I. INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century Africa was the theatre for competing Muslim and Christian evangelism. Islam grew away from its established roots nearer the northern and eastern coasts of Africa, while Christianity crossed the oceans from Europe, spread by missionaries who were later helped (and hampered) by the advance of European imperialism, during the "Scramble for Africa". Yet the challenges facing both religions, though similar, were not identical. We shall see here that there were characteristically Islamic and Christian faces to religious expansion, which recall contrasting aspects of both religions, and point to certain wider theological conclusions about their historical range and legacies.

The challenge faced by Christian missionaries in this period was twofold: to adapt their heartfelt religious convictions to the understanding of an entirely different cultural mind; and to decide how far they were prepared to divorce their socio-cultural values (in Europe so entangled with Christianity) from these religious certainties. Not that many would have seen the issues in such terms. Representative nineteenth-century Christians (ie. European Christians) saw no disjunction of culture, religion, and society. Nowadays, cultures are understood as discrete systems; the prevailing view in the nineteenth century was that cultures stood on steps of a metaphorical ladder, ascending from barbarous at the bottom to civilised at the top. Nineteenth-century Africa yields examples across the spectrum of religious and cultural transmission, from the "Black Europeans" of the Sierra Leone experiment to the "White Africans" of the 1890s,[1] from the Established Church of Sierra Leone to the nascent "Ethiopian" independent churches of *fin de siècle* African colonies. Christianity's African legacy, of course, continues in the diverse and massive African

Christianity of today, a sign that in the long term, missionaries were at least partially successful in their aim of evangelising all of what was called the "Dark Continent".

Global Muslim evangelism was also making large strides, especially in Africa – many Christians believed that Islam was running rampant over the whole continent. Muslim evangelists in Africa were themselves Africans; thus Islam, unlike Christianity, was initially spread by people with a lesser cultural gap to bridge. They lived and breathed the culture – and understood the religious traditions – surrounding them. Indeed, varied observers suggested that Islam was in fact a better religion for Africans than Christianity. Canon Isaac Taylor caused a stir at the 1887 Church Congress by asking: 'Can we expect the Negro, with a low moral and cerebral development … to receive at once that lofty Christian morality for which even the prophets and heroes of Hebrew history were not prepared?'[2] Taylor's views – a mishmash of racial and religious hierarchies with a dash of anti-Semitism for good measure – usefully show us the interconnectedness of culture and religion, in Europe just as in Africa. E. W. Blyden, the early pan-African nationalist (who migrated to Liberia from his birthplace in the Caribbean via a Western education in the USA) felt that Islam may be a better religion for Africans not because of their limited capacity, but rather because it did more to raise them up, morally and spiritually, than the triple-pronged doctrine of "Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation" which had been the early-Victorian model of Christian mission.[3] For Taylor and Blyden, the damage caused to Africa by European influence (and notably the trade in liquor) was prejudicial to the usefulness of Christianity in "raising" the continent.

For all their need to acculturate, and their different methods of doing so, both religions featured movements of radical and centralising reform, insisting that their

[1] Walls, 1996: chapter 8

congregations met some common standard. In the later nineteenth-century, a reaction against the "three Cs" caused a reformulation of Victorian mission theory. The rise, from the early 1880s, of a muscular and uncompromising spirituality within Anglican evangelicalism, inspired by the Keswick Convention,[4] and by the institutionalisation of, and subtle policy changes within, the Church Missionary Society (the CMS), meant that missionaries and their employers were now often concerned more with 'the obligation to holiness [in the temporal world], rather than … an understanding of the inevitability of sinfulness', and with 'proclamation while there was yet time, rather than the development of an ecclesiastical establishment'.[5] Similar reform movements preaching the all-sufficiency of the Qur'an arose in West Africa in this period. These were equally holy, scriptural, and pious, and likewise sought to purge their tradition of impure elements.

We must therefore consider the contributions of this period to the present-day character of Christianity and Islam. Some have argued that Christianity's explosive growth in Africa during the twentieth century can be explained by the long Christian tradition of transmission through translation, and have emphasised the role of nineteenth-century missionaries in starting this ball rolling.[6] This study will mainly analyse the expansion of both religions in West Africa, the setting for much of their African interaction, and will concentrate more upon the activities of the CMS than other missionary societies. Thus over-ambitious generalisations must be avoided. But the issues raised are of real theological interest, reflecting as they do the characteristic transmission methods of these two universal monotheistic traditions.

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[2] Taylor, 1887: 7; also see Prasch, 1989: 51-73
[3] Blyden, 1967
[4] Porter, 1976: 5-34
[5] Williams, 1990: 262
[6] Sanneh, 1989; also Walls, 1996

II. RELIGION, CIVILISATION, AND MODES OF CULTURAL EMBODIMENT

How did Christianity and Islam relate to each other in the struggle to evangelise Africa? Were their perceptions of and prescriptions for the African setting and people which they worked amongst different, and if so, why?

There is an inevitable gap between religious theory and religious reality – particularly so in the case of Christianity and Islam, both religions of the Book:

> 'Religions, and world religions in particular, are bearers of messages from the past to the current situations in which they operate. This anchorage in a temporal otherness, mediated by narratives and other vehicles of "collective memory", both gives strength to religious motivation, and renders inadequate any attempt … to tie particular religious manifestations into a purely synchronic set of determinations'.[7]

However, texts are mediated by teachers, especially when fully or partially untranslated (as in many Christian missions in Africa at this time), or untranslatable (as in the case of the Qur'an). This is exaggerated by the widespread illiteracy of this period. Hence any consideration of religious expansion in this period (or any other) requires an understanding of *how* the message was mediated in order to cross cultural boundaries, and how this mediation was affected by the prejudices and preconceptions of both Christian and Muslim missionaries regarding the African setting in which they worked. We can thus see how social and cultural backgrounds affect religious outlook.

[7] Peel, 2000: 5

Traditionally, Islamic and Christian orthodoxy frowned upon "superstitious" and "polytheistic" religious practices, for reasons both theological and social. Both took a dim view of supposed African polytheism; likewise both criticised the idol-worship they perceived in traditional African religion. European Christians in this period were especially censorious of what they saw as cultural mixing; one Anglican missionary in 1890 lambasted the 'weakness' with which local Christians had 'partake[n] in some heathen rites' to avoid forcible eviction from their village, and concluded that the Church there was 'impure and rotten through and through'.[8] Similarly, the word "Islam" means "submission": to the One God (Allah) and the prescriptions for His worship laid out by His chosen prophet (Muhammad). Islam holds that the world can be divided into two – those who belonged to the *umma* (brotherhood) of Muslims, and those *kefir* (unbelievers) who did not. Thus both religions, though concerned to acculturate, nevertheless retained a necessary sense of distinctness from the traditions of their surroundings in Africa .

