

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

THE PROTESTANT BOOMERANG

THE PROTESTANT FOREIGN missionary project expected to make the world look more like the United States. Instead, it made the United States look more like the world. The missionary encounter with peoples beyond the historically Christian West yielded relatively generous dispositions toward the varieties of humankind, and led the missionaries to question many cherished beliefs of the folks at home. Missionaries, their children, and their closest associates became conspicuous players during the middle decades of the twentieth century in the Foreign Service, universities, foundations, churches, literature, journalism, the military, and several reform movements. Missionary-connected Americans advanced domestic programs that would later be called “multicultural” and foreign policies that prioritized alliances with nonwhite, colonized peoples. More globally conscious than all but a few of their contemporaries, the missionary contingent was the Anglo-Protestant counterpart of the cosmopolitan Jewish intelligentsia whose influence in expanding American public life has been rightly recognized. But while Jewish cosmopolitanism was intensely European, missionary cosmopolitanism was predominantly Asian.

Confidence in the eternal and universal validity of certain values propelled the missionary endeavor. These certainties, including the rudiments of the Christian faith, were expected to achieve a dominant place throughout the globe. But the project had ironic consequences. The “gospel of inclusive brotherhood” preached by the missionaries, observed the Congregationalist leader Buell G. Gallagher in 1946, flew back like a boomerang to the hands of those who had flung it outward, carrying on its return trip an awareness of the provincialism of its original construction.

“The missions boomerang has come back to smite the imperialism of white nations, as well as to confound the churches,” wrote Gallagher. Sustained experience with the indigenous peoples abroad gradually led more and more missionaries to appreciate aspects of foreign cultures largely ignored by the classic ideology of missions. Even the pagan religions of Asia turned out to have some redeeming qualities. The “gospel of inclusive brotherhood” changed its meaning: there was a lot more to include than had been discerned at the start. What had been thrown “across Asia, Africa, and the Seven Seas” and supposed to stay there had come back. And when it came back, it was laden with an indictment of “cultural imperialism and arrogant paternalism” and a plea for a more genuinely universal human community.¹

Gallagher’s “boomerang” figure of speech gets across an important reality. Normally we think of a boomerang as returning to its point of origin unchanged. Here, an ideal of universal fraternity became a boomerang when it was immersed in alterity. One could also speak of “blowback.”² Yet *boomerang* conveys more precisely the essential dynamic: an enterprise formidably driven by ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism—and often linked closely with military, diplomatic, and economic imperialism—generated dialectically a counterreaction that was enabled by the religious ideology of its origin. This counterreaction developed first among missionaries themselves, then spread through a number of religious and secular domains.

The missionary experience cut America and its religious and racial particularities down to size and led missionary-connected Americans to make adjustments. The missionary contingent led the ecumenical movement within Protestantism, joined with their Jewish counterparts in diminishing Christian cultural hegemony in the nation, and facilitated a drift toward post-Protestant secularism. Missionary-connected individuals and groups were prominent in efforts to end the mistreatment of people of non-European ancestry at home and abroad, and they opened the public ear to nonwhite voices within and beyond the United States. Even when missionary-connected individuals were not in the ideological forefront, they supplied the expertise and energy for one endeavor after another that expanded American horizons. They did not all think alike, and they operated in many different arenas, but their efforts often converged. Walter Russell Mead is correct: “A dispassionate study of the American missionary record would probably conclude that the multicultural and relativistic thinking so characteristic of the United States today owes much of its social power to the unexpected consequences of American missions abroad.”³

The missionary cosmopolitans were not alone in challenging the provinciality of American public life. Other agents and circumstances during the same period posed comparable challenges, from different starting points. These other deprovincializing forces have been extensively studied, and rightly so. They include the popularization of cultural anthropology, the efforts of African Americans to achieve an equitable position in American politics and society, the expansion of secondary and post-secondary education, the federal government's strategic needs during World War II and the Cold War, and the cultural influence of Jewish immigrants from Europe and their offspring. Jews added a distinctly non-Christian element to American public life, especially in politics, the arts, academia, and many professions. Although heavily based on a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migration, Jewish cosmopolitanism achieved special prominence with the arrival of intellectuals fleeing Hitler's Europe.

