

Dispensational Thought as Motivation for Social Activism among Early Plymouth Brethren

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to highlight the influence of dispensational thought in motivating early Plymouth Brethren toward cross-cultural missionary outreach and social activism. This will be achieved by looking at some of the movement's founding members: Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853), Edward Cronin (1801–1882), and John Parnell (1805–1883), along with a handful of other early influences such as James Deck (1807–1884), George Müller (1805–1898), and Henry Craik (1805–1866). Despite their orientation towards religious separatism from the world and from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have earned a reputation for being among the most outward reaching affinity groups within Christianity. This paper will demonstrate how dispensational thought energized this orientation among early Plymouth Brethren.

Introduction

Over the past two centuries, the community of Christians known as the Plymouth Brethren have been known for several traits that stem from a strict adherence to a theologically conservative view of Scripture's authority and sufficiency as understood through a literalistic interpretation. This approach to Scripture has resulted in an orientation that could be generally described as evangelical, if not fundamentalist

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with several nuances, including a primitivist ecclesiology that maintains a low church orientation, a premillennial eschatology that is consistent with a dispensational understanding of Scripture, and a Calvinistic soteriology that emphasizes separatism from the world and other corrupting influences. It may also be added that the Brethren have become as well defined by what they stand against as what they stand for. In this way, they may be well characterized as anti-denominational, anti-creedal, anti-liturgical, and anti-clerical. Many of these named qualities are commonly recognized by those who possess even a scant familiarity with those who identify with the label Brethren. What is less immediately recognized is that among the most prominent contributions made by this community of dispensational-minded believers is the indelible mark they have left on the developing world through their unrivaled efforts in international and cross-cultural missionary outreach and a distinct zeal for social activism.

Some may be aware of the itinerate ministry of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) in Switzerland, throughout Europe, and in North America, including his original translation work of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments into English, French, and German. Less known are the efforts of his colleagues Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853) and Edward Cronin (1801–1882) who labored in India and Baghdad, or the ministry of John Parnell (1805–1883) in Mesopotamia, or James Deck (1807–1884) in New Zealand. Yet few are unfamiliar with the indefatigable charitable work of George Müller (1805–1898) and Henry Craik (1805–1866) in Bristol and the cross-cultural missionary activity of Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) in China. For each of these Brethren whose names may be recognized stand myriads of others whose stories have not been memorialized. However, scarcely has any connection been made between their charitable efforts and their dispensational thought that drove them to dedicate their lives to carrying out the social demands of the gospel of Christ at home and to the remotest peoples of the earth. Therefore, it is the goal of this article to consider how dispensational thought served as motivation for social activism among early Plymouth Brethren and stimulated them to pursue

cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world.

The Plymouth Brethren's Legacy of Social Activism

In a newly published book by Oxford University Press, one of the leading international scholars of new religious movements makes a valiant effort to demystify one of the more complex and generally misunderstood religious groups of our time, the Plymouth Brethren.² Though Massimo Introvigne's work has received mixed reviews, its value in painting an outsider's impression of the enduring presence and activity of this most peculiar people should not go without mention.³ In the book, he takes note that for such a relatively obscure religious minority, the Plymouth Brethren's global impact is of no minor significance, being realized in countries across the globe. Moreover, he observes that their "charitable and humanitarian activities in favour of those who are not members of their community are as old as the Brethren themselves."⁴ Though Introvigne fails to pay the pioneering efforts of Anthony Norris Groves and Edward Cronin more homage than a sentence or two, and entirely overlooks the work of men such as John Parnell and James Deck in the developing world, he at least gives a slight nod to the Lady Theodosia Powerscourt (1800–1836) who "was active in funding the schooling of local poor children in Ireland and supported several educational and charitable initiatives in favour of the poor of all denominations."⁵ He likewise does not fail to mention the "Lieutenant John Blackmore [who] established two rescue houses for 'fallen girls' from the London streets in the 1850s, with the personal support of John Nelson

² Massimo Introvigne, *The Plymouth Brethren* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³ Massimo Introvigne is professor of Sociology of Religions at Pontifical Salesian University in Torino, Italy, and managing director of CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions). He is the author of nearly sixty books on religious minorities, including *Satanism: A Social History* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016).