A potential source of bias stems from the fact that Christian missions both produced and inspired a far greater volume of writing in English than did Muslim proselytisation. Nevertheless, contemporary Christian accounts of Islam encourage the deduction of tentative conclusions about how Islam approached the African setting, and thus allow us to explore more fully the ways in which Christianity and Islam differed in this respect.

There was extensive debate among late nineteenth-century observers of Christian missions as to whether Christianity did any good for its African converts. From the late 1870s onwards, the climate of European territorial aggrandisement during the "Scramble for Africa" made some observers feel that Europe did more

[8] Dobinson, 1899: 47-50. Dobinson is probably referring to an annual "pagan" festival.

harm by its gunboats, rifles, alcohol, and colonial expansion than the good of Christian mission work could justify. Historians have sometimes judged missionaries harshly for their complicity in this respect. The early model of Victorian mission in Africa did emphasise the linkage of the "three Cs" (Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation), but mainly in the hope that bad trade (in slaves) could be driven out by developing good trade (in natural resources). Consequently men like Livingstone envisaged the rise of a stable, educated, and Christian African bourgeoisie, who would help to raise Africa by means of mutually beneficial trade with Britain.[9]

Although this doctrine had mostly faded by the later nineteenth century, many felt – in the light of such early experiments as the Sierra Leone Church – that the conjunction of the three Cs had caused Africans merely to copy European manners, clothing, and behaviour, rather than seeking to make good Christians of themselves. Critics were consequently chary of anything that smacked explicitly of turning Africans into Europeans. One (albeit an extreme example) judged the African Christians he had met to be, 'all, more or less, bad men. They attempted to veil an unbridled immorality with an unblushing hypocrisy and a profane display of "mouth"-religion which … seemed even more disgusting than the immorality itself'.[10] Criticism of mission also took a more pragmatic hue: 'the expenditure [of Christian missionary societies] bears little or no relation to the results'.[11] Christian missions, under greater metropolitan scrutiny in our period than ever before, had to pass '[t]he ultimate test of a religion … [i.e.] its continuous fitness to elevate the faith and character of man'.[12] There were numerous divergent attempts to suggest alternative theoretical frameworks for Christian mission that would be better able to pass this

[9] Stanley, 1983: 71-94; also Porter, 1985: 597-621
[10] Johnston, 1887: 720
[11] Taylor, 1888: 494

'ultimate test'. Such theories illustrate the mediating influence of metropolitan socio-cultural ideas upon European missionary work.

One such framework was that of the "Islamicists". Animated by innovations in the comparative study of religion, certain European students of Islam sought to analyse the failings of Christian mission work by reference to the perceived success of Islam. Islam had traditionally been seen by Christian Europe as a static, stationary tradition, obdurately opposed to development and reform. The Islamicists wanted this view modified. They were a motley crew – mostly amateur students, only rarely accomplished theologians, and often with little knowledge of Arabic or first-hand experience of Islam. Reginald Bosworth Smith was typical – a Harrow schoolmaster three of whose four books, all on different subjects, had a common theme: 'the responsibilities attached to British imperial … power'.[13] Smith spotlighted 'what [was] good, rather than what [was] evil' in Islam[14] averring that in fact Islam bettered moral standards, and alleviated the worst excesses of "heathen" religions. Cannibalism, human sacrifice, and infanticide all '[disappear] at once and for ever … tribes coalesce into nations, and … nations into empires … [thus] the centres from which war springs are fewer in number and further apart'.[15] Education and order increased slowly, as the mosque became the centre of the community.[16] Smith felt that African Islam 'gives to its new Negro converts an energy, a dignity, a self-reliance, and a self-respect which is all too rarely found in their Pagan *or their Christian* fellow-countrymen'.[17] In Africa, Islam exhibited 'a forbearance and a sympathy for native customs and prejudices and even for their more harmless beliefs', unlike

[12] W. Boyd Carpenter, bishop of Ripon, in his introduction to Robinson, 1897: vi. Carpenter is here using the language of social Darwinism.
[13] Walls, 2002: 148
[14] Quoted in Bennett, 1992: 76
[15] Smith, 1887: 798-9
[16] Ibid: 799

Christianity, which imposed creeds too much the product of 'all that civilisation had done' for that religion.[18]

But their nascent cultural relativism was also the main weakness of the Islamicists' position. They depended on doubts that Christian truth precluded the possibility of truth in other religions, but as European Christians they were still fully convinced of their paramountcy on the "ladder" of civilisations. They sought ways to justify their conviction that the elevation of Africans was better served by Islam than by Christianity, and found them by mediating their Christianity with other (secular) "faiths" such as racial hierarchies and social Darwinism. Hence they insisted that Islam was but a stage in a long-term evolution:

> 'The Islamicists' notion that Islam could be a stepping-stone to Christianity for the African conflated two hierarchical systems: the ranking of the races that had become a mainstay of late-Victorian anthropology, and the charting by cultural anthropologists of religious systems on a line of "progress" or "development" that moved unequivocally upward from "primitive" animism to "civilised" spiritual monotheism … Mohammed offered a revitalisation of monotheistic principles particularly suited to warmer climates and degenerated populations. These characteristics suited Islam to the Africans, who … were on the lowest level of the hierarchy of races, the pure negro lowest of them all.'[19]

Canon Isaac Taylor was thus able to contend that '[t]he Christian ideal is unintelligible to savages',[20] and that missionaries 'are much more likely to be useful

[17] Ibid: 800. Emphasis added
[18] Smith, 1874: 249
[19] Prasch, 1989: 57-58
[20] Taylor, 1887: 7

in England to preach to those who share their ignorance and their prejudices, than among nations whom the cleverest among us only imperfectly understand'[21], since 'the polyandrous English are not entitled to cast stones at polygamous Muslims'.[22] The Islamicists' emphasis on the cultural specificity of the Christian message has implications bearing heavily on the importance of translation in Christian conversion, discussed later in this essay.

The Islamicists were not alone in altering their conception of the role of Christian mission in response to imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century. Criticism by Christians like Taylor and Smith met a riposte from missionary apologists. Early Victorian mission work wished to plant in the mission field the seed of the Christian message, which, it was hoped, would bloom into an *indigenous* native church – self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Many defenders of mission work acknowledged that the apparent success of missions following this principle in Africa had not been all it might – certainly not when compared to the success of Muslim expansion. Henry Morris, a member of the CMS committee, wrote that 'Christian England has failed in its duty … Islam is a subtle and gigantic foe … [it] is too like Christianity to be despised; too unlike it to be overcome', adding that this was cause to redouble the efforts of missionary societies.[23]

The idea that Islam was 'too like Christianity to be despised' constitutes a partial concession to the Islamicist viewpoint. The traditional Christian view of Islam held that its historical success was down to ingenious doctrine, favourable circumstances, appeals to the sword, and the corruption and fallenness (in Western Protestant eyes) of the ancient African, Egyptian, and Syrian Christian churches

