

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“THY KINGDOM COME: THE WITNESS OF CHURCH HISTORY”

<i>THE MODERN AGE: “Revival, Revolution, and to the Ends of the Earth” (3)</i>

III. The Age of Revolution and Missions

C. English Christian Mission (Abroad and at Home)

1. **William Carey (1761-1834)** – considered the “*Father of Modern Missions*,” Carey came to Christ while he was a shoe cobbler, converted in 1779 through a coworker. As he grew in the faith he eventually was ordained in the Baptist Church and became pastor of Moulton Baptist Chapel, supporting his family by preaching and shoemaking. Soon he developed a passion to take the gospel to the lost overseas. He became friends with a fellow pastor, Andrew Fuller. Fuller was a Calvinist who believed that despite the doctrine of election (God chooses alone those who are saved) the obligation of the Christian is to share the gospel with everyone. Carey agreed that the call to share the gospel is required of every believer. In 1792 he published *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* where he addressed five commonly held objections at the time to taking the gospel to the heathen lands. These were 1) distance 2) barbarism 3) the danger 4) difficulties of support 5) unintelligible language. Carey argued that since the same obstacles had not stopped the merchants from going overseas neither should they stop the Church! He then gave practical proposals for how to go about preaching the gospel throughout the world.

In October of that same year, Carey and Fuller joined with eleven others to form the *Baptist Missionary Society*, and within a year he and his family were on their way to India. Needless to say, the British East India company was not amused with this new missionary zeal. Most of its representatives thought that Carey was a “*mad, moonstruck fanatic!*” They did not allow Carey to reside in Calcutta so he settled in Serampore, under the Danish flag. There he and two fellow Baptist missionaries worked to learn the languages of the various people groups and learn the Hindu culture and religion. They organized mission stations in and beyond the Bengal region. By 1824, Carey had overseen the translation of the Bible into six different languages and partial translations of the Bible into twenty-four different languages. He also devoted his efforts to putting an end to the custom of burning widows on their husbands’ funeral pyres.

Through his example, Carey demonstrated the possibilities and potential of mission overseas. As a result, hundreds of missionaries followed, first from the nonconformist denominations – Baptists, Congregationalists, and Methodists. Eventually, Presbyterians and Anglicans followed suit. Soon many in these denominations were cooperating by forming voluntary missionary societies where people of like-mind could work together to evangelize the world.

Coinciding with this newfound concern for foreign missions, Protestant Christians began formally coming together to address various the societal ills with Christian charity. The missionary societies led to a wide variety of humanitarian ministries established abroad, including schools, hospitals, and training centers for doctors and nurses. Many indigenous languages in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were developed in written form for the first time due with the goal of translating the Bible so that people could read it and other Christian writings. Improved public health measures and better agricultural techniques were also introduced.

This same pattern of concern for the lost overseas took root in the United States when the first missionary society, the *American Board of the Commissioners for Foreign Missions* was established in 1810, by Congregationalists from the newly created Andover Theological Seminary. Within a few years other denominations in America followed suit.

This trend spread to denominations in other nations so that by the end of the 19th century almost every Christian body in almost every country had a missions' program and missionaries overseas. The Church in a real sense was recovering a key truth that should unite every believer and church - the proclamation of the gospel – in word and deed. Such unity would help reaffirm the catholic (i.e. universal) and orthodox reality of our faith. Furthermore, unlike the past, when bishops and monks proved to be the primary agents of evangelism, it was now the everyday “rank and file” laity who were taking up the call to go to distant lands to share the good news of Jesus. As a result, the world would never be the same!

2. Evangelicals in Great Britain – in light of the challenges of the Industrial Revolution that increased societal ills, and the scourge of slavery in Britain's colonies, it would be the evangelicals in Britain that would be the catalyst for positive change and church growth. Sparked by the revivals of Wesley and Whitefield, evangelicals were those Christians who held to the importance of a conversion experience followed by commitment to personal piety (holiness) and Christian service. Evangelicals within all the major denominations in Britain (Anglicans, Methodist, Baptists, Congregationalists, and some smaller bodies) sought to work together to make God's Kingdom a reality. What became like a “general headquarters” for those wanting to tackle the social evils of the day, Clapham was in a small hamlet outside of London. The Clapham community consisted of a small group of wealthy influential evangelicals who met for Bible study, prayer and conversation.