⁴ Introvigne, *Plymouth Brethren*, 1–3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

Darby.”⁶ Moreover, Introvigne takes notice of several other efforts of early Plymouth Brethren who engaged in social and charitable endeavors, not the least of which includes the extraordinary labors of George Müller and Henry Craik who established homes to rescue orphans from Bristol’s cruel streets.⁷ In the end, his book serves to cast a generally favorable light of the impact of the Brethren, eliciting the following response from one reader: “Far from just being a quaint outdated group, the Brethren are a most active community in our contemporary world.”⁸ Anyone taking an impartial look at this religious minority would find Introvigne’s conclusions difficult to dispute: despite their orientation of religious separatism from the world, and moreover, from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have made an indelible impact on the world that is remarkably disproportionate to their numbers.

Dispensational Thought as Motivation for their Efforts

In the following section, a brief sample of noteworthy efforts by early Plymouth Brethren will be offered to introduce the reader to some of the men listed above who pioneered cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world. However, it seems appropriate to first offer clarity concerning the specific claim of this paper. It may seem to some a bit of a stretch to draw a link between the missionary efforts of the early Plymouth Brethren and the dispensational thought which served to distinguish them. After all, numerous examples of other missionary-minded contemporaries could be cited who are not inclined toward nor should be associated with dispensational ideologies such as William Carey (1761–1834), Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), or David Livingstone (1818–1873). Therefore, the limitations of this claim should be made clear: for many of the early Plymouth Brethren, dispensational thought

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 37–42.

⁸ Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, professor of North American Literature and Civilization, University of Bordeaux, taken from the back cover dust jacket of Introvigne, *Plymouth Brethren*.

served as a stimulus which compelled them to pursue cross-cultural missionary efforts in the developing world.

In particular, the early Plymouth Brethren were noted for subscribing to several distinctly dispensational ideals, including:

(1) Dispensational bibliology as expressed in their predisposition to a theologically conservative view of Scripture's authority and sufficiency as understood through a literalistic interpretation.

(2) Dispensational ecclesiology demonstrated in a strong anti-clericalism accompanied by a high view of the shared priesthood that is common to all believers.

(3) Dispensational eschatology with a compelling expectation of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ to usher in the next age of his millennial kingdom upon earth.

(4) Dispensational pneumatology with its peculiar notion of the direct agency of the Holy Spirit in the present age among Christian believers and superintending their evangelistic efforts.

(5) Dispensational soteriology, expressed as it was, through a moderate Calvinistic soteriology that recognized God's sovereign election of believers was to be realized in concert with the energy of those whom he called, in keeping with the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles:

How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without one who preaches? and how shall they preach unless they have been sent? according as it is written, How beautiful the feet of them that announce glad tidings of peace, of them that announce glad tidings of good things! (Rom 10:14–15, DARBY)

Although it may be granted that non-dispensationalists hold to some of the above stated ideals,⁹ nevertheless, these points serve

⁹ In fact, some non-dispensationalists may even affirm all five of the points offered above, and yet may persist in rejecting the “dispensational” label, though they cannot rightly maintain that they have not subscribed to dispensational thought, however unwittingly, surreptitiously, or otherwise.

to mark those doctrines, which emerge from a distinctly dispensational approach to Scripture. Moreover, each of these enumerated points could be cited as motivating factors for social activism among early Plymouth Brethren and served to stimulate them to pursue cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world. A brief survey of some of the more noteworthy efforts of early Plymouth Brethren will demonstrate this.