[21] Taylor, 1888: 498
[22] Taylor, 1887: 7
[23] Morris 1887: 13

which had fallen before Islam.[24] The arguments of the Islamicists had attempted to expose such explanations' inadequacy, but actually indirectly rehabilitated them, with modifications – which newly deemed Islam as worthy of respect, but still in need of confrontation with Christian truth. The members of this "confrontational" school were typically former or current colonial administrators or missionaries, and frequently "professional" orientalists (in contrast to the amateurs of the "conciliatory" Islamicist camp).[25]

One, Sir William Muir,[26] wrote that 'the sword of Mahomet, and the Coran are the most fatal enemies of Civilisation, Liberty and the Truth which the world has yet known'[27]. Islam was a 'system … devised with consummate skill for shutting out … the light of truth' from Muslims.[28] However, his commitment to a more considered view of Islam is seen in his understanding of Mohammed, for instance, which attributed to the prophet greater sincerity than had traditional views of Islam. Muir allowed that Muhammad had been genuinely pious and sincere for at least part of his life, arguing that he had only been corrupted by worldly desire after his flight to Medina, and writing of Muhammad's 'earnestness and honesty [while] at Mecca'.[29] Notwithstanding this, Muir's conclusion was that Islam's evils far outweighed its benefits, and that the Qur'an was a work wholly human in origin.[30]

[24] Bennett, 1992: 25
[25] Ibid: 13
[26] Muir studied Islam during administrative service in the mid-century Raj, and became convinced that it was a retrogressive force partly as a result of the 1857 Mutiny. Later he became a keen supporter of Christian mission, and a distinguished writer on Islam. His books were much admired in missionary circles. See Bennett, 1992: 123
[27] Quoted in ibid: 109
[28] Quoted in ibid: 117-8. Muir, of course, meant a specifically Christian truth.
[29] Quoted in ibid: 121-2
[30] Ibid: 122

Muir's contribution was echoed in the writings of some missionaries. C. H. Robinson[31] attributed the success of Islam to: i) the measure of truth it contained; first and foremost in the 'acknowledgement of the unity of God'; ii) the fact that it was 'admirably adapted to the nature and capacity of the *average* man'; and iii) that its 'unbending conservatism' safeguarded it from the dangers of progress and development.[32] But Robinson doubted that Islam was better suited than Christianity for African advancement, citing reports of widespread drunkenness in Muslim areas as evidence that Islam did not improve morals.[33] Strikingly, Robinson also judged that Islam had not furthered civilisation among the Hausa, basing this appraisal on his conclusion that the indigo-dyeing industries of Kano were there long before the arrival of Islam in the area:[34] '[I]t seems very doubtful indeed whether the Hausas owe anything … to the influence of Mohammedanism for the very remarkable degree of civilisation now to be found among them'.[35] Eugene Stock, the Editorial Secretary and official historian of the CMS, shared this view of Islam: '[In Yorubaland] there are great Pagan towns, characterised by all the law and order, commerce, and social development which [some imagine] to be found only in the Mahomedan districts, and therefore to be a direct result of the influence of Islam'.[36]

We see the intimate association of Christianity and culture in such viewpoints. Racial theories were far less important for the apologists of Christian mission than for the detractors, though such was the contemporary respectability of such theories that we cannot discount them altogether. But mission's defenders laid more stress on the civilisational pecking order, and the ancillary belief that African Christians should be

[31] A former missionary in the Western Sudan. Later Robinson became the Editorial Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and sometime Reader in Hausa at Cambridge.
[32] Robinson, 1897: 11. Emphasis added.
[33] Ibid: 22-5. Robinson conveniently ignored the European origin of the alcohol.
[34] To the Victorian mind, industry was a hallmark of civilisation.
[35] Robinson, 1897: 27

judged by contemporary European Christian benchmarks of faith. For evangelical Protestants in this period, conversion entailed 'a heartfelt inner conviction [leading] to external actions consonant with it',[37] and it was their uncompromising theology that found missionaries keen to satisfy themselves that such convictions in Africans *were* heartfelt before they would baptise them. Hence they insisted that converts demonstrate certain standards of knowledge, comportment, morals, and so on.

Such tests speak more of assumed European superiority than about the character of Christian morals. Hence, 'a Moslem [or, by implication, any non-European Other] who is morally abreast of a Christian is … relatively a much better man, inasmuch as his privileges are fewer and his temptations greater'.[38] In this view, the advantages of (European) civilisation create the most favourable environment for the upstanding, moral, Christian life. This is consistent with the picture of a growingly institutionalised post-Scramble CMS, whose official policy veered further and further towards the ideal, stated in a CMS document, that 'the English-speaking race may have the honour of leading the way in a policy of Christian Imperialism, which shall have no other object than to bring nearer the fulfilment of the divine promise that the Kingdom of this world *is to become* the Kingdom of our Lord and His Cross'.[39]

If both Islamicists, and defenders of mission work, showed a mixture of secular and religious concerns in their consideration of African mission, what of those observers who lived and worked in Africa, rather than the imperial centres? E.W. Blyden, the Liberian intellectual and pan-African nationalist, was shaped by his Christianity and Western-style education, but he was equally committed to pan-African nationalist ideas, yearning for the kind of African "elevation" spoken of in

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[36] Stock, 1887: 7
[37] Peel, 2000: 203. We shall see later that nineteenth-century Christian criticism of African Islam often failed to acknowledge the possibility of alternatives to this model.
[38] MacColl, 1887: 5

Europe. He became the first African[40] to take European theories of race and use them to his own ends,[41] and while accepting the principle that the races were fundamentally different, he trumped the vertical hierarchy to argue that blacks and whites were 'distinct but equal' races:[42] '[t]here is a solidarity of humanity which requires the complete development of each part in order to the effective working of the whole'.[43]

Later in life Blyden became sceptical of the ability of a European-dominated Christianity to regenerate Africa. He was deeply impressed by the civilising capacity of Islam: '[i]t is the African [Muslims] and the Negro colonists from Christian countries, who have … done most for the permanent advance of civilisation in equatorial Africa … [they are] the only capable and efficient agencies for the work of African regeneration'.[44] Blyden felt that the encounter of Christianity (under African direction) and Islam could be mutually beneficial:

> '[The Christian] will infuse spiritual life into the formalism of the Muslims, a vital and spontaneous activity into the mechanical regularity of their worship; while the Muslims by their disciplined intellect and respect for order, will confront the pretensions of ignorant and unlettered religious guides, the indifference to learning, the license … imported from the house of bondage'.[45]

Blyden also wrote much about the missionary achievements of Islam vis-à-vis Christianity, saying that Muslims did not attack African social forms as

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[39] Quoted in Williams, 1990: 247. Emphasis added
[40] Although born in the Caribbean and resident for some years in the USA, Blyden believed that the racial unity of all "Negroes" made them all Africans.
[41] Introduction by Christopher Fyfe to Blyden, 1967: [xi]-[xviii]
[42] Blyden, 1967: 277
[43] Ibid: 66
[44] Ibid: iv-v
[45] Ibid: v

indiscriminately as Christians: '[W]hen the Arab met the Negro … [what took place] was a healthy amalgamation, and not an absorption or undue repression'.[46] Muslim clerics 'may be inferior to the theological and classical scholar fresh from college in Europe or America, but [they have] the advantage of speaking to the people in a *sympathetic and perfectly intelligible* language',[47] while 'the Christian world, trained for the last three hundred years to look upon the Negro as made for the service of superior races, finds it difficult to shake off the notion of his absolute inferiority'.[48] Blyden was concerned that this notion was being carried into Africa by European missionaries.

