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# DIEGO THOMSON IN THE AMERICAS (1818-1844): MONITORIAL SCHOOLS, NATION-BUILDING, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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## 1. EARLY YEARS<sup>1</sup>

James Thomson<sup>2</sup> was born on 1 Sep 1788 in Parish of Kirkmabreck, Ferrytown-on-Cree, Kirkcudbrightshire, in south-west Scotland, the third child of William Thomson and Janet Burnett. His father was the *dominie* and session clerk of the parish church. Apart from mentioning books he read as a boy, Thomson himself makes little reference to his early education, but given his home situation a link between Bible and education would have been very clear. In 1807 he began medical studies in Edinburgh, but after two years left these for theological studies<sup>3</sup> in the University of Glasgow.<sup>4</sup> Although he was later to work with James and Robert Haldane, it does not appear that he studied in their seminary in Edinburgh. The Haldanes closed it in December 1808 when they judged the Divinity faculties in Edinburgh and Glasgow to have become more acceptable to their own theological position.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paper first presented at the 'Missions and Education' conference of the Yale-Edinburgh Group on the History of the Missionary Movement and World Christianity, June 30 – July 2, 2011, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT.

<sup>2</sup> Known as Diego Thomson in Latin America. For Thomson's letters, see <[www.jamesdiegothomson.com](http://www.jamesdiegothomson.com)>.

<sup>3</sup> Thomson's *Union Liturgy*, published in 1837 but written during his travels in the previous ten years, and his *Family and Individual Prayers*, published in 1840 but written during his 1837 visit to Cuba, show remarkable theological and biblical acumen, as does his work on textual criticism, for example, on the sources of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible.

<sup>4</sup> Girvan C. McKay, 'Growth and Eclipse of Presbyterian Missionary Outreach in Argentina' (Lic.Th. thesis., Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos, Buenos Aires, 1973), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Haldane, *Memoirs of the Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of his brother James Alexander Haldane* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1852), p. 330.

It is not known at what point Thomson changed his allegiance from Presbyterianism to the nascent churches of the Haldanes, but by 1815 he was working with James Haldane in Edinburgh's Leith Walk Tabernacle and providing pastoral care for French prisoners-of-war in Edinburgh Castle. In 1817 Thomson was having his daily devotions in French, in preparation for joining Robert Haldane in Montauben. This never transpired, for reasons that are not clear.<sup>6</sup> What did happen was that in 1818 he spent a few months in London at the Borough Road training college of the British and Foreign Schools Society (BFSS), and on the 12th July of that same year he sailed from Liverpool for Buenos Aires. The Leith Walk church financed his first year in South America.<sup>7</sup> The next twenty-five years were to make him one of the most widely travelled British missionaries in the Americas, representing both the BFSS and the British and Foreign Bible Societies (BFBS).<sup>8</sup>

## 2. MISSION AND EDUCATION: FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Parish schools were part of the legacy of the Reformation in Scotland. John Knox's 1560 *First Book of Discipline* set out plans for a school in every parish. That did not happen immediately, but by 1700 most parishes in the Lowlands had a school, with the Bible, the catechism, Latin, and French being taught, and with the addition of logic, rhetoric and 'the tongues'<sup>9</sup> in some larger towns.<sup>10</sup> Above all, parish school education was designed to enable children to read the Bible for themselves—initially the Geneva Bible and later the 'Authorized Version' (but not a Bible in Scots or, at that time, in Gaelic!<sup>11</sup>).

<sup>6</sup> In a letter to BFBS from Montauban (29 August 1848) Thomson states: '[Haldane] found however difficulties which hindered what he had in view, and the plan was given up'. It may also have been that Henry Drummond's arrival in Montauben at that time may have made Thomson's help unnecessary.

<sup>7</sup> James Thomson. 'South America - VII', *Evangelical Christendom*, I (1847), 389.

<sup>8</sup> Argentina (1818-1820), Chile (1821-22), Peru (1822-24), Ecuador (1824), Colombia (1825), Mexico (1827-1830), Canada (1831), Venezuela, Demerara, and the Caribbean countries (1832-38), Canada (1838-1842), Mexico and Yucatan (1842-44).

<sup>9</sup> Greek and Hebrew.

<sup>10</sup> James K. Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1972), pp. 130-4.

<sup>11</sup> 'Only a few events in the history of Scots language, literature and culture have been as much discussed as a non-event — the failure of the Reformation to produce a Bible in Scots'. Graham Tulloch, *A History of the Scots Bible* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), p. 1.

The intellectual climate of the Scotland of Thomson's early years had undergone profound changes due to the Scottish Enlightenment, and as a student he found himself in cities that were dynamic centres of change. New ideas, discoveries and inventions were the order of the day and involved a wide range of participants, with philosophers, doctors, lawyers, artists, religious leaders and the academic community all playing a part. Due to agricultural reforms, changes in land tenancy and use, and rural-urban migration in Scotland, as well as immigration from Ireland, these same cities also were struggling to cope with thousands of new arrivals, living in appallingly overcrowded and insanitary conditions in older neighbourhoods.

