The Psalms in Nineteenth-Century Mission Theology

James R. Rohrer

Department of History, University of Nebraska Kearney, Kearney, NE 68849 USA
rohrerjr@unk.edu

INTRODUCTION:

Many recent studies proclaim a new era in missiology. According to a now standard argument, the shift in the demographic centre of Christianity from the West to the global South and East, as well as the breathtaking acceleration of globalization and its myriad discontents, has rendered many of the assumptions of the modern missionary movement incoherent and even dangerous.[1] Missiologists generally begin their presentation of the emerging model of mission by emphasizing the limitations of the Post-Enlightenment worldview that dominated the missionary movement from the days of William Carey to the late twentieth century. To highlight the contrast between historical understandings of mission and the new model, they generally lean heavily upon David Bosch's magisterial *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*. This study, which drew on Thomas Kuhn's concept of scientific revolutions to argue that Christianity has historically been driven by succes-

[1] The following textbooks are representative: F. J. Verstraelen, et al, eds. *Missiology, An Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2003); A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2014); Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and Issues* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2015); and John Mark Terry, ed. *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History and Strategies of World Mission*, 2nd edn (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2015).

sive shifting paradigms of the missionary mandate, has been among the most influential theological works of the last generation. According to Bosch, the modern missionary movement was grounded upon Enlightenment notions of progress and scientific innovation while continuing to uphold the old medieval commitment to Christendom, accepted largely uncritically the beneficence of Western imperialism, and pursued an individualistic and instrumentalist approach to evangelism that reduced mission either to soul-saving in heathen lands or campaigns to spread the blessings of modern civilization to those still burdened by antiquated social traditions. In short, most Christians with a post-Enlightenment worldview myopically conceived of mission as a geographical movement of ideas and institutions from Western Christian to non-Christian lands, with the concomitant extension of modernity on a global scale.[2] In response to seismic changes in the global church, the argument runs, missiologists must articulate a new and more holistic understanding of mission that more faithfully reflects biblical teaching.

The overall thrust of this argument is accurate, but to the extent that it rests upon broad generalizations it inescapably simplifies history and at times exaggerates the discontinuity between past and present. For example, following Bosch's lead, many authors now assert that nineteenth-century missionaries paid little attention to rigorous biblical studies and typically relied upon proof-texts from Scripture (primarily the New Testament) that seemingly provided legitimacy for their missionary crusades. Victorians, it is said, thought in terms of 'missions' undertaken by denominations or voluntary societies, and sought in Scripture a 'biblical foundation' for their varied missionary enterprises. Bosch emphasized that in every period of Christian history, there has been a tendency 'to take one specific biblical verse as *the* missionary text'. This text, he suggested, was not necessarily frequently quoted in actual sermons or theological writings: 'Still, even where it was hardly referred to, it somehow embodied the missionary paradigm of the period.'[3] Bosch acknowledged that it was hard to select the one paradigmatic missionary text for the Post-Enlightenment era of mission history, but after weighing several New Testament options he settled upon Matthew 28:18-20 as the passage that 'certainly was most widely used during the entire period' from Carey onward. In the course of time, obedience to Christ's 'Great Commission' tended 'to drown' out all other biblical motifs. Bosch quoted numerous leading missionary luminaries (all from the late nineteenth century) to

[2] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), especially pp. 262-84.

[3] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 339.

illustrate the tremendous significance assigned to this text, especially in Anglo-American Protestant circles.[4]

Bosch strongly critiqued this approach to mission theology and urged missiologists to devote greater attention to biblical studies, advocating a 'missional reading' of Scripture that recognizes the relevance of every text in both Old and New Testaments. Rather than seeking the 'biblical foundation' for 'missions' in selected New Testament verses, Bosch identified mission with God's work of redemption throughout history and therefore as the central motif of the entire Bible: 'either mission, properly understood, lies at the heart of the biblical message or it is so peripheral to that message that we need not be overly concerned with it.'[5] This understanding of mission as first and foremost the *missio dei* was not original with Bosch. Articulated by Karl Barth as early as 1933, it figured prominently in the Willingen Conference of the IMC in 1952, and subsequently was embraced by theologians working in virtually every ecclesiastical tradition.[6] Bosch's landmark book, however, popularized the term *missio dei*, and today it is the starting point for virtually all mission theology.