The idea of a 'policy of Christian Imperialism'[49] might signify that European missionaries bought into contemporary secular prejudices about Africa and Africans. But this was not universally the case. Brian Stanley has argued that the idea of Britain as a Christian model 'became increasingly vulnerable as the nineteenth century drew to a close'.[50] Canon Taylor's criticisms of the 'polyandrous English' express an aspect of this,[51] though it was still rare for mission theory to question the general applicability of the British developmental model.[52] However, on a personal level, many missionaries did find that field experience softened their attitude to new cultural environs. So it was that some missionaries self-consciously endeavoured to dissociate themselves from European civilisation.[53]

Missionaries on the Niger (further from the coast and the influence of European settlement) sought this dissociation from the late 1880s. Henry Dobinson

[46] Ibid: 12
[47] Ibid: 21. Emphasis added
[48] Ibid: 46
[49] Quoted in Williams, 1990: 247
[50] Stanley, 1990: 165
[51] Taylor, 1887: 7
[52] Stanley, 1990: 165

saw, upon arrival at Lokoja, 'two figures in white with turbans and long robes sitting down as Mohammedans. These, we presently discovered to be Mr. Robinson and Mr. Wilmot Brooke'.[54] These missionaries also borrowed the Hausa title for Muslim missionaries – *mallam*. Such borrowing was the case elsewhere, in Yorubaland, for instance, where the word *alufa* referred to both Christian and Muslim preachers. In 1890s CMS missions, it tended to be missionaries *in the field* who counselled more responsibility for African agents of the Society, while the Parent Committees perceptibly moved towards an attitude of 'petulant distrust'[55] of such counsel – an inversion of what had been the case for the previous half-century.[56]

G.W. Brooke, J.A. Robinson, Henry Dobinson, and the rest of the "Sudan Party", were nevertheless typical of a generation of late nineteenth-century Anglican missionaries; for all their dubiety about the worldly prestige of European civilisation, they still accepted but one yardstick of Christian spirituality – their own. We can see this in the notorious "Niger Purge" of 1890. Brooke, the 'moving spirit in this ecclesiastical revolution', wrote at the time that 'the pastors … must be changed, the communicants must be changed, the message preached must be changed, the time, mode, and place of worship must be changed, the schoolchildren must be changed and the course in the schools must be changed'.[57] The Sudan party felt that Crowther's Niger Church was no better than an immoral imitation of what it ought to be. However, their actions soured relations between indigenous and European clerics

[53] This idea had been pioneered in China during the 1860s and 1870s. Because Western identity was a definite hindrance for missionaries there, James Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission adopted characteristic Chinese dress and hairstyling, insisting that other missionaries follow suit.
[54] Dobinson, 1899: 61. 'Mr Robinson' is J.A. Robinson, a CMS missionary and brother of C.H. Robinson.
[55] Williams, 1990: 232
[56] Ibid: 229-30
[57] Quoted in Hastings, 1994: 389. It should be stressed that their actions were not based on secular racialism, but on their (over-) zealous application of a newly rigorous Keswick-influenced theology of Anglican evangelicalism.

in West Africa, and demonstrated the readiness of European missionaries to apply ruthlessly their own spiritual standards in new settings.

However, Dobinson, the only one of them both still alive and in Africa after 1892, later declared that he longed for 'the old feeling of close union … I regretted the sad events of 1890, when many men were misjudged, and had greatly suffered in consequence'.[58] Dobinson concluded that Brooke and Robinson had mislaid 'all sense of Christian fairness and charity' in 1890.[59] Late nineteenth-century European missionaries, while initially viewing the African environment with prejudice, often allowed 'their personal experience of other cultures to re-define their norms of civilisation to the limited extent that their moral and theological convictions allowed'.[60] However, this did not dissipate the air of superiority crystallising around them, which Blyden had seen as disruptive of the 'elevating power' of Christianity in Africa.

Ordained African Christians *were* in many ways better placed to be successful missionaries, though this ministry 'was "native" only in the sense of not being European'.[61] The African Christians, like Blyden, *needed* their Christian education to express the idea that 'the same Gospel which accounts for the growth and supremacy of Europe will not fail to do the same thing similar [sic.] for our beloved country'.[62] But where some African clergymen of the later nineteenth century differed from their earlier counterparts was in their conviction that African religious agency was indispensable to the budding of African nationalism. The church therefore came to embody the social, religious, and political hopes of African Christians.[63]

[58] Dobinson, 1899: 195
[59] Quoted in Williams, 1990: 232
[60] Stanley, 1990: 160
[61] Walls, 2002: 163
[62] Quoted in Ayandele, 1966: 179
[63] Ibid: 178

Yet the difficulty for African clergymen was that they inhabited two cultures simultaneously. They were Africans, with all the concomitant political, cultural, and social implications, and yet also Christians, who had to square the apparent superiority of Christian Europe with the messages of justice and equality before God to be found in the translated Bibles to which they had growing access. Born into African society, they drew upon a greater instinctive understanding of the social and cultural embeddedness of traditional (and Islamic) rites. This led men like Bishop Crowther to adopt a tolerant and sympathetic approach to mission work, avoiding denunciation when possible.[64] Yet as converts to the Christian faith, they often found that their "dual nationality" tore them between their own religious convictions and those of the Europeans who supervised their work. Bishop Crowther found himself in this predicament in 1885, when Christians in Brass had eaten human flesh during a traditional ritual. His son, Dandeson Crowther, had temporarily denied them Communion, a horrifyingly lenient punishment in European eyes.[65] This was an extreme example; nevertheless signs of syncretism in the Christianity of African converts were overwhelmingly seen as apostasy by Europeans, who in fairness could hardly have been expected to react any differently to events such as this.

Such incidents show why many found it hard to imagine the flowering of a truly indigenous African church while Europeans dominated the ecclesiastical and political agenda. The eventual development of an accepted and distinct African Christian theology had to wait until decolonisation in the twentieth century. Even so, it owed much to the work of missionaries in our period, as we shall see in the next section of this essay.

