and their Gospel the opposite of Spain's brutal religion. The laws issued for the new Jamestown colony in 1612 included a prayer to be read every morning and evening by the captain of the watch. In this he prayed, 'seeing Lord the highest end of our plantation here, is to set vp the standard, & display the banner of Iesus Christ, euen here where satans throne is Lord, let our labor be blessed in laboring the conuersion of the heathen.' And what was that labour? Not to impose the Gospel on them. Instead, he prayed, 'adorne vs with the garments of Iustice, mercy, loue, pitie, faithfulnesse, humility, & all vertues, & teach vs to abhor all vice, that our lights may so shine before these heathen, that they may see our good works, & so be brought to glorifie thee our heauenly Father.' And he asked God to allow the colony to prosper, so 'that the heathen may neuer say vnto vs, where is now your God'. And the prayer finishes by looking forward to the day 'when the heathen do know thee to be their God, and Iesus Christ to be their saluation, [and] they may say, blessed be the king & Prince of England, & blessed be the English nation, and blessed for euer be the most high God, possessor of heauen & earth that sent them amongst vs.'

When I first came across this sort of rhetoric from colonists, and there is much more in the same vein, I admit that I was cynical. All they are actually proposing to do to win converts is to live godly lives and to secure the prosperity of their own colony, and since they were already committed to doing those things for other reasons, this looks like so much froth. But I have been persuaded to take it more seriously, and I hope you will not think me too soft-hearted and credulous for doing so. This fitted absolutely with the Protestants' understanding of why they had come and how their gospel would be spread. They truly believed in the power of example: both that this was the right way to do it, and that it would work. When Jean de Léry and his comrades in Antarctic France made a point of demonstrating their religious practice before the Tupi, when the Scots in Darien did the same in the villages of the Guna, the point was to draw them towards the obvious virtues the Christians were modelling. But this was not only about piety. As the colonists saw it, what set them apart from the savages was not only religion but civilisation: two gifts that were inextricably entwined, and they came to offer both to these pitiable people. If only they could see how much better the lives of the colonists were – their solid houses, their productive agriculture, their decent clothing, their cultured manners and diet, their material wealth – then surely, they would be drawn to it, and would see it as better than running naked through the woods like beasts. The colonists offered civility for the Native people's bodies, Christianity for their souls. A more than fair recompense for the little parcels of land they had persuaded themselves they had bought.

I do not want to say that alluring never worked. Anti-Spanish alliances were not imaginary: the main basis of the Dutch occupation of Brazil was an alliance with the Tupi people, the same grouping who had cautiously welcomed the French in the previous century. Friendly as they were towards Dutch rule, the Tupi were more openly enthusiastic about Protestant evangelisation than any Native American people of the era, with the possible exception of the Mohawks in the New York colony. If they did not exactly regard the Dutch as liberators, they were certainly preferable to the Portuguese, and adopting their religion – or at least politely

accepting instruction in it – seemed a sensible way to cement the alliance. But in general, the perplexed colonists found that their way of life did not attract the envious and grateful attention they assumed it would. When they pondered this problem, they found two obvious reasons for it. One was that, in fact, the behaviour of Christian settlers in the New World towards Native peoples was not always marked by exemplary morality. It was common to lament the baleful influence of Indian traders, the freebooting individuals who spread beyond colonial settlements to trade for furs and other goods and who were often the first contact with Europeans that Native peoples had, but even in those colonies that were not staffed principally by convicts and conscripts, not all of the young, the wild and the desperate who chose to make such a risky journey were fully committed to quietly modelling an exemplary Christian life once they got there. Las Casas' fear – that nothing hindered Christianity's spread more than the behaviour of Christians – quickly became the conventional wisdom amongst Protestants too. But if the failure of allurement could be blamed on the colonists, it could also be blamed on the Native peoples themselves. They were too sunk in ignorance, depravity and sin to see what they needed. Merely showing them the truth was like scattering seed over the desert; without ploughing and watering, nothing would grow. They were too wild. Before anything could be done, they needed to be cultivated. To be civilised.