In the preceding decades the national Church of Scotland—the Kirk—had been the domain of the 'moderates', but as the nineteenth century began the rise of the evangelicals heralded change. The brothers James and Robert Haldane were part of that evangelical movement. They however left the Church of Scotland in the late 1790s and devoted themselves to evangelism, developing the 'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home' and encouraging mission overseas. Their churches were initially congregational in nature, but as their views on baptism changed they broke from the Congregationalists and formed their own churches.

In 1809 they were involved with others in founding the Edinburgh Bible Society. In 1811 they joined with representatives of other denominations, most notably the Baptist leader Christopher Anderson, to begin the Edinburgh Gaelic Schools Society.<sup>12</sup> This was a rejection of the practice of the 'Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge'. The SSPCK had for almost a century followed official policy aimed at discouraging the use of the Gaelic language and used only English in their almost 300 Highland schools.<sup>13</sup> For the Edinburgh Society however Gaelic was the essential medium of instruction, and the object was 'to teach the inhabitants to read the Holy Scriptures in their native language'.<sup>14</sup> This was the path to promoting 'civilization and Christian knowledge' in the Highlands and Islands. Thomas Chalmers summed up the relationship of the Bible Society and the School Society: 'The two Societies move in concert. Each contributes an essential element in the business of enlight-

<sup>12</sup> Also the Glasgow Gaelic Schools Society (1812) and the Inverness Gaelic Schools Society (1818).

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Connell Szasz, *Scottish Highlanders and Native Americans: Indigenous Education in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), pp. 98–9.

<sup>14</sup> Murdo Macaulay, *Aspects of the Religious History of Lewis to the Disruption of 1843* (Stornoway: privately printed, 1980). The Scottish Gaelic New Testament was published in 1766 and the Old Testament in 1807.

ening the people. The one furnishes the book of knowledge and the other furnishes the key to it.<sup>15</sup>

Thomson shared these views and promoted both societies. Years later he cited the success of the Gaelic schools on more than one occasion to encourage Scripture translation and the creation of schools using the indigenous languages.<sup>16</sup> He reflects the same commitment to home and foreign mission as the Haldanes. Not only that, their enthusiasm for the revolutionary happenings in France were paralleled by Thomson's support for the independence movements in South America.

Amidst the millennial hopes that prevailed in evangelical circles, the possibility of mission in South America was explored in journals then circulating in Edinburgh. Articles in the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* spoke of the religious opportunity that was opening up there, especially for the Bible Society.<sup>17</sup> A wider framework for understanding Central and South American peoples had been provided by William Robertson's *The History of America*, first published in 1777 in Edinburgh and reprinted regularly thereafter.

From 1808 to 1825 the influential *Edinburgh Review* carried extensive reviews of publications on South America. The editor, Francis Jeffrey, and regular contributors Henry Brougham<sup>18</sup> and James Mill, held that Providence was 'calling a free world into being to redress the tyranny of the old'. The British were to be the chosen agents of change. Mill was emphatic on this subject: 'The inhabitants of the new world are holding out their arms to the inhabitants of the British Isles, craving their assistance in the hour of need—and offering to them, in return, the most unbounded prospects of advantage which it ever was in the power of one nation to hold out to another.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *The Influence of the Bible Societies on the Temporal Necessities of the Poor* (Cupar: R. Tullis, 1814), p. 12. By the 'key', Chalmers meant literacy.

<sup>16</sup> James Thomson, *Tour in Yucatan: Together with brief notices of travels in Buenos Ayres, Chile, Ecuador, N. Granada, Venezuela, Mexico, all the West Indian Islands, the United States, Canada, N. Brunswick and Nova Scotia* (Unpublished ms., Bible Society Collection, Cambridge University Library), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. the issue of May 1811.

<sup>18</sup> Robertson's grand-nephew.

<sup>19</sup> James Mill, 'Gutierrez Molina's Account of Chili', *Edinburgh Review* 14 (1809), 336.

## 3. MONITORIAL SCHOOLS AND SPANISH AMERICA

The monitorial system of education, developed by Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838) and Andrew Bell (1753-1832) at the turn of the nineteenth century, was arguably the first global model for elementary schooling of the modern period. Within very few years the method had been adopted by a variety of schools around the world. While the specific purposes of its promoters varied, there is no doubt that the spread of the monitorial system coincided with the expansion of the ideal of universal education, and was seen by many as the best way of achieving that purpose and of nation-building in the newly-founded republics.

The method was based on the abler pupils being used as helpers to the teacher, passing on the information they had learned to other students, hence the ideas of 'monitors' and 'mutual education'. It had an immediate appeal through the possibility of providing mass education, with a minimum of teachers, at low cost. Bell pioneered his methodology in the 1790s while an Anglican chaplain in Madras. Lancaster, a Quaker, opened a school in Borough Road, Southwark, London in 1798. A teacher training college was added in 1801. Lancaster came to wider public attention with the publication of his *Improvements in Education as it relates to the Industrious Classes of the Community* in 1803.