[64] Walls, 2002: 162
[65] Ayandele, 1966: 211

It now remains to reflect on the position of Islam; specifically, to consider whether Muslim missionaries brought troublesome cultural baggage to their mission work, in the same way as Christians did. It is hard not to conclude that there was no alternative ideology affecting African Muslims as powerful as those of racial and civilisational superiority, which complicated the African Christian picture in this period. This had much to do with the background of the missionaries themselves. Christian commentators such as Taylor, Blyden, James Johnson, and Smith readily averred that Islam was successful, in part, because its missionaries were all Africans. So too, of course, were the indigenous Christian clergy, and we have seen that they very often made accomplished missionaries, most obviously in the field of translation. But their faith was bedevilled by the inherited thought-structures of late nineteenth-century Europe. On the fringes of the Islamic world, 'armed only with his portable bed and dingy manuscripts'[66], the African Muslim was able to preach in a language people understood, adapting Islam to the local cultural setting, without immediate supervision from others who reckoned themselves better Muslims than he.

Yet Africanness is not enough *per se* to explain the lack of cultural baggage attending the Muslim missionary in Africa. Much as men like Blyden admired the education of Muslims he encountered, the faith they initially preached to the *kefir* (unbelievers), as we shall see presently, strayed far from the strictures of the Muslim Law. In Islam there has been at times a 'clearly felt and openly discussed conflict between two cultural heritages', and Muslims have always been deeply conscious of heterogeneity in their faith.[67] This has been the case for Christians too. The methods by which the two universal monotheistic traditions have dealt with such inevitable consequences of their expansion have been fundamentally different, and this has

[66] Ibid: 21

important consequences for how we understand the two religions in relation to each other today.

[67] Von Grunebaum, 1955: 17

III. PATTERNS OF TRANSLATABILITY AND RELIGIOUS ACCULTURATION

Recent work by Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh explores the importance of translation as a means of understanding how Christianity has traversed difficult cultural barriers. Christian faith is built on translation, embodied in John 1:14: 'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us'. Historically, the spread of Christianity has also been a result of translation, because Christians have continually translated the Scriptures into new languages. Translation, though, is never exact:

> 'Exact transmission of meaning from one linguistic medium to another is continually hampered not only by structural and cultural difference; the words of the receptor language are pre-loaded, and the old cargo drags the new into areas uncharted in the source language. In the end the translator has simply to do his best and take risks in a high risk business'.[68]

Because language is specific to cultures, it is guaranteed that the Christian faith will be subtly or dramatically changed when is translated into different tongues. Thus, 'Christianity is a generational process, an ongoing dialogue with culture'.[69] Walls has characterised the Gospel as 'Prisoner and Liberator of Culture',[70] and has spoken of two forces, in constant tension with each other. Firstly, the "indigenising principle", accounting for the diverse forms of Christian worship and faith over time.[71] Christians are members of their own society as well as of the faith at large, meaning that '[a]ll

[68] Walls, 1996: 26
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid: 3
[71] Ibid: 7

churches are culture churches – including our own'.[72] On the other hand, there is the "pilgrim principle" – the universalising force in Christian history, giving the Christian 'dual nationality', an adoptive past, and a duty to balance the demands of their cultural and their Christian beliefs.[73]

We have seen how nineteenth-century Christian mission in Africa often became a prisoner of culture: '[f]aith carries with it as a permanent peril the sedulous defect of cultural arrogance'.[74] Yet Christianity also liberates culture, in that it gives great status to the vernacular. Lamin Sanneh cites, among others, the example of William Carey, an early-nineteenth-century missionary in India. Carey mastered Sanskrit and Bengali, and, by translating much of the Bible into the latter, gave new prestige to the language, revitalising the local vernacular and sparking a literary renaissance. Sanneh argues that this, rather than the number of people he converted, is the true measure of his work.[75] Here translation becomes the means to a revitalisation of the vernacular and the cultural scene it draws upon.

This is the Gospel as Liberator, and is demonstrated in the fact that Christianity has in many cases sown the seeds of national consciousness.[76] Therefore:

> 'Christian mission laid the basis for comparative studies in general, and excited a profound revitalisation process within the vernacular itself. It is the logical opposite of colonialism, for the means and methods of mission, though perhaps not the motives, conspired together with the consequences to determine a vernacular destiny for the cause'.[77]

[72] Ibid: 8
[73] Ibid: 8-9
[74] Sanneh, 1996: 25
[75] Sanneh, 1989: 100-101
[76] See Hastings, 1997

Although it was hard for missionaries to ignore the implicit "civilising" dynamic of Western expansion, nonetheless 'the seeds of … divergence between mission and colonialism were sown with the translation exercise'.[78] It is worth considering this when we compare the modest numerical growth of African Christianity in our period with the explosive expansion that followed during the twentieth century. The obvious missionary strength of Christianity has been its sanction of the convert's growth, both as a Christian, and as a member of his culture. Its clearest weakness has been the schismatic tendency of post-Reformation Christianity.

Late nineteenth-century observers of mission were preoccupied with the slow growth of Christianity, but also with Islam's rapid growth. It is absolutely explicit in the Islamic tradition that the message of the Qur'an can only be apprehended in the original Arabic. The Qur'an is untranslatable. It also prescribes certain rules for correct living and the organisation of society, for which it is hard to find a direct equivalent in Christianity. As Walls puts it: 'The true Christian analogy with the Qur'an is not the Bible, but Christ. Christ for Christians, the Qur'an for Muslims, is the Eternal Word of God; but Christ is Word translated'.[79] If translation is vital to Christian acculturation, then it follows that Islam treads a different path when bridging cultural divides. And if translation allows "dual nationality", then we need to understand how Islam introduces such an apparently rigid and inflexible set of rules as those contained in the Qur'an.

In placing their emphasis on the paramountcy of translation in the missionary success of Christianity, Walls and Sanneh imply that Islam, in its *scriptural* failure to translate, must employ other factors accounting for its *cultural* translatability and

[77] Sanneh, 1989: 105
[78] Ibid: 111-2
[79] Walls, 1996: 27

missionary appeal. If Christianity 'begot cultural nationalism'[80] in Africa, then was there an analogous awakening of Islamic consciousness? How was Islam, while apparently militating towards a unitary civilisation, able to seem a potentially authentic *African* religion to Blyden?[81] The evidence of this period suggests that in fact Islam was acculturating itself very successfully indeed in later nineteenth-century Africa, by the process of quarantine, mixing, and then reform, which, as Humphrey Fisher argued, characterises Muslim conversion in Africa.[82]

Let us consider in depth the example of Yorubaland, where 'foreign Muslim clerics and their indigenous heirs adapted Islam to the local cultural setting'.[83] Initially confined to those northern areas of Yorubaland closest to the Sokoto Caliphate and other Islamic power bases of greater maturity, Islam spread southwards, from the early nineteenth century, in the great population movements of the Yoruba Wars.[84] Initially, a freshly-settled Muslim community in the southern towns 'remained, to all appearances, a virtually autonomous unit'.[85] How did Islam move out of quarantine?