A Sample of Noteworthy Efforts of Early Plymouth Brethren

As previously noted, the Plymouth Brethren have left a remarkable legacy of social activism both in the “home mission” and abroad. They are known for having channeled an inordinate amount of energy into cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world; more than one might expect their numbers could warrant. Since it is not possible to do justice to these efforts in such a small amount of space, here mention will be made of some of the earliest figures who might typically be regarded as founding members of the Plymouth Brethren.

It has been a matter of some disputation whether John Nelson Darby was, in fact, counted among the first coterie of like-minded Christians who broke bread together in Dublin in 1827.¹⁰ However, what is quite certain was the presence and participation of Anthony Norris Groves, Edward Cronin, and John Parnell. Like Darby, each of these three men dispatched from the British Isles within just a few short years after their initial gathering to break bread in Dublin around 1827–28. However, whereas Darby’s itinerant ministry carried him through western Europe, and particularly to settle down in French-speaking Switzerland, between the years of 1837–1843, each of these other three men embarked on cross-cultural missionary endeavors which carried

¹⁰ Introvigne, *Plymouth Brethren*, 29; Cf. Willian Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 17–21; Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren* (London, UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1967), 44–46; Donald Harman Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time: Irish Evangelicals in the Age of Daniel O’Connell*, (Chicago, IL: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 271–73.

them to developing countries such as India, Baghdad, and Mesopotamia.

Anthony Norris Groves

In 1829, ten years before David Livingstone first set off for Africa, Anthony Norris Groves arrived in the heart of the Muslim world with his wife and two young sons to “establish what was to become the first Protestant mission to Arabic-speaking Muslims.”¹¹ Groves was a dentist by trade, with a lucrative practice in Plymouth, England. He was sufficiently well-established, financially, to embark on a mission to the Muslim world that would never yield him any earthly remuneration. The presence of this gentle European family in Baghdad was every bit as startling and perplexing to the indigenous peoples of that day as it comes across to readers of the present day. Secular Irish historian and Brethren-critic Donald Akenson, has offered the following remark:

The earliest Brethren were not a link in some undocumentable skein of sackcloth-wearing dissidents, but rather a new phenomenon, a group of privileged members of a First World cohort who gave themselves over to an attempt to redeem various

¹¹ Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2004), 13. Dann has produced some of the most impressive biographical research on Anthony Norris Groves, stemming from his PhD research at the University of Liverpool. Besides the title referenced above, he has authored several other works on his subject, including Robert Bernard Dann, “The Legacy of Anthony Norris Groves,” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 29, no. 4 (October 2005): 198-202; *The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on the Nineteenth-century Protestant Church in Britain* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2007); and *The Primitivist Missiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A radical influence on nineteenth-century Protestant mission* (PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 2006). More recently, Donald Harman Akenson has undertaken to produce a most cynical evaluation of the life and ministry of Anthony Norris Groves in the second installment of his critical trilogy on John Nelson Darby: Donald Harman Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture: John Nelson Darby and the Victorian Conquest of North-American Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Third World cultures. The faith missions of the early Brethren were paradoxical and contradictory, humble in the sense that the missionaries followed St. Paul and put themselves through arduous deprivations, and arrogant in the sense that their goal was to supplant the core beliefs of the indigenous cultures which they targeted.¹²

What Akenson fails to recognize is that in both of these so called “paradoxical and contradictory” traits, the earliest Brethren were following the pattern laid down by the apostles. Not only did Paul assume a posture of humility in preaching the gospel of Christ to a people that were not his own kinsmen, but he too assumed that supplanting their native beliefs would be of eternal benefit to them; otherwise, the temporal cost could not be considered justified. In the case of the apostles it cost them their very lives. Although Anthony Norris Groves did not lose his life on the mission field, on May 14, 1831, he lost his wife, Mary, to the harshness of the foreign mission field. A week prior she had been afflicted by a plague which claimed between half and two-thirds of the population, according to Groves’ reports.¹³ Just three short months later he would be deprived of his baby girl, who was born on the mission field, before she could see her first birthday.¹⁴ Rather than abandon his efforts at this point, Groves maintained his commitment in the field to which he felt called. Within a year, while still laboring in Baghdad, unbeknownst to him, his story was published throughout London, and Groves’ faith-missionary efforts received manifold support. In addition to generating increased financial revenue for his field work, Groves received waves of visiting parties from the West, who came to see first-hand the work that he was pioneering in the heart of the Muslim world, the very area referred to in his day as “the headquarters of Islamism.”¹⁵

¹² Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 51–52.