An audience with George III in 1805 led to royal approval and patronage of the system. The king 'having fully informed himself of the nature of the System, perceived its important bearings upon the whole mass of the poor population in favour of religion and morality. It was on this occasion that the King uttered those memorable words...: "*It is my wish that every poor child in my kingdom may be taught to read the Bible*".<sup>20</sup> The Borough Road School then became the 'Royal Free School'. Lancaster had no administrative ability and in 1808 had to be rescued by a number of benefactors who formed the 'Society for Promoting the Lancsterian

<sup>20</sup> 'BFSS Annual Report', *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, XVIII.III (1819), 212. On 16 January 1823, Thomson, Francisco Navarrete, and Camilo Vergara presented a proposal to the Peruvian Congress to establish schools in Lima's San Lázaro parish where one third of the city's population then lived. In this Thomson cited George III's support for the school system and of children being able to read the Bible as evidence that nations then thought to be important had adopted the method. See Tomás J. Gutierrez Sánchez, 'Diego Thomson en el Perú: el factor protestante en los inicios de la República, 1822-1824', in *Ecos del Bicentenario: El protestantismo y las nuevas repúblicas latinoamericanas*, ed. by Carlos Mondragón (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2011), p. 159 = 'James Thomson in Peru: Protestant Influence in the Beginning of the Republic, 1822-1824', *Journal of Latin American Theology* 6 (2011), 131-57; see p. 147.

System for the Education of the Poor', with the support of evangelicals and non-conformists, including figures such as William Wilberforce. In 1814 the Society was renamed the 'British and Foreign School Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion'.

On his return to Britain Bell's system was adopted by the Church of England and from 1811 was promoted by the 'National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Christian Church'. Two systems emerged in the country: the 'National Schools' of the Established Church and the 'British schools' supported by non-conformists.

Lancaster argued for the non-denominational nature of his system:

The school is not established to promote the Religious Principles of any particular sect; but, setting aside all party distinctions, its object is to instruct Youth in useful Learning, in the leading and uncontroverted principles of Christianity, and to train them in the practice of moral habits, conducive to their future welfare, as virtuous men and useful members of society.<sup>21</sup>

The BFSS 1819 report to supporters and potential benefactors stressed this:

Education, conducted on these enlightened principles, while it invariably inculcates the purest morality, and the most important points of religion from the unerring standard of Divine inspiration, excludes the peculiar tenets or catechisms which divide the opinions of good men—the *Bible in the authorized version, without note or comment*, being the only religious book taught in its schools: and thus all sects and parties may send their children to British Schools with the greatest confidence.<sup>22</sup>

An acrimonious debate later developed between Bell and Lancaster. Bell maintained that Lancaster's system would raise the poor above their station, create in them unrealistic expectations and unsettle the social hierarchy. While this did not concern Lancaster, the widespread support for his educational initiatives did reflect a fear on the part of many of subversion, both as a result of the social tensions of a rapidly industrializing society, and from the 'excesses' of the French revolution. 'Useful learning' would counteract such developments. Education for the 'lower classes' would improve their morals and manners, enable them to read the Bible,

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Lancaster, *Education as it respects the Industrious Classes of the Community*, 3rd edn. (New York: Collins and Perkins, 1803), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> 'BFSS Annual Report', *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, XVIII.III (1819), 211.

and make them better workers in an age of commerce and industry.<sup>23</sup> At the same time Lancaster's system did replace 'a pedagogy of subordination, piety, deference, and social estates with a pedagogy much more appropriate to a fluid class society organized around market relations and processes'.<sup>24</sup>

As the school movement developed and grew, it was adopted in Scotland not only by evangelicals like the Haldanes, but found wider support in society. In a speech to the Lancasterian Society of Glasgow in 1812, Robert Owen, of New Lanark fame, urged 'those who have weight and influence in the city' to support the Lancasterian system of education for the poor, 'until every child of that class shall find a place in one of the schools. There, in a manner peculiar to the system, they must learn the habits of obedience, order, regularity, industry and constant attention which are to them of more importance than merely learning to read, write and account.'<sup>25</sup>

The Lancasterian system not only found very important patrons in British society and politics, the Spanish American community in London also took an increasing interest. In the 1810s that community comprised diplomatic envoys, political exiles and deputies en route to the *Cortes* in Cadiz, Spain. Karen Racine states that 'between the years 1808 and 1830, over 70 independence era leaders of the first rank lived and worked together in London'.<sup>26</sup> For a number of years the Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco de Miranda's house in Grafton Street served as a centre for them. Meetings were held with people like Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, William Wilberforce, Humphrey Davy and Joseph Lancaster. The British system of government and a wide range of organizations, including the BFSS and the BFBS, attracted the interest of many of these leaders. 'The Spanish Americans leaders who went on to have the greatest impact in

<sup>23</sup> Eugenia Roldán, *The British Book Trade and Spanish American Independence: Education and Knowledge Transmission in Transcontinental Perspective* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), p. 84.