The question I wish to explore in this essay is whether the extremely impressionistic portrait sketched by Bosch accurately depicts Victorian mission theology, or whether it stands more as a caricature that distorts as much as it clarifies about the historical evolution of mission theory. While Matthew 28:18-20 was undoubtedly an important influence upon William Carey and the modern missionary enterprise, is it truly the case that, in the words of Craig Van Gelder, the 'theology undergirding these movements' was shaped almost entirely by 'an understanding of the necessity to obey Christ in seeking to fulfill the Great Commission'?[7] Following Bosch, recent missiology textbooks have emphasized the missional nature of the entire Bible, giving detailed attention to the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and often explicitly claim that this approach is a necessary correction to older treatments of mission theology built upon limited New Testament proof-texts. Thus, in one important recent study, Michael W. Goheen observes in his discussion of Acts

4 Ibid., pp. 340-41.

5 Bosch, 'Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission', in *Toward the Twenty-First Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honor of Gerald H. Anderson*, ed. by James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 177.

6 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 389-91.

7 Craig Van Gelder, 'How Missiology Can Help Inform the Conversation About the Missional Church in Context', in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. by Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 17.

that 'we must be careful not to impose a nineteenth-century view of mission on this book. A central theme in Acts is the way the Old Testament vision of God's eschatological program will come to fulfillment.' Based upon Bosch's survey of mission history, Goheen assumes that Victorian theologians had a truncated understanding of mission that ignored the missional nature of the Old Testament.[8]

Missiology as an academic discipline is primarily a twentieth-century development, and the missionary movement occupied a peripheral place in the published writings of most Victorian theologians.[9] Thus the source material needed to reconstruct nineteenth-century mission theology is scattered throughout the uncatalogued pages of countless tracts, missionary treatises, and newspaper accounts of missionary deputations, conferences, and sermons. To date, remarkably few scholars have mined this material to clarify the use of Scripture in nineteenth-century mission theology, so that we lack substantive research to confirm, modify or contradict Bosch's account of the post-Enlightenment paradigm. The following paragraphs, then, on the place of the Psalms in nineteenth-century Protestant missionary thought can necessarily open up only one small part of a much larger project. Though my findings are preliminary rather than exhaustive, they suggest that missionary leaders of the past were not as unfamiliar with the concept of *missio dei* as recent studies presuppose.

MISSIONARY USES OF THE PSALTER

Bosch's assertion that 'paradigmatic' biblical texts may have been rarely used in Christian proclamation ought to give readers pause. Short of solid empirical evidence to substantiate a given text's importance to the theology of an era, how can we know that its purportedly paradigmatic nature is not simply a subjective impression in the minds of later scholars? It seems far better to seek the key missionary texts within the documentary sources of each era of Christian history, looking for those biblical passages that were actually used in the construction of mission theology. This essay rests upon hundreds of ordination sermons, proceedings of local and national missionary organizations, and missionary treatises published between 1800 and 1914.[10] My goal was simply to identify what

8 Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, p. 63.

9 On the historical evolution of missiology see Jan A. B. Jongneel, 'Is Missiology an Academic Discipline?', in *Christianity and Education: Shaping Christian Thinking in Context*, ed. by David Emmanuel Singh and Bernard C. Farr (Oxford: Regnum International, 2011), pp. 225-36.

10 I have relied heavily upon missionary memoirs in Google Books, as well as the following digital databases: American Periodical Series (available at many

biblical texts preachers and theologians regarded as especially missional in nature, and to understand how they employed these texts in constructing mission theology. Although Bosch identified Matthew 28:18-20 as 'certainly the most widely used text' throughout the Modern Era, my research suggests that its pre-eminence was confined to the two generations after 1880—the so-called Age of High Imperialism—and that previous apologists for mission employed myriad texts from the entire sweep of Scripture, with Isaiah and Psalms figuring prominently. Indeed, the most commonly quoted biblical verses in missionary sermons throughout most of the nineteenth century were drawn from the Psalter, which many Victorians considered the 'missionary text' *par excellence*.