¹³ Anthony Norris Groves, *Memoir of the Late Anthony Norris Groves, Containing Extracts from his Letters and Journals* (London, UK: James Nisbet, 1857), 141.

¹⁴ Groves, *Memoir*, 189.

¹⁵ Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, 13.

Groves' enthusiasm and sincerity toward his labors was truly contagious. In his time spent in Baghdad he was joined on the field by his friend and apprentice, John Kitto (1804–1854), who is deserving of a story all his own, though space will not permit. Additionally, Groves inspired visits from Edward Cronin and John Parnell, both of whom will be considered below, as well as Francis William Newman (1805–1897). A few years after the loss of his wife and daughter, Groves learned that a revised charter granted to the East India Company opened the way for unrestricted Christian missionary work in India. After an initial tour from Bombay to Calcutta in 1833, he determined to set his attention on Madras, where he was joined by an entourage of Brethren workers in 1836. Groves continued his work among the Indian natives until poor health forced him to return to England in 1852. Within a year he passed away. Though he felt unsatisfied by his efforts, wishing he had more time and strength to give to the field, his pioneering efforts inspired countless others to follow the path he had blazed as a primitivist-missionary and spawned a new generation of “faith missions.”¹⁶

Edward Cronin and John Parnell

Among those first Brethren who broke bread in Dublin in 1827–1828, Edward Cronin was perhaps the most religiously out-of-place, having been brought up a Roman Catholic.¹⁷ That fact did not obstruct his kinship to John Varney Parnell, who later took on the title “Second Lord Congleton” or “Baron Congleton.” The two were bound to one another not only by the same energizing Spirit, but by marriage as Edward Cronin wedded John's sister, Nancy Parnell. Accompanied by a handful of others, the three set off for Baghdad in pursuit of Anthony Norris Groves in 1830. As Cronin was a doctor by trade, his skills would serve as a tremendous asset in Baghdad, where Groves had been laboring. As seen earlier, Cronin walked a path that intersected with Groves' in many ways. This is not only true of their travels,

¹⁶ For a very helpful timeline of Anthony Norris Groves' life and work, see Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, 572–74.

¹⁷ Henry Pickering, *Chief Men Among the Brethren* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1986), 16.

but also of their losses. While Cronin was on the mission field in Baghdad during the time of the plague which claimed the life of Mrs. Groves, so too did Cronin's wife share the same fate. In December 1831, Edward Cronin lost his wife, and John Parnell lost his sister.¹⁸ Far from deterring their efforts, both faithful Brethren continued their work in Baghdad, and into India in the years that followed.

James Deck

James George Deck was not among the first coterie that broke bread in Dublin in 1827–1828, but that does not by all means make him a late-comer to the Plymouth Brethren movement. Evidence of this can be seen in that some of his hymns were published in the one of the earliest Plymouth Brethren song books edited in 1838, titled *Hymns for the Poor of the Flock*.¹⁹ James Deck was an officer who was stationed overseas in the East India Company's service for two terms, first between 1824 and 1826 and again from 1830 to 1835.²⁰ Shortly after returning to England from his first stint in India, he came under the influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He determined that in his second appointment he would take a strong stand as a Christian. After a few years "he became troubled in his conscience about whether a Christian could be a soldier, and so he resigned from the position."²¹ Initially, he aspired to become ordained as a minister, though his introduction to the Brethren in Plymouth changed his mind concerning that ambition, and he resolved to pursue his Christian calling as a lay evangelist wherever he found himself.

¹⁸ Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 78.