<sup>24</sup> David Hogan, 'The Market Revolution and Disciplinary Power: Joseph Lancaster and the Psychology of the Early Classroom System', *History of Education Quarterly* 29 (1989), 405.

<sup>25</sup> David Hamilton, 'Robert Owen and Education: A Reassessment', in *Scottish Culture and Scottish Education 1800-1980*, ed. by Walter M. Humes and Hamish M. Paterson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1983), p. 9. Owen later broke with the monitorial system. He wanted an education system to develop character, not inculcate piety.

<sup>26</sup> Karen Racine, '"This England and This Now": British Cultural and Intellectual Influence in the Spanish American Independence Era', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 90 (2010), 423.



reconstructing the institutions and cultures of their nations after independence were the same ones who actively traveled to, and solicited material support from, Great Britain over the course of nearly two decades.<sup>27</sup>

In his years in the Americas, Thomson became part of this network and in the sphere of education was encouraged and supported by men like Lucas Alamán (Mexico), Andrés Bello (Venezuelan based in London), Simón Bolívar (Andean countries), Antonio José de Irisarri (Chile), Bernardo Monteagudo (Peru), José María Luis Mora (Mexico), Bernardo O'Higgins (Chile), Bernardino Rivadavia (Argentina), Vicente Rocafuerte (Mexico, Ecuador) and José de San Martín (Argentina, Peru).<sup>28</sup> The development of public education was key to nation building in the new republics.<sup>29</sup> For example, during his short visit to England in 1810 Bolívar visited the Borough Road School and decided to send prospective teachers from Venezuela to study there.<sup>30</sup> Lancaster himself would later spend time in Venezuela.

Vicente Rocafuerte, while in London as a representative of the Mexican government, developed strong links with BFSS and BFBS, as he had done earlier with the American Bible Society and the (Lancasterian) 'New York Free School Society'.<sup>31</sup> Eugenia Roldán sees support of BFBS by some of these leaders in terms of a 'liberal project aimed at reducing the power of the Catholic Church and promoting a change in the mentalities of the citizens of the new republics through a more direct and less mediated

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>28</sup> It is significant that almost all of them were freemasons. To date I have found nothing to indicate that Thomson himself was a mason.

<sup>29</sup> The Preamble to the Peruvian Congress decree of 6 July 1822 creating the public school system with Thomson as director begins: 'Without education, there is, properly speaking, no society; men may indeed live together without it, but they cannot know the extent of the duties and rights which bind them to one another, and it is in the knowledge of these duties and rights that the wellbeing of society exists.' Cited by Thomson in his letter to BFSS, 12 July 1822.

<sup>30</sup> Karen Racine. 'Simón Bolívar, Englishman: Elite responsibility and Social Reform in Spanish American Independence,' in *Simón Bolívar: Essays on the Life and Legacy of the Liberator*, ed. by David Bushnell and Lester D. Langley (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), p. 58.

<sup>31</sup> See his *Lecciones para las Escuelas de Primeras Letras sacadas de las Sagradas Escrituras siguiendo el texto literal de la Traducción del Padre Scío, sin notas ni comentarios* (New York: A. Paul, 1822). In the Dedicatoria—'A la Juventud Americana'—he recommends the development of Lancasterian schools and asks: '¿Qué mejor libro puede haber para la instrucción de la juventud que la Biblia, que el sagrado código de la moral evangélica?'

reading of the Scriptures'.<sup>32</sup> It was partly due to Rocafuerte that BFBS and BFSS formed the 'Society for Spanish Translations' in London to produce religious and educational works for Spanish speaking countries.<sup>33</sup> Thomson was involved with this group during his stay in England in 1825-7 and arranged for the publication of extracts from Joaquín Lorenzo Villanueva's *De la Lección de la Sagrada Escritura en Lenguas Vulgares* on the benefits of reading the Bible. It was a publication he distributed in Mexico (1827-30) to promote Bible reading.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. THOMSON IN THE AMERICAS

Thomson arrived in Argentina in 1818, a mere eight years after the 'May revolution' in Buenos Aires marked the beginning of Argentine independence. Under the leadership of Bernardo O'Higgins, Chile had won its independence in 1818, while in Peru full independence would not come until 9 December 1824.

In the emergent apparatus of state and government, relations between citizen and state were generated by a common objective—the re-establishment of law and order after a period of social and political turbulence that began with that May revolution in 1810. It was a time of change from traditional authoritarian ideals of subjects loyal to the Crown, to a progressive ideal of the participatory citizen. The Enlightenment had paved the way for this change, and education was seen as the medium by which to 'inspire in children the habit of order, the sentiments of honour, love of truth, the search for justice [and] respect for their peers'.<sup>35</sup> Mark Szuchman comments on the Lancasterian system: 'To the enlightened it carried the legitimacy born of its English origins; to the rational, it offered scientific design; to the liberal and anticlerical, it became positively identified with secularism; and to the authorities, always short of money, it promised economy'.<sup>36</sup>

When Thomson brought the system, it was hailed as the greatest and most efficient innovation in the field of pedagogy. The system was

<sup>32</sup> Roldán, *op.cit.*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>33</sup> Jaime E. Rodríguez, *The Emergence of Spanish America: Vicente Rocafuerte and Spanish Americanism 1808-1832* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 181-3. The aims of this Society are set out in *Missionary Register*, Vol 13, July 1825, 307-9.