Given the Reformed tradition's strong insistence upon the unity of Scripture and the tremendous importance of the Psalter in Christian worship and devotional practice, it would be remarkable indeed if the Psalms had not figured prominently in the burgeoning Protestant missionary movement. From the days of Carey onward, Protestant missionaries everywhere made the translation of Scripture into local vernacular languages their first order of business, and alongside the New Testament and Pentateuch the Psalms invariably stood first in priority. In part this reflected the desire to replicate the supposed biblical model of worship. Throughout what Kenneth Scott Latourette dubbed 'the great century' of Christian expansion,[11] converts throughout the world praised God in translated Psalms, a fact so well-recognized that one LMS missionary in South Africa noted in 1830 a common criticism levelled by 'persons unfriendly to the great cause of missionary exertion': 'It has frequently been said... that Psalm singing was all that they taught the people.'[12] In part, however, the priority of the Psalms rested upon the apologetic import of the messianic passages scattered throughout the Psalter, which missionaries often emphasized in their evangelistic presentations on the authority of Jesus. Thus by 1802, when Carey and his colleagues had not yet completed their translation of the Old Testament into Bengali, they already had produced a vernacular version of Psalms and Isaiah, which they printed together as a 'class book' for their students.[13]

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research libraries through Proquest); British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk); Early Canadiana Online (www.canadiana.ca/en/eco); and Genealogybank (www.genealogybank.com).

11 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Volume 4. *The Great Century: Europe and the United States, 1800-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941).

12 Boston *Christian Watchman*, 12 August 1831, p. 1, reprinting an account first published in the *South Africa Commercial Advertiser*, 15 December 1830.

13 *New York Missionary Magazine*, 1 June 1803.

Far from ignoring Christ's fulfilment of the Old Testament's eschatological vision for the nations, this theme was absolutely central to nineteenth-century Protestant mission theology. It is striking that when missionary sermons in the early Victorian era occasionally quoted the Great Commission it was often linked explicitly to Old Testament messianic passages rather than taken as a self-sufficient authority for missionary outreach. Just one typical example is provided by ABCFM missionary Samuel C. Damon, who in 1866 delivered a discourse on 'Puritan Missions to the Pacific' before the Hawaiian Evangelical Association. Taking as his texts Isaiah 42:4 and Matthew 28:19, Damon insisted that modern missions had been envisioned by Isaiah, who 'glanced his prophetic eye down the vista of the coming centuries' and saw the 'conversion of the Gentile world to the Messiah'. Foreign Missions, Damon asserted, must be 'contemplated in the light of Hebrew prophecy', for the last command of the saviour had been anticipated centuries earlier by 'the enraptured minds of Isaiah, Daniel, and Malachi', whose hopes and labours all converged 'on the promised Messiah as the central figure in that grand panoramic picture of coming events'.[14]

Although Damon built his discourse around Isaiah, missionary leaders more frequently appealed to the many Psalms that speak of God's ultimate redemption of the nations. Throughout the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the two most commonly cited missionary texts were Psalms 67 and 72, which featured so frequently in missionary lectures and the proceedings of evangelical organizations that they were commonly referred to as 'the Missionary Psalm' and the 'Missionary Hymn' respectively. This latter reference reflected the remarkable popularity of Isaac Watts' paraphrase of Psalm 72:12-19, originally published in 1719 as a fourteen stanza hymn entitled 'Christ's Kingdom Among the Gentiles', but by William Carey's time more commonly known by its opening line, 'Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun'.[15] Accounts of missionary gatherings from the start of the century show that Watts' paraphrase was already sometimes employed in worship on such occasions.[16] However, the song really came into its own during the Victorian Age, when British evangelicals sang it at the commencement of their 'Anniversary meetings' at

[14] Damon's address was published as a special supplement to the Honolulu *Friend*, 2 July 1866, p. 1.

[15] Most hymnals since the late nineteenth century have included a five stanza condensation. For Watts' original version, and a helpful summary of the history of this psalm in English hymnody, see <http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/j/s/jsreign.htm> (Accessed June 10, 2016).

[16] (Philadelphia) *Churchman's Magazine*, July & August 1808, p. 293.

Exeter Hall each May, often accompanied by the reading of Psalm 67.[17] This practice, noted by one writer as early as 1848, had become so familiar by 1886 that Edinburgh minister John Ker identified Psalm 67 as 'by special distinction *the missionary psalm*' in his treatise *The Psalms in History and Biography*, while the Reformed Presbyterian scholar William Goold dubbed it 'The Mission Hymn of the Hebrew Church'.[18]