¹⁹ A digital copy of this hymn book edited by G. V. Wigram (1805–1879) is available online at brethrenarchive.org.

²⁰ Peter J. Lineham, "The Significance of J. G. Deck, 1807–1884," *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* no. 107 (November 1986): 4. Note: a repaginated PDF of this article is located at the German Brethren history site www.bruederbewegung.de. This version was accessed for purposes of this research, and thus the pagination corresponds to that of the electronic document.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

When a conflict erupted between a leading brother in Plymouth, Benjamin Willis Newton (1807–1899) and John Nelson Darby, for whom he had great respect, his unwillingness to take a partisan position gave him all the reason he needed to look for ministry opportunities outside of Plymouth. In 1852, Deck resolved to move his family to New Zealand, where he took up residence in the Waiwera district to exercise his evangelistic gifts among the indigenous people. Within a year of relocating, Mrs. Deck found herself as maladjusted to the foreign living conditions as were so many other wives of the Plymouth Brethren, and on December 8, 1853, she lost her life, leaving several young children behind.²² Within two years, James Deck remarried a lady by the name of Lewenna Atkinson, with whom he had five more children. However, shortly after the birth of their fifth child in 1865, Lewenna and the infant both succumbed to disease on the mission field, leaving James Deck a single father, again, this time of thirteen children.²³ We must be careful not to slip into thinking Deck's experience in New Zealand was nothing but tragedy upon tragedy. To the contrary, he lived out the remainder of his days in New Zealand and bore decades of fruitful ministry until at last he received his homeward call on August 14, 1884.²⁴ Three days later his body was laid to rest in the New Zealand soil at the Motueka Cemetery between the graves of his first and second wives.²⁵ At least one observer has attributed Deck's success to his dispensational thought when he remarked: "He was one of the most original of the Christian pioneers in New Zealand. Because he owed allegiance to no foreign church of theology, his assemblies adapted to the local environment to a degree which was rare among colonial churches."²⁶ At the turn of the century, within 40 years of Deck's

²² Lineham, "Significance," 12.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Pickering, *Chief Men*, 39.

²⁵ Lineham, "Significance," 23.

²⁶ David C. F. Wright, "James George Deck," an unpublished biographical paper, 2012. Note: a PDF of this article is located at the Christian history site www.christian-moral.net.

first arrival in that country, nearly 1% of the total population of New Zealand identified as Brethren.²⁷

George Müller and Henry Craik

Far better documented are the efforts of George Müller and Henry Craik, whose social work in Bristol garnered, at least the former, international recognition, though they were, indeed two co-laborers whose names should be paired together in the annals of history. Shortly after his conversion in 1825, Müller's Christian interests were turned almost exclusively toward the evangelization of the Jewish people. This drove him from his hometown of Prussia to England in 1829, to study the languages of Hebrew, Chaldean, and Yiddish to prepare for his cross-cultural mission.²⁸ There in England he first encountered Henry Craik, who had been an associate of Anthony Norris Groves. Craik convinced Müller to broaden his ministry interests beyond merely the Jewish people. Beyond that, Craik introduced Müller to several dispensation ideals, which he was eager to adopt as his own. These several ideals have been identified by a secular Irish historian and dispensational-antagonist, as follows: "the conviction that the Bible as sufficient for all human guidance and a belief in its literal accuracy, an embrace of the imminent approach of the Second Coming, and an acceptance of the validity of lay-based worship, including the breaking of bread."²⁹ While Akenson understands Müller and Craik as converts "to the beliefs and to the attitudes of Anthony Norris Groves,"³⁰ they might be otherwise understood as beholden to those ideals which distinguish dispensational thought.

In 1832 Müller and Craik moved to Bristol, "where they found an open door, and their united ministry, chiefly in Bethesda Chapel, was exceedingly fruitful."³¹ Within a decade Bristol

²⁷ The results of the 1901 New Zealand Census have been made available online as part of the digitized collection of New Zealand Statistics: Tauranga Adtearoa, https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historic_publications/1901-census/1901-results-census/1901-results-census.html#d150e1088.