The unquestioned leader of the group was **William Wilberforce (1759-1833)** member of the British Parliament. He had many evangelical friends in key positions of power, and he used his outstanding leadership qualities to tackle the world's greatest societal ill at the time – slavery. His first goal was the abolition of the slave trade itself. The English entered the trade in 1562. By the 1770's out of the 100,00 slaves that were transported from West Africa, British ships accounted for half. In 1789 Wilberforce made his first speech in the House of Commons against the slave trade. Two years later he introduced a bill to ban it, saying, *“Never, never will we desist till we have wiped away this scandal from the Christian name, released ourselves from the load of guilt, and extinguished every trace of this bloody traffic.”*

Naturally, Wilberforce had the support of the Clapham community which learned the two basic steps in creating change in a democracy. First, one must influence public opinion to support your cause, and second use that public opinion to bring pressure on the government. They with Wilberforce, used all means necessary to sway public opinion and move complacent politicians to put an end to the evil of slavery. on February 23, 1807, after a nearly twenty-year fight, Parliament finally voted to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire. However, current slaves remained in chains. It took another 26 years before all slaves in the Empire were free. On July 25, 1833, only four days before Wilberforce's death, the *Emancipation Act* was passed. This Act would mean that slavery would no longer be a predominant endeavor, as the African Continent was carved up by the European powers in the decades to come. It also gave courage and momentum for the abolitionist movement in the United States. Sadly, for the United States, it would take a brutal civil war to end slavery once and for all in the New World. What Wilberforce and the members of the Clapham community showed was how a few persevering and devoted Christians with ability can influence society and make changes in that society that reflect the principles of God's Kingdom.

D. American Christian Mission

1. A Christian America? - in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening, not only were many volunteer missionary and social action societies formed, seminaries and new Christian colleges established but a Christian vision for America was taking root. In 1835, Lyman Beecher, (1775-1863), a Presbyterian minister, preached a sermon on **Isaiah 66:8** entitled "*A Plea for the West.*" In it he called on Christians to take advantage of the new nation's expansion westward. This call included the need to preach the gospel, distribute Bibles, plant churches, establish schools, and reform American morals. He argued that a free society needs just and fair laws informed by the principles of the Christian faith. This could be achieved only if Christians were actively involved in society. He was echoing what President John Adams had said only a generation earlier (1792) – "*Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.*" ***Note that Is. 66:8 says "*Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.*" It is a reference to Israel being created by God in a day. Many believe that it may be a prophetic reference to the rebirth of Israel in 1948 when it became a nation by UN decree in a day (May 8, 1948). However, during Beecher's time many viewed America as the new Israel or Zion of God. He would go on to publicly share his message in many cities in the North and Midwest through speaking engagements and his work's publication.

Beecher's views were widely held across Protestant denominational lines. Evangelical Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians all agreed. So much so that historians often speak of this era as the age of the "righteous empire." It echoed the national sentiment of "Manifest Destiny." The idea that a free and democratic United States was destined to encompass the land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The Louisiana Purchase from France bolstered that sentiment. The lands acquired from the war with Mexico (1846-48) also were used to both justify the war and further reinforce the vision of "Manifest Destiny." However, there was one evil – slavery that would contradict this vision and would end up leading to the bloodiest and most divisive time in our nation's history. How would the Church respond?

2. the Abolitionist Movement and its effects – the anti-slavery movement in America was primarily a church-based movement. Several denominations took a clear stand against it during the early years of the new republic. These included the Quakers (1776 – expelled all slave owners), the American Methodists (1784 at formal creation banned slaveholders from membership), and many Baptists (no national organization but most congregations were anti-slavery). But all was not right. As time went on, by the 1820s, the Methodists and Baptists in the south modified their preaching on slavery to attract southern whites. In fact, by 1843 over a thousand southern Methodist ministers owned slaves. It should be noted, however, that antislavery sentiments were equally strong in the North and the South. In 1817 the *American Colonization Society* was founded with the purpose of buying slaves, freeing them, and returning them to Africa. Even a new nation, the Republic of Liberia, was formed because of these efforts. What first began as a settlement for freed slaves in 1822, soon became its own independent nation in 1847.