WILLIAM BINNIE'S MISSION THEOLOGY

Let us examine how several Scottish Presbyterian theologians of the Victorian Age handled the Psalms as missionary texts. We will begin with William Binnie (1823-1886), Professor of Systematic Theology at the Divinity Hall of Scotland's Reformed Presbyterian Church, who in 1870 published a treatise on the theology and history of the Psalms that developed their missionary implications in especially great depth.[19] Binnie, a student at the University of Glasgow and the Reformed Presbyterian Divinity Hall before pursuing postgraduate study under Neander and Hengstenberg in Berlin, possessed a comprehensive mastery of the literature on Psalms. His conclusions often reflected scholarly consensus, and this certainly was true of the argument he developed in his chapter on 'the future glories of the Church', that the Psalms had 'for eight and twenty

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17 The practice was noted in an 1848 essay, 'Thoughts on the Sixty-seventh Psalm', originally published in the (London) *Christian Observer* and later reprinted in the (Philadelphia) *Episcopal Recorder*, 11 November 1848, p. 137. A Manchester minister noted that the custom was still observed more than a decade later: *Manchester Currier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 24 November 1860.

18 John Ker, *The Psalms in History and Biography* (Edinburgh: Morrison and Gibb, 1886), p. 94; W. H. Goold, 'The Mission Hymn of the Hebrew Church', in *The Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, 1 January 1866, pp. 1-12.

19 William Binnie, *The Psalms: Their History, Teachings and Use* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1870), which subsequently appeared in a revised and expanded edition as *A Pathway into the Psalter. The Psalms: Their History, Teachings and Use* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1886). Professor Benjamin Shaw of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh brought out a reprinting of this 1886 edition: William Binnie, *A Pathway into the Psalter* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), and it is the pagination of this American edition that I will cite in the following notes. In his introduction Shaw provides a helpful overview of Binnie's life, but additional biographical details can be found in the following obituaries: *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 23 September 1886, and *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 23 September 1886. Binnie moved to Aberdeen in 1875 to assume the Chair of Church History at the Free Church College there, and held this post until his death.

centuries' been 'bearing witness that God's visible Church is destined to embrace all nations whom God has created on the face of the whole earth'. Binnie opened with an explication of Psalm 86:9 and 22:27, which unmistakably announced God's missionary purpose: 'They are as unambiguous as anything that can be spoken by the most sanguine advocate of Christian missions in this nineteenth century. Yet they come from the age... of David.'[20]

Binnie emphasized that the Psalms articulated an eschatological vision that was much older than the Hebrew monarchy: 'the Psalms are not so much the vehicle of new revelations as the authentic response of the Church to revelations elsewhere delivered.' Later psalmists perhaps listened to the voice of Isaiah and other prophets, Binnie reasoned, but the Davidic Psalms reflected the promise made by God to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, that his descendants would bless all the nations of the earth. Binnie found the Table of the Nations in Genesis 10 particularly significant, coming just at the juncture between the early chapters that treat universal history and the remainder of the Pentateuch which narrows the focus to the history of the covenanted people. 'May we not discern in this an intimation that, although the nations were to be suffered to walk in their own ways, it was to be only for a season?' The Table of the Nations, Binnie gibed, 'was not set down in the Tenth of Genesis merely to guide the researches and gratify the thirst of our modern archaeologists', but was to remind the Hebrew Church of 'the Lord's interest in the nations'. Far from being bigoted sectarians, as some Christians foolishly imagined, the Hebrews throughout Old Testament times 'carried the hope of the Gentiles; so that when our Lord declared that many should come from east and west, and should sit down with the patriarchs in the gospel kingdom, it was not a novel announcement that He made. He simply recalled attention to an announcement coeval with Abraham.'[21]

The Psalms 'were in perpetual use in public worship', Binnie observed, and therefore reflected the 'common mind of the Hebrew Church' toward the Gentiles rather than the understanding of individual poets. Although 'neither called nor qualified to be a missionary society'—a development that unfolded only with the dawning of the New Testament dispensation—the Hebrew people through their hymns kept alive the memory of the Abrahamic covenant, so that Israel 'never ceased to desire and hope for the conversion of the nations'. The Old Testament cannot give us 'detailed instructions with respect to the missionary enterprises of the Church', Binnie reflected; these must be found in Acts and the Pauline epistles. Yet

[20] Binnie, *A Pathway Into the Psalter*, p. 306.
[21] Ibid., pp. 312-13.