And so, we come swiftly to the second phase of the missionary effort, the phase of civilizing. We start to see schemes of this kind being discussed in the Virginia in the 1610s, and they were still being pursued a century and a half later. Behind all of them was the assumption – I'm here quoting Charles Inglis, a future Anglican bishop, as late as 1770, but this could have been said by any number of people over more than two hundred years – the assumption that 'it is necessary to civilize Savages before they can be converted to Christianity; & that in order to make them *Christians*, they must first be made *Men*.' What they meant by *civilizing* them can be divided into two ambitions, one broad, one focused. For the broad kind, let me quote a systematic scheme proposed by an enthusiast in Philadelphia in 1767. He suggested acquiring a substantial block of land, 50,000 acres or more, which could be partly settled by what he called 'sober white Families, consisting of Farmers and Tradesmen.' Then:

> *'Let a number of Indian Families be induced to settle among them, and let each Family have a fixt Property in a small Plantation. ... For the first Years let them be assisted by the Society with Cloaths, Provisions, Implements of Husbandry, & for Building, Fishing, learning Trades &c Let them be taught to build & lodge comfortably, to plow plant, sow and provide for winter. Let them be enticed to all this, not as a Drudgery, but by a Spirit of Emulation, by giving Premiums in Proportion to the Improvements they make, till they are gradually brought to see & to feel with how much More Comfort, Ease and Security they can live in this Way, than in their own Vagrant unsettled Condition.'*

It would take time, he accepted. But the result would be that

> *'the Instruction of Children at Schools, and in all sorts of manual or mechanic Employments will become easy; and the more aged, by having fixed Habitations will also be brought to listen to the Blessed Gospel. And at Length, by the Blessing of God, it is to be hoped, Numbers of Young Indians, animated with the Gospel, conscious of the Sweets of improved Life, and inflamed with a sacred, perhaps Apostolic Zeal, to communicate these Blessings to their Countrymen, might go forth & form like Colonies in different Parts, still farther & farther thro' this vast Continent.'*

Most Protestant settlers who bothered to think about the subject rapidly concluded that, until the Native peoples could be induced or compelled to live in fixed habitations and adopt settled agriculture on the European model, any thought of Christianising them was hopeless. In which case, before the Gospel could be preached, their way of life had to be changed, by any means necessary. There were, plainly, mixed motives in this. Take a scheme that was set up in Virginia in 1654, by which Native Americans were offered a bounty for killing wolves: for every eight wolves' heads they delivered to the colonial authorities, they were to be given a cow. This was obviously a pragmatic attempt to exterminate predators, but it was also explicitly framed as a religious project. Giving them cows would encourage them towards settled agriculture and adopting European-style property rights. But notice two things about this scheme. First, a rapidly expanding colony had selfish reasons for wanting to confine its Native neighbours to fixed patches of land and to soften their warlike ways. And second, almost too obvious to point out, it didn't work. The Virginia wolves' scheme was abandoned after fifteen years. On some other occasions Native peoples were ushered or forcibly relocated onto patches of land, but the results were rarely promising. The best-known partial exception I'll come back to in a minute.

I said there were two ways that the civilizing mission could work: a broad way, trying to reshape the entire Native American way of life, but there was also a more focused way, at whose heart was education. The

core idea here was articulated in Virginia in the 1610s and many times and in many contexts thereafter. If, as most settlers quickly concluded, Native American adults were too sunk in ignorance and corruption to be rescued, the cycle of sin could be broken with the next generation. If even only a few children – ideally boys of high status within their society, but at a pinch it could be anyone – if they could be brought into the colonists' world at a young age and given an intensive education, they could be the conduit through which saving grace could flow to the whole continent. They would learn the colonists' language while retaining knowledge of their own native tongue; they would learn the benefits of a civilized way of life; and of course they would learn the Christian gospel, receive baptism, and the brightest and most faithful of them would then take it back to their own people, to whom they could speak far more fluently and persuasively than any outsider. A single spark might set the continent aflame. What is most attractive about this vision is the genuine conviction that the Native American mission ought to be led and governed by Native Americans, a real willingness to relinquish control which was only partly driven by the expectation that a self-sustaining mission of this kind would be appealingly cheap.