Since slave labor was essential to the South's economy and social system it became more widely accepted and soon white Christians were using the Bible to support it. This led to even greater anger in the North against the practice. Eventually, the differences led to splits in the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches. The only major denominations that did not split were the Roman Catholic and Episcopal (American Anglican) Churches.

The gospel took root first among the slaves and eventually led to the formation of black denominations such as the *African Methodist Episcopal Church* (1816 – by Richard Allen a freed man

who was ordained a deacon in the *North American Methodist Church* and organized a black church in Philadelphia) as well as the *African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church* (1821), partly due to the prejudices in the North. Both denominations played an important role among Northern blacks and later after the war, those in the South. They also engaged in important missionary work in Africa.

There were a number of key abolitionist leaders – both white and black – that moved many in our nation to see why slavery should be abolished. The revivalist preaching of **Charles Finney (1792 - 1875)**, an American Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening, played a key role in strengthening the abolitionist cause in the North and the Midwest. One of his students, Theodore Weld wrote two important works on the matter – *The Bible against Slavery* (1837) and *Slavery as It Is* (1839) – that galvanized support for the abolitionist cause. The latter work by Weld, motivated Harriet Beecher Stowe (daughter of Lyman Beecher – see above) to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. Her book showed that the whole nation, not just the South, bore responsibility for the great evil of slavery. The North as well as the South would face God's judgment. She wrote, "*Christians! Every time that you pray that the kingdom of Christ may come, can you forget that prophecy associates in dread fellowship, the day of vengeance with the year of His redeemed?*" After selling over a million copies, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was so influential in arousing antislavery sentiment that President Lincoln told Stowe upon meeting her in 1863, "*So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!*"

But it was not just leaders in the white community that tackled the evils of slavery, black leaders like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman were believers motivated by God's Word to fight for freedom. **Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)** was born into slavery in Maryland. After escaping from slavery, he became a national leader of the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts and New York. He proved to be a gifted orator and writer, showing the evils and injustice of slavery. As such, he proved how foolish and wrong were the arguments that enslaved people lacked the intellectual capacity to function as independent American citizens. He wrote three autobiographies to refute the bigotry and sin of slavery. Following the Civil War, Douglass was an active campaigner for the rights of freed slaves and wrote his last autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Douglass also actively supported women's suffrage, and he held several public offices. Douglass believed in dialogue and in making alliances across racial and ideological divides, as well as in the liberal values of the U.S. Constitution. When radical abolitionists, under the motto "No Union with Slaveholders", criticized Douglass's willingness to engage in dialogue with slave owners, he replied: "*I would unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong.*" **Tubman (1825-1913)** was born into slavery and abused as a slave in Maryland until she escaped to Pennsylvania in 1849. From there she returned to leading others to freedom in what became known as the "underground railroad." During the Civil War she served as a nurse, a spy, and a scout for the Union, liberating more slaves in the South. After the war, she spoke for women's rights and established a home for elderly black Americans. Never ashamed of her faith, she said of her work, "*Twant me, twas the Lord. I always told Him, 'I trust you. I ond't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to leadme,' and He always did.*"

After the Civil War, Reconstruction, (when the North gave blacks greater autonomy and power to the freed slaves) increased the bigotry of Southern whites and made life very difficult for black believers. The rise of the KKK and the so-called Jim Crow laws that required "separate but equal" rights for all races effectively made blacks "second-class" citizens. Thus, when the Supreme Court approved segregation in 1892, more black believers formed their own denominations like the *National Baptist Convention* and the *Colored Methodist Episcopal Church*.

Black Churches were the "glue" of black society in America. They provided the stability and cohesion needed for the black community to thrive despite its persecution by whites. Most black

leaders were also pastors. Their leadership would provide the foundation for the modern Civil Rights Movement nearly a hundred years later.