<sup>34</sup> James Thomson, *Spain, Its Position and Evangelization* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853), p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> *El Censor*, 24 April 1817.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Szuchman, *Order, Family, and Community in Buenos Aires 1810-1860* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 155.

embraced by almost all the liberal leadership as being of ‘unquestionable public utility’. In 1821 the newspaper of Buenos Aires’ utopian liberals recorded ‘we have just happily seen in practice the Lancaster system, by which not only do children learn to read and write, but they also become accustomed to order’.<sup>37</sup>

Thomson found that the lesson materials then used in schools ‘were not calculated to promote the objects which took him to those quarters.’ They lacked what for him was the essential component—the Scriptures—therefore ‘he set to work and extracted passages from the Old Testament, and from the New, such as he thought the most adapted for the instruction of children in the truths and the virtues of the Christian religion’. These were presented to the Government and ‘an order was given to have them printed at the Government printing-office, at the public expense, and that forthwith they should be introduced into the schools’. He noted with gratitude the liberality shown by ‘a Roman Catholic Government and community towards a Protestant and a foreigner’.<sup>38</sup> Wherever he went Thomson linked his interest in schools with his interest in distribution of the Scriptures, although he was not officially a BFBS agent until late in 1824.

Thomson’s time in Argentina was not confined to Buenos Aires. He travelled to Montevideo in *la banda oriental* to develop schools there. In 1821 he moved to Chile invited by the O’Higgins government to develop schools there, and from there crossed east over the Andes to what were then the United Provinces of Argentina to set up schools in the interior.<sup>39</sup> In 1822 he travelled to Peru<sup>40</sup>, invited by General San Martín to implement public education there. When Simon Bolivar replaced San Martín

<sup>37</sup> *El Argos de Buenos Ayres*, 25 August 1821.

<sup>38</sup> James Thomson, ‘South America - IV’, *Evangelical Christendom*, I (1847), 287.

<sup>39</sup> His visit to Mendoza at that time came through an invitation from the Edinburgh surgeon and botanist John Gillies—one indication of Thomson’s links with the ‘Scottish diaspora’ in Spanish America.

<sup>40</sup> Thomson’s work in Chile drew the appreciative comment from another British expatriate: ‘Yesterday a very interesting person sailed from hence for Lima, Mr. Thompson, one of those men whom real Christian philanthropy has led across the ocean and across the Andes to diffuse the benefits of education among his fellow-creatures. He had spent some time in Santiago, where, under the patronage of the supreme director, he has established a school of mutual instruction on the plan of Lancaster. He has been in Valparaiso some time superintending the formation of a similar school... Mr. Thompson has been solemnly declared a free citizen of Chile by the government.’ (María Graham, *Journal of a Residence in Chile, during the year 1822, and a Voyage from Chile to Brazil in 1823*. London: John Murray, 1824; p.157).

as the leader of the pro-independence forces, he confirmed Thomson in this position. At the same time the role of the Scriptures in Thomson's approach to education and his realisation that over half of Peru's population did not speak Spanish, led him into the translation of the New Testament into the Quechua and Aymara languages.<sup>41</sup>

After leaving Peru in September 1824 Thomson continued to advocate for monitorial schools, advising city authorities and governments on education<sup>42</sup> and sending reports and recommendations to BFSS—as can be seen in the Tacubaya document (see below). With the exception of Jamaica,<sup>43</sup> he was no longer directly involved in implementing schools.

In his final visit to Yucatán in 1843-4 under the aegis of BFBS, Thomson presented educational proposals to the leaders of the then independent state and offered help to set up the system. He gave his views 'in favour of the general use of the Holy Scriptures as the grand basis and directory in right religion and true morality'. He stressed the importance of education for 'all classes of the community', including the large indigenous population: 'the only way which they could be successful in communicating education and all else to these people was by establishing schools among them on the plan of teaching them in their own tongue'.<sup>44</sup>

Thomson went further:

Besides giving education to the Indians, I urged the duty of doing them justice in seeing that they had their due rights, and more were not oppressed by the large proprietors. I mentioned how much injustice was done to the Indians in Mexico; and concluded by saying that if care were not taken by their superiors to see them enjoy justice and fairness, that God himself would interpose for them, and that in the event of this they would find that the account would cost them more to settle it than now.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See Bill Mitchell. 1990. 'James Thomson and Bible Translation in Andean Languages', *Bible Translator* 41.3: 341-5.

<sup>42</sup> In Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada and Yucatán.