The religious game was necessarily played out according to the rules of the pagan audience of the missionaries, both Muslim and Christian.[86] This meant initially that Islam was 'less scriptural and Arabised, more responsive to local demand for manipulative techniques which also embodied "pagan" elements, and reconciled to social practices of an un-Islamic character'.[87] Muslim *alufa* (literally, "teachers") stepped into social roles which placed them in direct competition with the traditional

[80] Sanneh, 1989: 106-7
[81] Blyden, 1967
[82] Fisher, 1985: 153-73
[83] Ryan, 1978: 61
[84] For a full account see Gbadamosi, 1978: chapter 1
[85] Ibid: 50
[86] Peel, 2000: 188
[87] Ibid: 189

priesthood. Muslim clerics were renowned for the potency of the charms they made. Typically they introduced their audience to the basics of Muslim prayer before agreeing to make such a charm for the king. One Christian missionary described such a scene: '[h]e now commenced his whispering prayers and in conclusion made all present to rub their faces with their hands and repeat aloud "lafia, lafia", peace, peace'.[88] Here,

> '[t]he *alufa* seeks to establish links with the local authorities and offers powerful techniques for the purposes of state, especially its military needs. He entirely accepts local criteria of need, but offers specifically Islamic means to meet them … The people are induced to share in Muslim religious practice without coercion, yet the presumed power of the *alufa*'s charms makes him feared, which allows him to press his terms.'[89]

In situations such as these, Muslim clerics endeavoured to make themselves indispensable sources of worldly manipulation, so that the spiritual powers of the *alufa*, whether purchased for success in battle or to ward off natural disaster, became 'a necessary item of public expenditure'. In this respect, 'the public role of the *alufa* was initially construed according to the premises of the old religion'.[90] Muslims also benefitted from political support, and would often help the political career of particular men in their town in exchange for their patronage. The Ibadan Muslims, for instance, backed Opeagbe, who became king in about 1850. Opeagbe later supported the construction of their Oja-Oba mosque.[91] Eventually, there were openly Muslim rulers – Muhammad Latosisa, king of Ibadan in the 1870s, always ensured that there

[88] Ibid: 198
[89] Ibid: 198
[90] Ibid: 202

was a Muslim prayer-ground in his military camps, and made great show of praying with his army,[92] which was almost certainly not entirely Muslim.

The Muslims also tried to identify themselves with traditional public life in the Yoruba town, even when such actions were, on the face of it, distinctly un-Islamic. Many towns had an annual divination festival, where a *babalawo*[93] would forecast the events of the coming year. In some places Muslims usurped this important public role. Thus, 'the community, on the basis of an antiquated but religiously revered text, predicted through a mallam the events, dangers, and blessings of the new year'.[94] Such Islamic inroads into traditional African ceremony could become so embedded that they were locally perceived as integral to the tradition – such as when the Muslims of Ilamuren 'refused to accept the offer of the sacrificial lamb' from the chiefs, and 'the latter protested to the [king] against this violation of tradition and custom'.[95]

For all the skills of *alufa*, ordinary people still had to be persuaded to join the Muslim faith. Ostentation and corporatism were important. On Muslim festivals and other public occasions, '[they] dressed alike, engaged drummers, and a few … occasionally rode on horseback. By this turn-out, the [Muslims] gave colour, glamour, and gaiety to their social occasions'.[96] Pagans at such occasions might sometimes wear Muslim dress, join the dancing, and even declare themselves Muslims, although most new converts would still have taken part in traditional rites and festivals.[97] We have seen already that Christian missionaries saw such actions as apostasy, even

[91] Gbadamosi, 1978: 25
[92] Ibid: 52-3
[93] An adept of Ifa, a traditional Yoruba method of fortune telling.
[94] Gbadamosi, 1978: 203
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid: 54
[97] Peel, 2000: 203

atavism. One CMS agent said of such Muslim festivities in 1880: 'What a mixture of Mohammedanism with heathenism! It amounts to no religion at all'.[98]

In the growth of formalised local Muslim power structures, too, 'there was strong evidence of local adaptation and influence'.[99] Muslims in Yorubaland often formed *egbe*, or religious associations, whose role in Islamic expansion was salutary – '[b]y their activities, they fostered corporate feeling among the Muslims; they helped to raise the tone of religious living …; they promoted community development projects such as the [construction of mosques]; … above all, they made the Muslim religion fashionable and popular'.[100] There is much truth in Ryan's assessment that Muslims in Yorubaland were 'geniuses of adaptation, moulding their presentation of Truth [so as to] make it intelligible in religious terms to people used to a sacrificial priesthood and a ministry by healers and diviners'.[101]

Yet if Muslim clerics so readily adapted their faith to local settings, and fulfilled a social function very close to that of the traditional priests, what made them Muslims? Local variations are not the obvious consequence of such a prescriptive tradition, and indeed the difficulty of reconciling this fact with the degree of local variety to be found in Islam constitutes an important aspect of understanding it. Von Grunebaum notes that 'the cohesion of the culturally Muslim-dominated area is in a large measure due to the firm conviction held by the most outlying groups that they form a part of a larger and religiously defined entity'.[102] It would appear from James Johnson's description of a Muslim woman at prayer that this firm conviction was present in Yorubaland:

[98] Ibid.
[99] Gbadamosi, 1978: 58
[100] Ibid: 55
[101] Ryan, 1978: 90

> "I do not believe in her religion … but I admire her confidence in her convictions and the boldness with which she avowed them … if we African Christians would make an impression with our faith, we must with a similar spirit of boldness and honesty … avow our convictions before Heathens and Mohamedans and induce them in spite of themselves to think seriously about it."[103]

Johnson also reported that at Ibadan in 1877 there were 24 mosques, each with its own Qur'an school.[104] It is in these schools that the "reform" stage of the quarantine-mixing-reform model begins.

Students in Qur'an schools would typically be read and would memorise sections of the Qur'an by rote:

> 'The Arabic writings provide a direct link with Muslim communities all over West Africa as well as an identification with a glorious past. For the listening audience, their lack of understanding of the foreign tongue – and the distances covered by the text in time and space – adds to the "beauty and music" of these written Arabic words and to the feeling of unity among all the "people of the book"'.[105]

Presently a few students might gain literacy and begin to understand the meaning of what they had learnt. This process occurred in late-nineteenth-century Yorubaland, where the number of Yoruba clerics (and not itinerant "foreign" preachers from the

[102] Von Grunebaum, 'The Problem, Unity in Diversity' in von Grunebaum, 1955: 18
[103] CMS CA2/056/51, Report, James Johnson to the Parent Committee, dated January & February 1878
[104] CMS CA2/056/50, Report, James Johnson to the Parent Committee, dated August 1877
[105] Sanneh, 1994: 37

North) increased markedly.[106] As the level of Arabic learning (and thus familiarity with the Qur'an) increased, so one would expect the more educated and pious of the Yoruba Muslims to seek to bring their faith closer to scriptural norms, and indeed reformist agendas, already common among itinerant clerics from areas with a longer Islamic tradition, were taken up in the later nineteenth century by native Yoruba Muslims.