²⁸ Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 105.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

³¹ Pickering, *Chief Men*, 7.

would rival Plymouth as the most prominent center of Brethrenism, outshining the Irish regions of Wicklow, where the Powerscourt conferences were held, and Dublin, where the Brethren first came together to break bread.³² However, Müller and Craik were not content with mere church work. Müller, in particular, was burdened with a heart to care for destitute orphans who littered Bristol's streets. In the years that followed, the city where Müller and Craik labored became better known for its orphan homes, which provided for the needs of thousands of displaced children, than for its thriving Brethren Assembly. Despite their numbers, the Brethren in Bristol were not able to provide support for all of the resident orphans, financially or otherwise. Rather than causing Müller to despair, the care for Bristol's orphans became a national, and even international, affair.³³

The Brethren's Extended Influence

Space does not permit further accounts of early Plymouth Brethren, whose stories could fill countless pages. Though it would be remiss not to at least make mention of a few of the more notable efforts of those who were not among the earliest Plymouth Brethren, but whose work extended from their influence. One such name, which should not go unnoticed, is that of James Hudson Taylor. At the age of 17, Taylor made the acquaintance of Edward Cronin, and became inspired by his missionary exploits to Baghdad. Two years later he was baptized by Andrew John Jukes of the Plymouth Brethren in the Hull Brethren Assembly, before spending 51 years in China and famously set up the China Inland Mission.³⁴ Remarking on the magnitude of his impact, one historian assessed,

Few missionaries in the nineteenth centuries since the apostle Paul have had a wider vision and have carried out a more systematic plan of evangelizing a broad geographical area than did James

³² Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 107.

³³ Pickering, *Chief Men*, 9.

³⁴ In later life, as the Plymouth Brethren fractured, Taylor became associated with the Keswick movement.

Hudson Taylor. His sights were set on reaching the whole of China, all 400 million people, and to that end he labored.³⁵

In a letter penned to his sister, Amelia, dated February 14, 1860, Taylor expressed his heart for the people of that developing country with these words: “If I had a thousand pounds, China should have it. If I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China but Christ. Can we do too much for Him?”³⁶ Looking back on the results of his efforts, American historian of China, Japan, and world Christianity, Kenneth S. Latourette, described Taylor as “one of the greatest missionaries of all time” as well as “one of the four or five most influential foreigners who came to China in the nineteenth century for any purpose, religious or secular.”³⁷

Indeed, Taylor paved the way for a generation of socially and cross-culturally minded Christians. One such man was the English cricket player C. T. Studd (1860–1931), who was so inspired by Hudson Taylor that upon coming into a sizable inheritance he gave away his wealth to support George Müller’s work in Bristol, as well as Moody Bible Institute, and the Salvation Army in India.³⁸ When his fortune was not enough, he gave of his own life to serve in the China Inland Mission. After

³⁵ Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 186.

³⁶ A. J. Broomhall, *The Shaping of Modern China: Hudson Taylor’s Life and Legacy*, vol. 1, *Early–1867*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 480. Note: This title, along with its second volume which covers the dates 1868–1990, is the product of a great-nephew of Hudson Taylor’s who also labored as a missionary doctor in China. Together, these volumes represent the most comprehensive work on the life and impact of James Hudson Taylor, serving as a re-issue of the 7-volume history with expanded material taken from primary sources, including extracts from Taylor’s letters, articles, etc.

³⁷ Taken from a quotation on the back cover of Broomhall, *Shaping of Modern China*. Extracted from Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Mission in China* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1929).