<sup>43</sup> The clamant educational needs in Jamaica moved the Thomsons deeply. Although he was a "full-time" BFBS agent at the time, he did get involved in the West Indian School Society setting up schools in Spanish Town (Letter to BFBS, 27 November 1834). For a three-month period in 1836 he left BFBS employ to work for the Mico educational trust (Letter to BFBS, 22 February 1836).

<sup>44</sup> James Thomson. *Tour in Yucatan: Together with brief notices of travels in Buenos Ayres, Chile, Ecuador, N. Granada, Venezuela, Mexico, all the West Indian Islands, the United States, Canada, N. Brunswick and Nova Scotia* (Unpublished ms. Bible Society Collection, Cambridge University Library), p. 86.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. THOMSON AND THE TACUBAYA DOCUMENT

Thomson first went to Mexico in 1827 as an agent of BFBS, but had agreed with BFBS that he could initiate translation of the Bible into Mexican languages and pursue BFSS interests as opportunity presented itself. In fact, as well as transporting 48 cases of Bibles to Mexico, he also carried an important BFSS document which he and Vicente Rocafuerte had prepared,<sup>46</sup> to be presented to the delegates of the second Pan-American Conference<sup>47</sup> to be held that year in Tacubaya, Mexico. The conference did not, in fact, take place, but that did not deter Thomson.

He found that a Lancasterian society had already been formed in Mexico City, by voluntary subscription. 'The Government gave every encouragement to this institution, and made it, in fact, its board for extending education over the country.'<sup>48</sup> Shortly after arriving in Mexico City Thomson met with President Guadalupe Victoria and two of his ministers.<sup>49</sup> The President had facilitated the activities of the Lancasterian Society. Thomson was made a member of that board and in that role presented plans for extending the system. Two years later he met with President Vicente Guerrero and formally presented to him the BFSS document he and Rocafuerte had prepared: 'The writer had a long interview with him to explain the system of Infant Schools.'<sup>50</sup>

The document both congratulates the newly independent nations and offers help in implementing public education on the Lancasterian model as they forged their new identity and character. At the same time it reveals the philosophy and ethos that underpinned the BFSS. Education—'civil, moral and religious'—was the *sine qua non*. It would break the chains of the 'cruellest of tyrants': ignorance. Independence had been won, it promised progress, and was due to the workings of Providence ('that Supreme Power who orders everything regarding humanity and the universe'). The provision of education for all was the 'sacred duty' of leaders ('may your goal not be a *limited* education, nor the education of *just a few*, instead achieve for *everyone* the best you can').

They were to take comfort from the fact that the system was 'low cost'. Moreover, they stated that 'the habits of obedience and order that children acquire in these schools will prove very important for your new states'.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>47</sup> The first such conference—the Congress of Panama—was organized by Simon Bolivar and took place in Panama City in 1826 from 22 June to 15 July.

<sup>48</sup> Thomson, *op.cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to BFBS, 23 May 1827.

<sup>50</sup> James Thomson, 'South America - VI', *Evangelical Christendom*, I (1847), 350.

Knowledge and liberty would go hand-in-hand and lead to 'enlightenment and happiness'. The new states were congratulated on their actions abolishing slavery. Their interests 'were not personal interests, but rather the noble cause of true freedom'. Something that Thomson sadly noted elsewhere was not true in the nation to the north of them.<sup>51</sup>

The signatories, who had 'complete confidence' in their friend Mr Thomson, pointed to another network of which Thomson was a part,<sup>52</sup> and to the overlapping interests of School Society, Bible Society and 'civilization'. The similarities between this document, the document signed by O'Higgins inaugurating the Chilean schools,<sup>53</sup> and the preamble to the Peruvian decree on public education,<sup>54</sup> suggest Thomson had a role in drafting all three.

Thomson's role in the drafting and presentation of the Tacubaya document confirms the conclusion that Eugenia Roldán draws from his earlier work in South America (1818-1825) —he saw the monitorial method in Spanish America as a 'tool for the expansion of universal education',<sup>55</sup> as opposed to being only for the instruction of the children of the poor— 'the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society', as it was in Britain. The way in which the monitorial method was appropriated and contextualised in Spanish America 'associated it to ideas of nation-building and the formation of citizenship' in a way that was not true elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> Might it also have been for Thomson the implementation of the insights of the Scottish Reformation and of Knox's vision of 'a school in every parish'?

<sup>51</sup> Nor was it true in British colonies!

<sup>52</sup> Thomson elsewhere writes of them as the 'great and the good' of British society.

<sup>53</sup> Thomson's letter from Santiago to BFSS, 30 January 1822.

<sup>54</sup> See note 9 above.

<sup>55</sup> Eugenia Roldán, 'Export as Import: James Thomson's Civilising Mission in South America, 1818-1825', in *Importing Modernity in Postcolonial State Formation: The Appropriation of Political, Educational, and Cultural Models in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, ed. by Eugenia Roldán Vera and Marcelo Caruso (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 259.