But there were formidable problems en route to that destination. In 1619 King James I authorised fundraising in England 'to erect and build a Colledge in Virginia for the trayning and bringing vp of Infidells children to the true knowledge of God & vnderstanding of righteousnes', and the following year an anonymous donor, who with Calvinist panache simply signed himself 'Dust and ashes', donated £500 to the project, to be used, he said, 'for the mayntenance of a Convenyent nomber of younge Indians taken att the age of Seaven years or younger & instructed in the readinge & vnderstandinge the principalls of Xian Religion vnto the Age of 12 years'. This project was brought to an abrupt end by the Powhatan massacre of 1622, after which Virginians tended to regard their Native neighbours as enemies rather than as conversion fodder, but when William and Mary College was eventually established in Virginia in 1693, educating Native children was one of its main intended purposes. By then Harvard was nearly sixty years old, and it also had for a time had an Indian College, which, like most such projects, failed after a few years. The closest we get to an exception is Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, which was founded by the congregationalist minister Eleazer Wheelock in 1769 in order to put the so-called Indian Charity School he had been running since the 1750s on a firmer footing. Its royal charter committed it to 'the education and instruction of Youth of the Indian Tribes in this Land in reading, writing & all parts of Learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing & Christianising Children of Pagans'. Wheelock succeeded in creating an enduring institution, now part of the Ivy League, but the price was that Native education dropped out of its purposes. The essential problem with all these schemes is foreshadowed in that ominous turn of phrase from the anonymous Virginian donor: children to be *taken* at the age of seven. We should remember that the norm in European society at this era was for children to be sent to grammar school, to apprenticeships or into domestic service at a young age. This, perhaps, is why they were so persistently frustrated, surprised and genuinely puzzled by the inexplicable reluctance of Native American families to send their children away to study. We perhaps find it easier to understand that parents might dislike the idea of having their children kept deliberately separate and incommunicado from them, or of having those children systematically inculcated with alien values and customs: a leap of imagination which European settlers and missionaries of this era persistently struggled to make. Indeed, one persistent concern was that children sent to such institutions would either die from disease or malnutrition, or that they would be sold into slavery: charges that the organisers indignantly denied but which were not groundless. In Dutch Brazil, in 1641, the colonial government made a concerted push for Dutch Christian education for their Tupi allies. Two ministers were sent from the Netherlands to run a school, bringing their own children and several other Dutch children to form the new institution's backbone. An abandoned Portuguese building was found, and a substantial amount of money was spent converting it into a residential school, as well as providing a barracks for the teachers' security – which is already perhaps not a good sign. Astonishingly, it seems that at no point did they ask whether any of the Tupi were actually willing to send their children to such an establishment; and as friendly as the Tupi were to the Dutch, they made it clear that no children would be forthcoming. In Virginia in the 1710s, the colony's lieutenant-governor, Alexander Spotswood, was an enthusiast for missionary education. Confronting the problem that 'they are of so suspicious a Nature that they could never be persuaded to let their Children stay', he had a clever solution: the tribute that certain Native tribes regularly paid to the colonial government could be cancelled if they agreed to send children to William and Mary College instead. This worked, for a while, and at one point there were 17 such children at the college, but the fact that Spotswood in his letters routinely refers to them as 'hostages' perhaps tells us all we need to know. At least by then the enthusiasm for another idea routinely suggested by micromanaging donors was fading: that is, that a selection of promising Native children might be sent back to Europe for their education. This was tried on several occasions but was of course far more expensive that making arrangements closer to home, quite apart from the frustrating tendency of young

Native Americans exposed to the full panoply of European pathogens to die on the voyage or soon after their arrival. Even so, well-intentioned philanthropists continued to press the idea.

From what I have said so far, you might get the impression that these civilising missions failed entirely, but in some ways the truth is worse. Some of them were just successful enough to be misleading. The best-known missionary enterprise of all was launched in Massachusetts in the mid-1640s by the Congregationalist minister John Eliot, known in his own lifetime as the Apostle of the Indians. He stumbled into the mission field almost by accident but then threw himself into it, eventually mastering the Algonquin language, and in the process became the Protestant world's first missionary celebrity: the string of pamphlets which celebrated and indeed exaggerated his achievements brought in donations worth over £15000 within a decade. Much of the money was spent on the Indian Library, a missionary educational project par excellence: a wave of printing in the Algonquin language, of which the centrepiece was the first complete Bible ever printed in the Americas. Meanwhile, he had actually been winning some hundreds of converts, described as 'praying Indians', who – and this was central to his mission – were settled in a series of so-called 'praying towns'. There they could imitate and learn the European way of life and gather around a church. By 1675 there were no less than 14 of these praying towns in the Massachusetts Bay colony, with a total population of some two and a half thousand people: around a fifth of the Native population of the colony. This genuinely does stand out as the most successful Native American mission of the century, so it feels churlish of me to pick holes in it, but I am afraid I am going to. First, in a pattern that we'll become familiar with in other settings, the enormous achievement of the Indian Library has a whiff of white elephant about it: that population of some two and a half thousand Native converts was provided with over 4000 Algonquin New Testaments and over 3000 complete Bibles, despite the fact that perhaps only a quarter or a third of them were literate. And second, the 'praying towns' rapidly started to look less like the future of the Native American people and more like open prisons, or, to use Lieutenant-Governor Spotswood's term, hostages. As the settler population surged, the pressure on the lands held by the praying towns grew steadily, and a string of lawsuits between settlers and praying Indians in the 1660s and 1670s indicate that the facts on the ground were changing faster than even the most conscientious courts could intervene to defend the rights of the praying towns. Then came King Philip's War, the catastrophic Native-settler conflict of 1675-8, in which the praying Indians were caught in the crossfire, distrusted and indeed targeted by both sides. There were a series of atrocities against Christian converts by settlers especially in the first year of the conflict, and while the colonial authorities generally tried to punish those responsible, juries composed of settlers were rarely willing to convict. Worse, the praying towns were for a time entirely shut down, their population relocated to secure locations which functioned in effect as internment camps. When they were allowed to be re-established in 1677, only four of the 14 pre-war towns were re-established, and all Native Americans in the colony, regardless of religion, were required to be confined to those sites. Eliot and his few allies protested, but celebrity or not, his fellow-colonists were no longer interested in listening to Indian-lovers. So the problem with the civilising mission was not simply that it often did not work, but that when it did work, it was a trap: the idealistic vision of Native peoples taking their place alongside their white brethren was simply impossible in the context of voracious settler expansion. If there was ever a way that a truly independent and durable Protestant Native American culture could have been built, this was not it.