³⁸ Norman Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (1933, repr. Harrisburg, PA: Evangelical Press, 1935), 68-70.

spending fifteen years in China, he moved to India for another six years before spending the remainder of his days in Africa, where he founded the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, which is still in operation today under the name WEC International. This interdenominational agency reportedly has over 1,860 workers spread across 85 countries, who work to address a host of social concerns facing developing countries, including: education, medical work, rescuing and rehabilitating addicts, caring for children in crisis, offering business skills, among other services, with a view to “helping local Christians share the gospel cross-culturally.”³⁹

Another Christian who was equally impacted by the life of Hudson Taylor was the famous missionary from County Down, Northern Ireland, Amy Beatrice Carmichael (1867–1951). In 1887 she met Hudson Taylor at the Keswick Convention. On account of Taylor’s influence, Amy Carmichael intended to join CIM and spend her life in service to the people of China. However, when her health proved too poor for the demands that journey would put on her, she delayed travel to China. By the time her health permitted, she went to Japan for fifteen months before turning to Dohnavur, India, where she remained for the next 55 years of her life. Carmichael’s energies were turned primarily toward helping underprivileged children, including temple prostitutes and orphans. She famously founded an orphanage in southern India, which was described by one historian as “a center for humanitarian services.”⁴⁰ The Dohnavur Fellowship, founded by Amy Carmichael in 1901, is active today, having expanded its social programs to include child services, community development, education, and health services.⁴¹

It may be seen that the impact of the early Brethren discussed extended far beyond the British Isles. Before the close of the nineteenth century, the influence of these dispensationally-minded Christians reached the shores of North America. There,

³⁹ WEC International, “About WEC.” 2020, <https://wec-uk.org/about>, accessed July 29, 2019.

⁴⁰ Tucker, *From Jerusalem*, 300.

⁴¹ The Dohnavur Fellowship, “Projects Grid” <http://dohnavurfellowship.org/projects-grid/>, accessed July 29, 2019.

a Presbyterian minister named Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921), who had attended several of the Niagara Bible Conferences, made the acquaintance of Hudson Taylor. Scofield caught Taylor’s infectious passion for developing countries, and in 1890 he organized the Central American Mission (CAM) in Costa Rica. Within a decade the efforts of CAM spilled over to Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, with as many as twenty-five workers serving in those five countries. By the end of the twentieth century, the organization had as many as three hundred workers serving in six countries, including Mexico.⁴² The organization continues to thrive today under the name Camino Global as a nondenominational Protestant faith mission based in Dallas, Texas.⁴³

Thanks to Hollywood, many have become acquainted with the more recent story of the Brethren missionaries, Nate Saint (1923–1956) and Jim Elliot (1927–1956), who lost their lives in an effort to bring the Gospel to a remote tribe in Ecuador.⁴⁴ While those men did not live long enough to establish works in their field, after their deaths, Jim Elliot’s wife, Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015) spent two years working with the very tribe that took her husband’s life.⁴⁵

Conclusion

From the brief samplings offered above, it should be evident that the early Plymouth Brethren made a disproportionate impact, relative to their numbers, in countries throughout the developing world. Although Evangelical Protestant Christians are known for

⁴² Tucker, *From Jerusalem*, 350.

⁴³ Camino Global, “Who We Are,” 2019, <https://www.caminoglobal.org/who-we-are>, accessed July 29, 2019.

⁴⁴ The story of the missionaries to the Waodoni tribe who were mercilessly slaughtered in the jungles of South America near the Amazon in 1956 has been made famous by a documentary (*Beyond the Gates of Splendor*, 2002) and afterward a full-feature theatrical release film (*End of the Spear*, 2006).

⁴⁵ Elisabeth Elliot went on to write several books detailing her experience, including *Through Gates of Splendor* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1957), and *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1978).

their charitable efforts directed throughout the world, this particular religious minority deserves special distinction. Despite their orientation of religious separatism from the world and from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have proven themselves to be a group of dispensationally-minded Christians who have taken seriously their reading of the New Testament and have striven to emulate the example of the good Samaritan as told in parables of Jesus (Luke 10:29–37). Their efforts have therefore earned them a reputation as the most cross-culturally outreaching and socially-minded people of the past two centuries.