Missionaries brought some public attention to Africa, Latin America, and the South Pacific, but they had the most to say about the regions of the world in which they had been involved in the largest numbers: China, Japan, India, and the Arab societies of western Asia. Missionary cosmopolitanism was more diffuse than Jewish cosmopolitanism. It traded in many fragments of world civilization.⁴

In its heyday the Protestant foreign missionary project was anything but obscure. It was a major feature of the United States from the late nineteenth through the middle of the twentieth century. Thousands of Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Dutch Reformed, Quakers, and other kinds of Protestants served abroad. Between 1886 and 1920, more than 10,000 young people were sent out by the Student Volunteer Movement, an aggressive recruiting organization centered on college campuses.⁵ In 1925, there were more than 4,000 American missionaries in China, more than 2,400 in India, and more than 1,000 in Japan. Several thousand other American missionaries were widely distributed in smaller fields throughout Asia, Africa, the South Pacific, and Latin America.⁶

But the cultural significance of missionaries was much greater than their numbers. Missionaries were in the vanguard. In 1900 or 1920, a young man or woman thinking of becoming a missionary was contemplating one of the most honorable and widely admired of callings. "Am I a soldier of the cross?" a hymn popular during that era asked. "Must I be carried to the sky on flower beds of ease, while others fight for that prize and sail through bloody seas?"⁷ Missionaries were celebrated and revered for the risks they took in advancing abroad truths that their

contemporaries at home believed to be universal. For millions who never ventured outside the North Atlantic West, missionaries were not only cultural heroes, but the most intimate and trusted sources of information about the non-European world. Missionaries were the “point persons” of the national community’s engagement with peoples beyond the United States and Europe.

The community on whose behalf the missionaries engaged the world was understood as truly national. Missionaries from the major denominations were part of mainstream America. The public life of the United States was then much more heavily Protestant than it is today. Even as late as 1960, anyone in charge of a major enterprise with a substantial opportunity to affect the direction of the society was likely to be at least nominally affiliated with one of the leading Protestant denominations. Despite some exceptions to the rule, all branches of the federal government were chiefly in the hands of people born into Protestant families, whatever their degree of commitment to the doctrines and practices of the faith. The same social demography applied to most other major institutions, including corporations, universities, schools, the service professions, publishing houses, and philanthropic organizations. Protestantism mattered.

Indeed, Protestantism mattered in the United States much more than in any of the other industrialized societies of the North Atlantic West. Some of the Protestant missionaries going abroad from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries also came to believe their own religious and cultural inheritances were too narrow. But except for influencing their own churches, they had little impact. What Anglican missionaries had to say amounted to less because Anglicanism, despite its constitutionally established status, was no longer in 1940 nearly as influential a frame for national life as ecumenical Protestantism remained in the United States. Nor were missionaries the primary source of information about foreign peoples. Colonial empires brought substantial quantities of foreign experience into popular view, and on steeply hierarchical terms. The United States was anomalous. It still possessed an intensely Protestant national culture, and it had fewer civil servants and military personnel going back and forth from colonies to homeland. Americans were accustomed to dealing with the native population of North America, sometimes through missions and often through genocide, but foreign missions brought an otherwise relatively sheltered population into abrupt contact with a great range of peoples who were very different from themselves.

What the missionaries did in the company of those foreign peoples has since been a matter of widespread embarrassment. Missionaries from the United States and Europe often did exactly what their harshest critics claimed. They supported imperialist projects, accepted the white supremacist ideology of the West, imposed narrow moral codes, and infantilized the peoples they imagined they were serving. It is no wonder that many nationalist movements scorned and killed missionaries. The Boxer Rebellion in China had many sources and made few distinctions among those who became its victims, but the rebels had plenty of cause to identify missionaries with the imperialism of the Western powers.⁸ All this is true. But it is the only truth about missionary history that is widely understood.

The narrowness of prevailing attitudes toward missionaries is revealed by the speed with which the term “missionary position” caught on and how popular it remained long after it was shown to be based on a factual error. Alfred Kinsey in the 1940s said that South Pacific islanders had used the term to describe face-to-face sexual intercourse with the woman lying on her back. This position had long been known as “matrimonial.” Kinsey had simply misread— probably in an honest mistake—Bronislaw Malinowski’s *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*. That book reports the islanders’ comments about “white traders, planters, [and] officials,” not missionaries. Following Kinsey, it became standard to display moral superiority to missionaries by invoking “the missionary position” as an emblem for their limited sexual imagination and for the “on top” location they were understood to maintain in their relations with indigenous peoples.⁹ In 2001, Robert Priest’s discovery of Kinsey’s error was not altogether welcome. None of the seventeen anthropologists invited by the editors of *Current Anthropology* to comment found fault with Priest’s research, but most were reluctant to grant its significance. Some justified ignoring Priest’s discovery altogether. We may have “an ethical and political obligation” to continue to speak of the missionary position exactly as we have been doing, concluded one scholar. The usage expressed a large truth, and we should not be sidetracked by the particulars of this case. Another quoted several missionary manifestos about the need to convert the peoples of the world to Christianity and argued, therefore, that “missionaries have made their own bed” and are to blame if anthropologists and others continue to use the phrase. A third counseled recognition of the “rational kernel” contained by traditional usage of “the missionary position.”¹⁰