Christians 'need something more than practical directions regarding the fit manner of carrying on their Lord's work on the earth'. To accomplish their missionary calling, Binnie insisted that believers require the 'motive power' which has always been supplied by the Hebrew Scriptures:

> We stand in need... of such general views of the enterprise and its results as will fire the imagination and warm the heart; and for these we are chiefly indebted to the Prophets and the Psalmists. Missionary sermons are generally preached from Old Testament texts. The best missionary hymns that ever were written,—those which have the power of keeping abreast of every new generation,—are the Hymns in the Psalter. It is certainly a remarkable fact, that although the Old Testament Church was not a Missionary Church, the flame of its piety was fed with missionary hymns; and that the Psalter anticipated, by much more than the space of two thousand years, that efflorescence of evangelistic song which has of late shed a new glory on our modern poetry.[22]

From the Psalms, Binnie observed, Christians could clearly see God's unchanging purposes for the Church throughout history. Without detailing missionary methods, the Psalms set forth in unmatched beauty and power the end of all missionary endeavours: the future renovation of the entire earth under the reign of 'David's greater son, the true Prince of Peace'. The Psalms also indicated the means by which the church would fulfil its purpose: unceasing prayer and the faithful declaration of the truth in Jesus Christ. In a lengthy exposition of Psalm 67, Binnie concluded that missionary success depended upon the spiritual health of Christians:

> ...*the world is to be brought to God by means of the prayers and labours of a revived Church.* There must be preaching, and praying, and the giving of men's substance; yet the Lord's effectual blessing will not attend these if they are only the constrained offerings and mechanical services of a dead Church. The blessing will be sent to crown the hearty services of a Church whose heart is fired with love to God, with zeal for His house, with gratitude for His mercy, with Christ-like compassion for souls. Prayer for revival at home and prayer for a blessing abroad ought always, therefore, to go hand in hand.[23]

Commenting upon Psalm 72, Binnie emphasized that God's purposes went far beyond the conversion of individual Gentiles, to the restoration of creation to the harmony lost at the dawn of human history. When the 'Peaceful Prince' establishes his dominion from sea to sea, Binnie

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22 Ibid., pp. 317-18.

23 Ibid., pp. 318-19. Italics are Binnie's.

reflected, he will 'sweep away the institutions by which injustice has entrenched itself' and will purge the earth 'of wars and oppressions and cruelties' of every kind. 'What a store of comfort for the downtrodden, the enslaved, the needy, is laid up in the announcement that the Lord is coming to be the Avenger of all such!'[24]

WILLIAM GOOLD

Binnie acknowledged as his most influential source his 'honoured friend' William H. Goold (1815-1897), Professor of Biblical Literature and Church History at the Reformed Presbyterian Divinity Hall in Paisley. In November 1865, Goold presided at the ordination of three new Reformed Presbyterian missionaries to the New Hebrides, and his sermon on Psalm 67 was later published by the Paisley Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Goold opened with a strong affirmation of the missionary spirit of the Old Testament: 'We have before us... the impassioned yearnings of a believing heart for the conversion of the world to God.' In truth, Goold observed, 'fifteen centuries of the present dispensation rolled away before the Church of Christ had wakened up to any such conviction... as breathes in every verse of this fervent hymn of the old Hebrew Church'. Although ancient Israel was not a missionary body, Goold averred, all that Christ accomplished on the cross and will someday bring to consummation was already foreshadowed in the hopes and prayers of the Hebrew people, as 'the oak' is present 'in the acorn'.[25]

Goold stressed the public nature of Psalm 67; it was 'a Church's hope, a nation's song' of trust in the final salvation of the earth. It was a 'triumphal' messianic hymn, proclaiming the conversion of the Gentiles to Abraham's God as future fact: 'the battle is fought, the victory won', so that Christians might have assurance that their faithful missionary labours must ultimately bear fruit. Based upon his reading of the sixth verse, Goold also proclaimed that Psalm 67 was a '*festival* hymn' intended for use at the close of harvest, probably at the Feast of Weeks – the Pentecost – and thus it prefigured the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that later launched the Christian church's missionary outreach to the nations. Indeed, Goold queried, 'is it not a missionary hymn—*the* missionary hymn?' In singing Psalm 67 the church, in unity with ancient Israel, prayed for God's blessings upon the entire world:

> We identify ourselves in common interest with the whole family of man; and hence, by a feature of exquisite adaptation to the subject and whole scope of

[24] Ibid., pp. 324-25.

[25] William H. Goold, 'The Mission Hymn of the Hebrew Church', pp. 1-2.