And perhaps there was never such a way. But if there was, the hints of it are in my third and final approach to Protestant missions. A few people in the eighteenth century moved on from alluring and educating to accepting. Some enthusiasts for education began to try to take it to the Native population rather than trying to bring Native children to them, moving to villages and seasonal settlements and establishing missions and schools there. This was a fragmented, stop-start process, and some early cases involved missionaries establishing themselves alongside armed garrisons being posted deep in Native territories, which certainly provided some security for understandably nervous missionaries but also, let's say, complicated their message. Some, however, really did start trying to venture out on their own, the most celebrated being David Brainerd, who was sent to the Delaware Indians of New Jersey by a Scottish missionary agency in the 1740s and embedded himself deeply among them, winning some hundreds of converts before his reputation was cemented by a tragically early death. A less dramatic but perhaps more significant voice is Brainerd's contemporary Sir William Johnson, a formidable soldier of Irish extraction who in 1756 was made Superintendent of Indian Affairs for all of Britain's northern colonies. Johnson was enthusiastic for Protestant missions but brought a refreshing realism to the subject. Pestered by do-gooders peddling resettlement projects, he insisted that such schemes were 'obnoxious to the Ind^{s} who have repeatedly declared their aversion' to them, and that in practice the schemes usually had a rumble of land-hunger behind them. Native peoples, in his experience, feared that if they were forced into fixed settlements, they will 'become a Gloomy race & lose their Abilities for hunting &ca spend their time in Idleness & hang^{g} upon the Inhabit^{s} for a Wretched

subsistence'. When they saw the fate of those who were confined to praying towns, it hardly helped to win more converts. Civilizing projects, he insisted with a military bluntness, had simply failed:

> *'Those Ind[s] who … are become in some measure Civilized have hitherto derived no advantages from it. … On the Contrary they are poor, abject, full of Avarice, Hypocrisy, & in short have imbibed all our Vices, without any of our Good Qualities and without retaining their former Abilities for gaining a Subsistence.'*

That final point was important to him: as a soldier, he regarded the Native tribes allied to the British as military assets and knew how vital they had proved during the war against the French in the 1750s. Turning them into meek subsistence farmers was not desirable even if it were possible. So he, too, was at least as coloured by ulterior motives as were the more conventional missionary voices we've heard, but with this critical difference: unlike *any* of the other people we have met, he actually valued Native Americans for their abilities and distinctive skills, and saw them as potentially powerful allies of the British who could make a genuine contribution.

It should be said that this third phase of the Protestant mission, what I am calling the accepting phase, never achieved any kind of dominance. Brainerd was valorised more than he was imitated. Johnson was hugely respected but in the end his advice did not carry the day. The closest he and his view came to success is a Pyrrhic victory, and this relates to the Mohawks of New York, long-time allies of the British who were the focus of a pretty sustained Anglican missionary effort in the eighteenth century. A series of missionaries took up residence at their two main settlements. During the war of the 1750s, the principal Mohawk missionary, John Ogilvie, who had a history of pushing back against naïve or sinister civilizing projects, actually accompanied the Mohawks serving under British command as a military chaplain, going with them all the way to the siege of Quebec and preaching as it went. They became known to the British as 'the faithful Mohawks', and if you hear in that term a blurring between religious faith and political loyalty, you are right: certainly, for the colonial authorities, and apparently for the Mohawks themselves, religious and political alliance were two sides of the same coin. The irony of course is that, when the American revolution erupted in the mid-1770s, the faithful Mohawks fought loyally for the British. As a result, after the British defeat most of them were forced to leave the territory of the new United States altogether, establishing communities at what are still substantial reserves in Canada: many of them fought for Britain against the United States in the war of 1812. There they also became the recipients of this book, the very first publication of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, John's Gospel in the Mohawk language. It was not much of a reward. But both the faithful Mohawks and the Protestant missionaries who tried to serve them might be forgiven for thinking that, in the context of what was becoming an unstoppable westward tide of settlers, it was the best approximation to success that was available.

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