A colonial, exploitative image of the missionary project was kept alive by Barbara Kingsolver’s bestselling novel of 1998, *The Poisonwood Bible*. In her telling of the missionary story in the Belgian Congo, missionaries

arrogantly refused to engage with indigenous cultures and were oblivious to the humanity of the people to whom they ostensibly ministered.¹¹ Nadine Gordimer had little patience for this narrative. “The facts disprove” the old tale of missionaries as the inevitable agents of empire, the great South African writer railed in 2003, reminding readers that the church’s gospel produced many anticolonial activists who were “inspired by the rebel Jesus’ example” and remained “unreconciled” to colonialism. Missionaries were prominent in that important “minority of colonizers, mainly of the Left,” Gordimer continued, “who identified themselves with the position that colonialism was unjust, racist, and anti-human.”¹²

Recent scholarship has emphasized the aspects of missionary history to which Gordimer referred, and even when missionaries behaved in ways now considered reprehensible, they often lost control of Christianity to indigenous peoples who made their own uses of tools left to them by missionaries.¹³ Missionaries established schools, colleges, medical schools, and other technical infrastructures that survived into the postcolonial era. Missionaries were especially active in advancing literacy. They translated countless books into indigenous languages, produced dictionaries, and created written versions of languages that had been exclusively oral. Some missionary institutions became vital incubators of anti-imperialist nationalisms, as in the case of the American University in Beirut, founded in 1866, and the alma mater of several generations of Arab nationalist leaders. Christianity itself has assumed shapes in the Global South quite different from the contours designed by European and American evangelists. Religious voices purporting to speak on behalf of indigenous peoples have occasionally claimed that the missionary impact was beneficial for endowing local populations with Christian resources that proved to be invaluable.¹⁴ Feminist scholars have called attention to the ways in which African women were able to use Christianity—for all the patriarchal elements in its scriptures— as a tool for increasing their autonomy, especially in choosing their own spouses.¹⁵

Scholars continue to inquire just where and how the actions of missionaries affected the subsequent histories of the societies they influenced.¹⁶ That inquiry is an important and contested aspect of today’s discussions of colonialism and the postcolonial order that is largely beyond the scope of *Protestants Abroad*. But not altogether. As scholars come to recognize the interactive dimensions of the missionary project, we can comprehend that project itself as a genuinely global, dialectical event. Missions were part of the world-historical process by which the world we call modern was created.¹⁷

This book's cast of characters was involved with missions in three different capacities. The first of these was service abroad as a missionary. People routinely classified as missionaries included not only evangelists, but teachers, doctors, nurses, YMCA leaders, university professors, and social service workers affiliated in any way with institutions and programs sponsored by missionary societies, churches, and missionary-friendly foundations. All were understood to be part of the greater missionary enterprise, even though some would say, "I wasn't really a missionary," by way of explaining they were not directly involved in evangelism. A second order of involvement was to grow up as the child of missionaries, often spending many years in the field. The third capacity was the least direct: to be closely associated with missionaries, typically through missionary support organizations.

Although there were persons of both sexes in all three of these categories, the gender ratio was different in each case. In the field, about two-thirds of missionary personnel were women, either unwed or married to male missionaries. Missions afforded women opportunities to perform social roles often denied to them in the United States. Glass ceilings in the mission field were higher and more subject to exceptions than in most American communities. By the 1950s, nearly half of the missionary physicians in India were female. Women led many colleges in China. These included one of the most famous missionaries of all time, Minnie Vautrin, who turned the campus of Ginling College into a fortress during the Nanking Massacre of 1937 and 1938. She is credited with saving several thousand Chinese women from rape and murder at the hands of marauding Japanese soldiers.¹⁸ Women were sometimes allowed to preach in the mission field, even though Paul the Apostle had told the Christians of Corinth, "Let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience."¹⁹ While home on furlough, female preachers were often prohibited from speaking from the pulpits of their own denominations, sometimes even in their home congregations.²⁰