This coupling of reform, renewal, and Qur'anic rectitude has a long history in Islam, particularly so in areas of recent expansion. For Abd al-Karim al-Maghili, a North African itinerant cleric of the late fifteenth century, reform meant 'undoing the harm that results from neglect of the religious code, while renewal may be taken to mean the level at which prescriptive standards are applied after the removal of impediments'.[107] Al-Maghili was especially disdainful of Muslims 'who continued to imbibe from a pluralist religious world [something that was certainly true of most Yoruba Muslims in our period], and their offence in his eyes is more serious than that of nonbelievers'.[108] In sub-Saharan West Africa such a reformist movement had been typified *par excellence* by the Muslim intellectual and jihadist of the early nineteenth century, Uthman dan Fodio, founder of the Sokoto Caliphate and a keen admirer of al-Maghili's thought.

Such reformism appeared in Yorubaland in the late nineteenth century. Ryan gives the example, from Lagos in 1876, of the arrival of a Nupe preacher called Sulayman,[109] an event the immediate effects of which were noted by James Johnson, who astutely described the episode as indicative of the 'life, vigour, and energy' to be

[106] Gbadamosi, 1978: 62-3
[107] Sanneh, 1994: 29
[108] Ibid: 30. For a fuller account of al-Maghili's thought, see 29-31.
[109] Ryan, 1978: 119

found in Yoruba Islam.[110] Sulayman's preaching on the all-sufficiency of the Qur'an polarised the Muslims of Lagos, and alongside this more traditional Qur'anic radicalism arose in the 1890s a competing, and very novel, "modernising" reform movement in West African Islam, which still counselled fealty to the Qur'an, but which also wished to reconcile Islam to a greater degree with the West, and particularly Western education. Thanks partly to a campaign by Blyden, a Government Muslim School was opened in Lagos in 1896, which 'aimed to offset the reaction of Muslim parents against Modernising education which they had only [previously] experienced in its Christian missionary form'.[111]

In comparing Islamic expansion with the translation and vernacularisation of Christianity, it must be remembered that the vernacular remains in everyday use in all Islamic areas except where modern Arabic *is* the vernacular. Initial Muslim proselytisation must involve a degree of mixing, between an as-yet-imperfectly-understood Islam, and the culturally embedded traditional religious structures it ultimately aims to supersede. In this phase of expansion, 'Islam for the ordinary adherent is not an intellectual exercise … The important thing is the performance of the rites and the adoption of such customs as differentiate the believer from others'.[112] But with time, the increasing currency of Arabic (and therefore of the tenets of Islam as propounded in the untranslatable Qur'an) leads to reformism, and the birth of locally distinctive but nonetheless centrally oriented manifestations of Islam. All Muslims face Mecca to pray. In this period, in fact,

> '[i]n spite of the close identity of Islam and the African religious scene, there was a fundamental unity of thought and practice with world Islam. The

[110] CMS CA2/056/8, Letter, James Johnson to Hutchinson, 6 March 1876
[111] Ryan, 1978: 119

> Arabic language of the Qur'an and the commentaries, the prayer postures, the Islamic lunar calendar, and the figure and example of the Prophet have all helped strengthen the universal missionary appeal of Islam. The Christian could derive ecumenical profit from the confessional solidarity of Muslims'.[113]

If Islamic mission did not depend upon the importation of alien cultural values and social systems, then what of Christian mission in this period? The charge that Christian missionaries advocated precisely this has been made often.[114] Christian mission sometimes 'came to assume the unsavoury odour of collusion with the colonial powers'.[115] But the real picture is more nuanced. Such criticism concerns the *approach* to mission work of Christians (perhaps overly) influenced by the "indigenising principle". Sanneh notes that the *legacy* of Christian mission is a different story:

> '[I]nsistence on the primacy of the vernacular need not be coupled with explicit missionary support of its consequences for it to have the necessary impact on the local populations … The narrow view that translation was only an efficient method for quantitative superiority has not, in fact, been borne out by the history of translation. Instead, much wider responses in the cultures affected were set off by it'.[116]

The real outcome of Christian mission work – in the long term – was often *very* different from that conceived by missionaries. To understand what they thought they

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[112] Trimingham, 1968: 53
[113] Sanneh, 1996: 25
[114] See, for instance, Ajayi, 1965, or Ayandele, 1966
[115] Sanneh, 1989: 88

were doing and why, we must revisit their cultural preconceptions of Africa and its people.

Most Europeans considered themselves more "advanced" than Africans. For some, this took the form of an inherent racial superiority; the *Spectator* stated bluntly in 1887 that 'nothing really improves the Negro except one of two things – cross-breeding, and catching hold of some foreign but superior creed'.[117] To attribute such gross racial chauvinism to a majority of missionaries would be myopic and unfair. However, to the extent that they found it hard (as would anyone) to cast off their own cultural conditioning in matters of faith, European missionaries had difficulty accepting that African Christianity should answer questions and needs posed by the African setting. This meant that African Christianity, while under European supervision, was much less tolerant of the sort of mixing which led the missionary quoted above to describe Yoruba Islam as 'no religion at all'.[118] Even missionaries who doubted the intrinsic value of European civilization would not have questioned the worldly implications of their faith as a result, because they did not share our modern opinions on the intimate ways in which culture informs faith.

Such confidence in their convictions was also informed by a sea change in the emphasis of Anglican evangelicalism. Initially, the preoccupation of missionary theorists had been to nurture self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating indigenous Churches, an end attained by a heavy emphasis on the pastoral and evangelical needs of this world – education and the training of clergy. By the 1890s the rise of pre-millennial "Keswick" spirituality meant that for many missionaries it now seemed far more important to evangelise as many people as possible as quickly

[116] Ibid: 111
[117] *The Spectator*, 1887: 1651
[118] Peel, 2000: 203

as possible, before the coming of Jesus and the next world.[119] As Dobinson put it, "I think it is possible that my work eventually may lie more in … training native lads to be missionaries, than in direct evangelising work. I confess my choice would be in favour of itinerating work to preach".[120] In keeping with their conviction that the Parousia was almost upon them, Keswick-inspired evangelicals also placed great emphasis on the importance of 'holiness' – a pure heart and godly nature, which enabled one to do God's will on earth. The faith they wanted to instil was therefore a Christianity intolerant of the idiosyncrasies and syncretic innovations of African converts. Keswick evangelicalism was a radical reform movement that was scripturally oriented, uncompromising, and highly critical of its co-religionists; we will explore further the similarities between the Keswick missionaries and the Muslim reformers described above in the final chapter of this essay.