> the Psalm, it is the common name, Elohim, God, expressive of relationship to the whole world, not the covenant name, Jehovah, expressive of relationship to a special people, that is throughout employed. For all nations are one in a common ruin; one, too... in the offer of a common redemption.[26]

Psalm 67 also indicated the means that God would use to accomplish this work of redemption: 'The agency to be employed is men to whom God is merciful, on whom His blessing rests, on whom His face is made to shine.' Only those who recognized their own unworthiness and weakness, and who relied solely upon the blessings of the Lord could be fit instruments for this work of grace. This was the calling not of priests alone but of every believer:

> The entire covenanted interest of the Almighty upon the earth, the whole race of Abraham, the whole Church of God, even in that ancient age, was charged with the conversion of the world as the highest of its prayers, the highest end of its efforts.... In other words, the Church is evangelistic or it is nothing. No matter whether the field you should choose be the next street, your neighbor's household, nay even your own, or whether your mission should be to the millions of India, the shores of Labrador, the isles of the South Sea, how can you be light if you never shine... [27]

Goold lamented that many Christians misunderstood the evangelistic nature of the church, wrongly assuming that God would accomplish the salvation of the world through ordained missionaries. Psalm 67 commanded every believer to participate in God's mission of salvation: 'If you are Christians, the claims of business and of trade, all secular interests and pursuits, are as dust in the balance weighed against the duty to make God's way known upon the earth, His saving health among all nations.'[28] This obligation fell not only upon individual Christians and denominations, but upon entire nations. Thus Goold reasoned that God's mission alone could legitimize the global reach of the British flag, for God providentially allowed the expansion of Victoria's empire solely to prosecute his own purposes. Should Britain instead pursue wealth and imperial power as an end, he warned, it invited the same divine punishment that fell upon Old Testament Israel when it forgot its covenant with the Lord.[29]

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[26] Ibid., p. 4.
[27] Ibid., p. 9.
[28] Ibid., p. 10.
[29] Ibid., p. 9.

ALEXANDER DUFF IN SCOTLAND AND AMERICA

Goold's sermon echoed themes that had been repeatedly trumpeted for two decades by Alexander Duff (1806-1878), first foreign missionary of the Church of Scotland and later Convener of the Free Church Foreign Mission Committee, who enjoyed enormous respect on both sides of the Atlantic. Often dubbed 'the prince of modern missions', Duff's letters from Calcutta appeared regularly in Protestant magazines throughout the world, and his many books and tracts on the missionary enterprise were likewise familiar to mission enthusiasts globally. During the last decade of his life Duff held the chair in 'Evangelistic Theology' at each of Scotland's Free Church divinity schools, and he is generally regarded as the first academic missiologist.[30] His thinking, then, bears particular weight in considering the place of the Psalms in Victorian mission theology.

During his first furlough in March 1839, Duff preached at the ordination of Thomas Smith, who would join him as a Church of Scotland missionary in Calcutta. Later he published an expanded version of his remarks as a treatise on mission theology and practice, *Missions the Chief End of the Christian Church* (1839), which remained essential reading for missionary candidates for the following two generations. The key themes that Duff repeatedly underscored throughout his career were clearly set forth in this early discourse, which he built around a close explication of Psalm 67.[31] It was perfectly obvious to Duff that from God's first revelation to Abraham the Hebrews understood the goal of history as the salvation of all nations on the earth. In Psalm 67 the 'Royal Psalmist, in the spirit of inspiration, personating the Church of the redeemed in every age', set forth with clarity the same divine charter that Isaiah proclaimed and that Christ later bequeathed to his disciples when he constituted the church to be his '*delegated representative* as the world's evangelist'. The

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[30] See Olav Guttorm Myklebust, *The Study of Missions in Theological Education, Volume 1: to 1910* (Oslo: Egede Instituttet, 1955), Chapter Four, on Duff's missionary chair; and Andrew F. Walls, 'Missiological Education in Historical Perspective', in *Missiological Education for the Twenty-first Century; The Book, the Circle & the Sandals: Essays in Honor of Daniel E. Pierson*, ed. by J. Dudley Woodberry, Charles Van Engen & Edgar J. Elliston (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), pp. 14-15. There is no modern critical biography of Duff. For a useful assessment of his career see Michael A. Laird, 'Alexander Duff, 1806-1878: Western Education as Preparation for the Gospel', in *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of the Modern Missionary Movement*, ed. by Gerald H. Anderson, et al (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), pp. 271-6.