<sup>56</sup> Roldán's groundbreaking study of the translation into Spanish and contextualisation to Spanish America of monitorial school educational materials underlines what she refers to as the 'peculiar appropriation' of the monitorial system in the Americas. See *The British Book Trade and Spanish American Independence: Education and Knowledge Transmission in Transcontinental Perspective*.

## 6. "....THY KINGDOM COME"

Throughout his years in Spanish America, Thomson lived through wars, turmoil and social upheavals. In an early letter to BFBS from Buenos Aires he noted:

We are in the midst of political commotions here at present, and have been so for some time past. The Lord, however, is the security of his people, he is the Governor among the nations, and all these changes will, I trust, lead to the promoting of his kingdom. Let us join in the prayer, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven'.<sup>57</sup>

The Venezuelan émigré, Andrés Bello, then living in London, spoke of Thomson's 'simplicity and modesty' and recognised his contribution: 'the caring Christian spirit that characterises this distinguished philanthropist, his activity and truly apostolic zeal in promoting the work of the London society,<sup>58</sup> are known from one end of South America to another. It is impossible to speak highly enough of him'.<sup>59</sup> By contrast the British diplomat in Caracas, Sir Robert Ker Porter, was quite disdainful of him. He saw him as 'a *Spiritual bagman* travelling for the Bible Society... it has been such as *Monseñor Thompson* that have so frequently and of late aided in the present growing, restless and ruinous state of our Island colonies'.<sup>60</sup>

Sixty years later the Chilean historian Domingo Amunátegui was also deeply sceptical of Thomson, convinced a Protestant agenda was hidden behind his educational work. On the one hand he saw him as a latter-day Don Quixote, yet he also valued his political and social commentary which revealed 'a wise, discerning mind... In a word, when he's not talking about the Bible and ways to make it known, his observations are penetrating'.<sup>61</sup>

In recent years both BFSS and BFBS have been the focus of renewed research interest. Thomson has been interpreted in different ways. Karen

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<sup>57</sup> 5 June 1820.

<sup>58</sup> i.e. BFSS.

<sup>59</sup> Andrés Bello, 'Informe XXI de la Sociedad de escuelas británicas y extranjeras a la junta general celebrada en Londres el 15 de Mayo de 1826', *El Repertorio Americano* II (1827), 58-59.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Dupouy (ed.), *Sir Robert Ker Porter's Caracas Diary 1825-1842: A British Diplomat in a Newborn Nation* (Caracas: Editorial Arte, 1966), LVIII, 18 June 1832. Ker's reference to the 'Island colonies' may be an allusion to Thomson's friend, the Baptist missionary William Knibb and the 1831 'Baptist revolt' in Jamaica.

<sup>61</sup> Domingo Amunátegui Solar, *El Sistema de Lancaster en Chile y en otros países Sudamericanos* (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1895), p. 43.

Racine concludes that Thomson—the BFBS agent-evangelist-entrepreneur—and other Bible Society agents ‘...were not just disseminating religious texts, they were selling a wholesale shift in culture. There were many Spanish Americans who were anxious to buy it.’<sup>62</sup>

A network analysis of the school system in South America during Thomson’s years there, looks more deeply at the effectiveness of Thomson’s initiatives. In the fluidity of communication between the different ‘nodes’ and ‘hubs’ of educational initiatives, Thomson is identified as an important ‘hub’ in the network and the ‘most connected actor’. Thomson received crucial support from the political leaders in power, but in that turbulent period change was the only constant. Those who adopted the monitorial system were ‘clearly intertwined with the dominant political sphere, but once their parties were out of the political scene Thomson’s position was weakened’.<sup>63</sup>

Thomson’s departure from Peru in September 1824 is a clear indication of this and may have contributed to changes in his own approach to become that of an advocate and strategist for the monitorial system. On leaving he officially became a BFBS agent. At the same time the Tacubaya document and his work in Mexico (1827–1830), Jamaica (1834–1837) and in Yucatán (1843–1844) show his ongoing commitment to public education. For him it was taking place in a larger framework, that of another kingdom that was coming.

He had seen what he called the ‘singular interposition of Providence on behalf of the cause of liberty’. For him the ‘old tyranny and oppression’ was ending, and a new day was dawning. In the battles for independence from Spain ‘it was neither easy nor proper to remain indifferent as to the issue of the struggle’. For Thomson ‘the day of God’s merciful visitation had come’<sup>64</sup> and for him the development of public education, with the Bible at its heart, was central to the task of nation-building and civilization.

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<sup>62</sup> Karen Racine. ‘Commercial Christianity: The British and Foreign Bible Society’s Interest in Spanish America, 1805–1830’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 27 (2008), 98.

<sup>63</sup> Eugenia Roldán and Thomas Schupp, ‘Network Analysis in Comparative Social Sciences’, *Comparative Education* 42 (2006), 421.

<sup>64</sup> Letter to BFBS from Lima, 15 July 1824.