There were also many African Christian evangelists working in this period, and they were especially well-placed to work on translation. But the latter part of the century saw an increasing lack of trust in African missionaries by the Europeans. The new Keswick-inspired spirituality was in part to blame. Its 'increasing preoccupation with the value of self-discipline and the importance of ecclesiastical authority'[121] was a difficult thing for African Christians, already struggling to reconcile their new faith with their cultural milieu, to come to terms with – especially when it was combined with the inescapable impression of European superiority. So convinced were men like G.W. Brooke of the fallenness and degradation of the African Church that they felt it

[119] Porter, 1977: 23-46
[120] Dobinson, 1899: 57. The ironic truth is that Dobinson's lack of enthusiasm for fostering a native Church was rendered irrelevant by the inescapable logic of translation, which, in the long term, creates an indigenous Christianity, and realises the "three selves", albeit in ways perhaps unrecognisable and probably unpalatable to nineteenth century European Christians.
[121] Porter, 1976: 20

necessary to '[take] down the whole of the past work so that no one stone remains upon another'.[122]

The perception of African missionaries by European ones occasionally took on pejorative racial overtones – one CMS lay agent wrote that '[Negroes are] altogether depraved, a different creation from ourselves, an intermediate stage between men and brutes – without souls and incapable of being raised'.[123] That this was an extreme and unrepresentative view does little to soften its shock value, coming from the pen of a Christian. Nonetheless, the bulk of European missionaries' criticisms of individual African agents were based not on race, but on faith, meaning that the Keswick missionaries were no harder on African shortcomings than they were on those of themselves and Christians at home.

Peter Williams also charts changes, relevant to the position of African clergymen, in the official mind of the CMS towards the end of this period. In coming to terms with the realities of colonial rule, the CMS had, as its new objective, 'the full integration of the European (whether missionary, administrator, settler or soldier) and the indigenous Christians. It was a noble ideal but one … likely to give dominance to the "superior", more confident, better educated, and more experienced European'.[124] Furthermore, these changes 'drove an unnecessarily sharp wedge between pastoral work and evangelism and thus between Europeans and "natives"'.[125] Even if it did not explicitly advocate the importation of European civilization, Christianity nevertheless demanded in our period the strict adherence by "inferior" Africans to European standards of spirituality – an ordained paternalism which contributed to the schismatic birth of the first African Independent congregations.

[122] Quoted in ibid: 26
[123] Quoted in Ayandele, 1966: 211
[124] Williams, 1990: xiv
[125] Ibid: 224

The full flowering of a distinctive, self-confident, and truly indigenous African Christianity, such as early Victorian mission theorists aimed to build, could not (and did not) happen until this attitude changed. Whether missionaries were racists, or whether they based their authority on a 'paternalist evolutionary' mindset, made little or no difference to those Africans placing their ardent hopes for nationalism in independent church government,[126] because the practical result in both cases was frustration. Conversely, I have argued here that the arrival of an African Islam of equal distinctiveness, self-confidence, and indigeneity, was unhindered by culture in the same fashion. This was largely because the forms taken by scriptural purity in Islam were less culturally ambiguous than in Christianity. They were also applied far later in the conversion process.

[126] Ibid: 255

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Translation is vital to the acculturation of Christianity in new settings.[127] It ensures the rootedness of the Christian message in varied languages and cultural idioms, and accounts for the vastly different forms of worship and behaviour seen in Christians across large geographical and temporal divides. We have seen this logic at work here. Europe, convinced that its faith was the prime reason for the manifest superiority of its civilisation, sought to dramatically expand the size and scale of Christendom. European attitudes to the African setting often drew on secular concerns, and missionaries sometimes seemed to be 'trying (and in the process demonstrating all the elements of human fallenness and all the limitations of human vision and foresight) to do … things that [they felt] were specifically, characteristically Christian'.[128] Perhaps African Christians like Samuel Crowther and James Johnson perceived more than most the inescapably centrifugal logic of translation, but on the whole most missionaries' experience in the field softened cultural prejudices, meaning that they were 'both witness and agent' of the process by which 'mission begot cultural nationalism'.[129]

Christian expansion relies upon translation and literacy to spread its message, and this may account for the slow progress it initially made. The 'inside outwards' model of Christian conversion, which insisted Africans be good Christians (on European terms) before baptism, meant that Christian missionaries can appear to have demanded the adherence by converts to alien cultural values. But this was a result of the effectiveness of the "indigenisation principle" in Christian Europe, and does not mean that missionaries must automatically be seen as racists or imperialists; in fact,

[127] Sanneh, 1989; Walls 1996
[128] Walls, 1996: xviii

quite the opposite, because the "indigenisation principle" was at work in this period, even if it was not manifest until the twentieth century.

That Islamic conversion culminates in contrastingly centripetal movements of reform (thus following an apparently "outside inwards" progression) does *not* mean that Islam prescribes the importation of alien cultural values or social systems as a long-term remedy for the infidel. A lack of translation in Islam implies not a lack of indigenisation, but a different typology of expansion, distinct from that of Christianity. Islam works inwards from the margins of traditional religious systems by means of its translatability (to some degree) into local idiom. This translatability implies something that Christian missionaries understood only too little: that 'the process of making Muslims had barely begun with the saying of the *shahada* and the adoption of a Muslim name,' something that 'seemed to invert' the Christian model of conversion.[130] Instruction in Arabic, participation in mosques and other aspects of communal Muslim life, and increasing familiarity with the Qur'an[131] led to the rise of reformers, the 'odd [men] out'[132] – scripturally oriented, possessed of an unyielding piety, and seeking to move local manifestations of their religion back to scriptural first principles.

In these respects the Keswick missionaries were very similar to the Muslim reformers. They too were 'odd men out', critical of those aspects of their own civilization and culture that they felt to be inconsistent with their strict, rigid, and confidently stated religious principles. They too were preoccupied with holiness and personal morality, and sought to instil these values by means of confrontation and proclamation. The comparison between them and the Islamic reformers is invaluable

[129] Sanneh, 1989: p. 106
[130] Peel, 2000: 204
[131] Ibid.
[132] Sanneh, 1994: 45

because it reminds us of both the similarities and the differences between Christianity and Islam. Although they employ different means of expansion in order to cross cultural boundaries, the translation principle in Christianity has its parallel in the local translatability of early Islamic 'mixing'; however, this does not lead to the sort of vernacular endorsement or cultural embodiment present in Christianity, but instead to an inwards movement of reform leaving a distinctive but nonetheless unitary Islamic civilization.

Both religions, though, leave room for fundamentalist interpretations of their scriptures. Criticisms of the tactlessness of Keswick missionaries tend to miss the point, namely that their radicalism, while entirely at home in England, was cast out at sea and utterly lost in the African environment. There, the work of translation was already drawing African Christians to find their own way of expressing the Christian faith. Kindred criticisms of the prescriptiveness of Islam are similarly misdirected; most African converts are attracted by its syncretism, and are only then drawn – quite willingly – into the universality of its message.