[31] Alexander Duff, *Missions the Chief End of the Christian Church; also the Qualifications, Duties, and Trials of an Indian Missionary* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1839).

calling of the church in the nineteenth century was essentially the same as it had always been since the patriarchal age: to implore God's light and spiritual blessings '*so that*' it might be equipped for *'the impartation of God's saving health to all nations*'.[32] Duff discerned the full meaning of the 'grand charter' recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 in the light of various Old Testament verses, but especially Psalm 67:1-2:

> It thus appears abundantly manifest from multiplied Scripture evidence, that the *chief end* for which the Christian Church is constituted—the *leading design* for which she is made the repository of heavenly blessings... is, in the name and stead of her glorified Head and Redeemer, unceasingly, to act the part of an evangelist to *all the world*. The divine charter which conveys to her the warrant to teach and preach the Gospel at all, binds her to teach and preach it to *all nations*.[33]

Over the following four decades Duff proclaimed this conclusion in literally hundreds of public addresses: that Christian churches that fail to engage in world evangelisation cannot expect to receive continued spiritual blessings. The 'whole history of the Christian Church' served as 'one perpetual proof and illustration' of this grand thesis: *'that an evangelistic or missionary Church is a spiritually flourishing Church; and that a Church which drops the evangelistic or missionary character, speedily lapses into superannuation and decay!'*[34]

Just as Old Testament Israel was not called to actively convert the nations, and yet never lost sight of the salvation of the nations as its priestly calling, so, too, not every Christian could engage directly in foreign missions, nor could Christians collectively reach every nation at the same moment in history. Nonetheless, Duff insisted, all believers were called to pray without ceasing for the final redemption of every nation, actively sharing the gospel wherever their influence extended while remaining ready to proclaim the truth to unreached peoples whenever God might open a door. Since the entire world was the field of God's mission, those who laboured at home had the same calling as those who travelled far, yet even those who witnessed only in their own local communities were bound by Scripture to always keep the '*grand end*' in mind:

> But, should they lose sight of the ultimate end, and wilfully or indolently stop short of its accomplishment, do they not plainly incur a forfeiture of what they have already acquired? The field for Christian husbandry is the world,—

[32] Ibid., pp. 6-8.
[33] Ibid., p. 14.
[34] Ibid., p. 15. Italics are Duff's.

> and nothing short of its universal cultivation will suit the Divine design, or implement the obligation of the Christian Church.[35]

Duff spent 1850-1855 on an extended furlough, and during these years he travelled incessantly throughout Scotland in an effort to redirect evangelical energies away from local and sectarian concerns towards the cause of world evangelisation. He visited every Free Church presbytery and most congregations, successfully organizing hundreds of local missionary associations to raise funds for the cause throughout the year rather than rely upon the customary annual collections. Throughout this campaign his standard missionary address was built around Psalm 72, a text which, he assured a thousand Presbyterians gathered in Wick, better conveyed his message than any other verse in the Bible. Duff noted that although the original occasion of the hymn appeared to be the coronation of Solomon, yet the inspired Psalmist was enabled by the Holy Spirit 'to refer from things present to things future', and thus the psalm clearly pointed to the distant messianic age when the Prince of Peace would establish his dominion over the world and gather all nations to himself: 'Indeed, the whole psalm was a prophecy of the ultimate consummation of the Redeemer's triumph, whose name should be great among the Gentiles from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.' In light of the clear import of this prophecy, Duff lamented, he witnessed in sorrow and shame the relative insignificance of Scotland's contribution to world evangelisation, for even sincere Presbyterians prayed and sacrificed less for the redemption of the nations than they did for a host of worldly enterprises that were doomed to wither like grass.[36]

The highlight of Duff's furlough was his 1854 lecture tour of North America, where he drew huge and enthusiastic crowds from Philadelphia to St. Louis and as far north as Montreal. Duff turned repeatedly to the Psalms for the substance of his appeals, as he did in his Concert Hall Address in Philadelphia at the start of his visit, when he contrasted at great length the majestic vision of Psalm 67 with the impoverished spirit of modern Christianity. 'How glorious... the example of the Psalmist! What does he say? How does he proceed? The moment he prays for himself, he immediately forgets himself. This is divine—this is genuine self-denial.' How vastly different was the attitude of most Christians in both Europe and America, he warned, who prayed constantly for blessings for themselves and their own loved ones but who cared 'not one jot or tittle about the millions who are perishing' around the globe. In light

[35] Ibid., p. 9.