## REPRESENTATION<sup>65</sup>

OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN SOCIETY OF MONITORIAL  
SCHOOLS, TO THE TACUBAYA CONGRESS, PRESENTED ON  
7 JUNE 1829 TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF  
MEXICO BY THE SOCIETY'S BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE.

To the Representatives of the new American states meeting in Tacubaya,

Sirs:

As members together of the great human family, and as those who work with you for the progress of liberty and knowledge, we beg you to allow us to share with you some thoughts on the great objects which interest all of us.

Firstly, as English people born in a free country, we share your joy that you have removed a system of servitude, and we rejoice in seeing you take your place among the nations of the earth.

After a long struggle you have finally, and happily, become independent nations, thanks to the disposition of that Supreme Power who orders everything regarding humanity and the universe. In gratitude for the favours you have received, you will doubtless turn your attention to achieving a procedural system in the political steps you take, that contributes in the most effective way possible to the benevolent aims of Providence, with the enlightenment and happiness of the world in view.

The most important way to improve the human condition appears to be *education*. We use this word in its widest sense—civil, moral and religious. The basic elements of education and wisdom are reading, writing and arithmetic. Thus all nations have a fundamental duty to take effective measures to ensure that individuals have these important abilities and develop general knowledge as far as it can go. These are the keys to wisdom and happiness. In our view it is essential for each nation to ensure that the whole population learn these skills. A government which does not take appropriate measures to achieve such an important goal, truly fails in its most sacred duty.

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<sup>65</sup> The author's translation of the 1827 document prepared for BFSS by James Thomson and Vicente Rocafuerte: *Representación: De la Sociedad británica y extranjera de escuelas mútuas, dirigida al congreso de Tacubaya, y presentada el 7 de junio de 1829 al gobierno general de los Estados-Unidos Mexicanos por el encargado de los negocios de dicha sociedad*. British Library: 9770.bb.19.(19).

We have been delighted to learn from our friend Mr. Thomson, in whom we have complete confidence, that you have a deep desire to extend instruction to each and every person in your countries, irrespective of age, sex and situation. It is profoundly satisfying to know this is the case, for in your desire we see the seeds of your future greatness.

As members of the British and Foreign Schools Society (or the Society for setting up monitorial schools everywhere), we were very pleased to learn how quickly you adopted the monitorial or "mutual" system of education in your schools. The low cost with which a growing number of children can be educated by this system, gives you a great advantage in implementing your very patriotic plan to educate everyone in your domains. Moreover the habits of obedience and order that children acquire in these schools will prove very important for your new states. With these factors in mind we recommend that you make this system as widespread and effective as possible.

It often happens (such is our human frailty) that we begin a new work with great determination, and little by little we begin to tire or slack off in our efforts. We hope this will not happen with you in the great work of general education that you have begun. If you had not persevered in your struggle for liberty, and even redoubled your efforts, you would have still have been enslaved. Repeat that experience, breaking the chains of ignorance, the cruelest of all tyrants; if you do this, success is assured. We have been pleased to watch your first steps in this truly noble cause, and with all due respect we wish and earnestly urge you not to give up, but rather to persist in this with renewed vigour until your patriotic desire triumphs, until every last one of you enjoys the benefits of a good education.

We would be very happy to help in your praiseworthy endeavour through all the means at our disposal. We believe there are ways in which we can serve you, providing good teachers, both men and women, to educate young people of both sexes. We can also provide you with the materials you need to equip the schools. Please feel completely free to approach us for help in any of these ways.

We cannot let this opportunity pass without praising you for your noble action regarding that unfortunate class of men and women, snatched from their homes and dragged from Africa to your shores. In breaking free from your yoke, you immediately and generously broke, as far as was possible, the yoke that oppressed this class of fellow human beings. By this you showed that the principles behind your own struggle in the war for independence were not personal interests, but rather the noble cause of true freedom. We are happy to see that you continue to give proof of your desire, that your nations be characterized by freedom for all who live there.

To return to the matter of education, as your colleagues we repeat our ardent and affectionate plea, that you would persist in carrying out such a noble undertaking. May your young people of both sexes be taught perfectly. May your goal not be a *limited* education, nor the education of *just a few*, instead achieve *for everyone* the best you can. Your lives as free men and women, your character among the nations, and your individual happiness, depend on the measures you adopt in this great undertaking.

Your beautiful region shows all nature's majesty: your vast plains, your majestic rivers, your lofty mountains, delight and amaze the traveler. We want to hasten the day when your prosperity will be as great as your plains, in which knowledge will abound amongst you and enrich your creativity, just as your huge rivers fertilize your lands, and in which you rise up to true greatness, like the high ranges of the Andes.

Sirs, we the undersigned are honoured to be your sincere friends and colleagues:

Signed: The Duke of Bedford, President of the Society. Lord Clarendon. Lord John Russell. Marquis Lansdowne. Henry Brougham, M.P. J. F. Buxton, M.P. William Allen, Treasurer. E. A. Schwabe, Secretary. J. M. Cramp, Secretary. J. Millar, Secretary.  
London, 18 April 1827.