[36] 'Dr. Duff in Wick', *John O'Groat Journal*, 16 July 1852, p. 2.

of Psalm 67, Duff pleaded, 'is it not high time... that every one of you, of all denominations, should be awakened to your responsibility more than ever?'[37]

Duff capped his North American tour by chairing the world's first ecumenical missionary conference, which convened at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City and concluded with a grand public address before an audience of thousands drawn from every Protestant denomination. Duff's sermon, which Presbyterian luminary Theodore Cuyler later recollected as the most powerful evangelistic appeal he had ever witnessed,[38] was based upon Psalm 72, and followed closely the same line of argument that he had developed in his missionary appeals to the Scottish Free Churches. Although the Psalmist clearly spied the consummation of history for which all believers are bound to pray and labour without ceasing, Duff argued, Christians everywhere were manifestly failing to keep their covenanted obligation to advance the Redeemer's Kingdom. Duff found every verse of the Psalm directly relevant to the missionary calling of the Christian church, even drawing significance from the closing line, which most Victorian exegetes understood as a straightforward statement that Psalm 72 concludes one of the numerous ancient collections of verse that had been brought together to form the Psalter.[39] Duff set this interpretation aside in favour of a more eccentric reading that better suited his missionary proclamation:

> Now, then, if the Earth be fully replenished with the glory of the Great Jehovah, what more with reference to the world's blessedness can any soul desire or ever pray for? Hence the emphasis of the inspired writer, when he concludes the Psalm: 'The prayers of David, the Son of Jesse, are ended.' What more had he to pray for with regard to the consummation of this World's Evangelization? When this grand conception is realized, then prayer for that object is ended; because the object is fully accomplished. Let us try to realize the grandeur of this expectation, that our own souls may be filled with it as the soul of the Psalmist, and then we shall partake somewhat of his seraphic fire, and be up and doing with reference to the progress and advancement of it.[40]

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37 'Rev. Dr. Duff's Speech at Concert Hall', (New York) *Christian Observer*, 4 March 1854, p. 33.

38 Theodore Ledyard Cuyler, *Reflections of a Long Life: An Autobiography* (New York, 1902), pp. 187-9.

39 On the various interpretations of this verse in early nineteenth-century commentaries, see *American Baptist Magazine*, November 1832, p. 340.

40 *Proceedings of the Union Missionary Convention held in New York, May 4th and 5th, 1854; Together with the Address of the Rev. Dr. Duff, at the Public Meeting in the Broadway Tabernacle* (New York: Taylor & Negg, 1854), p. 29.

CONCLUSION

The writings of Binnie, Goold, and Duff demonstrate that Scottish Presbyterians in the Victorian Era were very familiar with the concept of *missio dei*, although they obviously employed different terminology, and that the eschatological vision of the Old Testament was central to their mission theology. This certainly included the understanding that salvation entailed the radical transformation of oppressive social institutions and the renovation of all creation. It would be easy to multiply parallel statements from missionary sermons delivered by Protestants of other communions throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and from both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, for example, at the 1858 annual meeting of the American Missionary Association, a Congregationalist preacher pointedly observed of Psalm 72 that 'the care and deliverance of those oppressed is the main thing commanded'; this, then, must be 'the work of missionary efforts, and the test of the missionary spirit'. In light of myriad Old and New Testament texts, the minister insisted, 'missionary work has as much to do with slavery as idolatry', and the missionary, if truly empowered by the divine spirit, will seek 'the redemption of the needy and the deliverance of victims from the Moloch of oppression'.[41]

These considerations suggest that we need to revise our understanding of nineteenth-century mission theology, to acknowledge that many key biblical themes emphasized by contemporary missiologists were indeed vitally important to Protestant mission theorists of the Victorian Era. It belongs to another essay to explain why missionaries of the High Imperial Age may have held a less expansive biblical theology of mission than their predecessors. Here it is sufficient to conclude that recent theologies of mission, which emphasize the missional nature of the Old Testament, do not correct a faulty grasp of Scripture that plagued our Victorian forebears; they restate theological truths that most Victorian mission apologists knew intimately but that were apparently obscured in twentieth-century missionary discourse.[42]

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41 *Boston Weekly Advertiser*, 2 June 1858, p. 4.

42 In addition to the missiology texts cited above, the following otherwise excellent studies all apparently assume that the missional nature of the Old Testament was unrecognized until recently: George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000); Andreas J. Kostenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grover: IVP, 2006).