Among missionary children, there were of course equal numbers of males and females. In missionary support organizations, women were very prominent. Most denominations had women's missionary boards that exercised strong influence in church affairs and stood among the largest women's organizations in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These women's missionary boards were often active on social issues, urging their denominations to take more vigorous stands, especially against racism. A group of 150 women from the various

denominational missionary boards picketed a Washington, D.C., hotel in 1945 to protest its refusal to serve black members of the United Council of Church Women.²¹

To understand the lives of these men and women, it is essential to begin with chronology. American churches sent missionaries abroad from early in the nineteenth century, but the numbers increased rapidly in the mid-1880s. From then until World War II, missionaries were the primary source of information for most Americans about the non-European world, especially Asia.²² Newspaper correspondents, travel writers, *National Geographic Magazine*, world's fairs, and the public representations of diplomats and businessmen all contributed impressions of non-European peoples. Missions were different; they provided a more intimate and enduring connection. Local churches often financed particular missionary families, with whom they regularly corresponded for many years. Religious periodicals kept foreign scenes constantly in front of readers in millions of American homes. The lectures delivered by missionaries on furlough were widely attended events in local communities as well as at regional and national meetings of denominations and cross-denominational organizations. The bravery and heroism of missionaries was the stuff of countless pamphlets and periodicals and memorials. The "Memorial Arch" on the Oberlin College campus, honoring the thirteen Oberlin graduates and their five children killed in the Boxer Rebellion, is a well-known example.²³

World War II and the decolonization of Asia and Africa catapulted missionary-connected Americans into positions of unprecedented importance because they were so far ahead of the global curve. That is why so much of this book is about the 1940s and 1950s. Knowledge of distant lands suddenly became much more functional. Individuals with experience abroad in business or diplomacy were also in demand, but their numbers were smaller and their language skills rarely as well-developed. After World War II, the public had many more sources of information about foreign countries. Never again would missionaries serve as the leading edge of American society's engagement with the remote regions of the globe. But in the short run, missionary expertise was much in demand.

When former missionary Kenneth Landon was called to Washington in 1941 to advise President Roosevelt on the situation in Southeast Asia, he discovered that the US government's entire intelligence file on Thailand consisted of a handful of published articles that he himself had written. When Edwin Reischauer was installed as the head of a military language training program in 1942, he noticed, upon arriving in Washington to take charge of his unit, that every person in the room was, like him, a child

of missionaries or had spent time as a missionary. The China and Arab sections of the Foreign Service included a number of missionary sons. The Office of Strategic Services—predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency—employed many missionaries and missionary children. The ability of OSS agent Rosamond Frame to speak the nine dialects of Mandarin she learned as a missionary daughter in China opened discursive doors that would otherwise have remained closed.

Chronological distinctions are thus crucial for understanding the timing and character of the role missionary-connected Americans played in public life. These distinctions are important, too, for understanding the shifting priorities of the missionary enterprise itself and the cultural orientation and class position of different missionary cohorts.

The great surge of missionaries going abroad in the 1880s and 1890s included many fervently evangelical men and women who believed that the world might end fairly soon. Quick conversion was necessary. Missionaries of this otherworldly orientation were only marginally interested in establishing long-term institutions. They also saw little reason to immerse themselves in local cultures. By 1900, however, and especially by the 1910s, the proportion of missionaries affected by the worldly priorities of the social gospel had increased.

Missionaries of this more down-to-earth and reformist persuasion were quicker than their apocalyptic colleagues to assess and respond to the immediate needs of indigenous populations by building schools and launching other service programs designed to help people cope with life in the here and now. Missionaries inspired by the social gospel were also more likely to be engaged by global politics. Many admired Woodrow Wilson's vision of the world, according to which the great powers would learn to cooperate with each other and together promote the self-determination of all peoples. These more worldly missionaries were also better educated. They were familiar with the basics of the Higher Criticism of the bible. A sense that even the truest of faiths took form through real people acting in real time made them more sympathetic with the religious and cultural practices they encountered.

These liberal missionaries sometimes allowed that Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism were early stages of a spiritual development that would eventually lead to a fully Christian world. This had long been a Protestant perspective on Judaism. It proved quite easy to apply the same idea to what came to be called the world's other Great Religions. Missionaries departing for the field after 1900, and the children born to them, were more likely than their predecessors to discard blatantly ethnocentric and

colonialist perspectives. Eventually, many of their descendants rejected as condescending even the notion that other religions were stepping-stones toward Christ. But in the meantime, this “stepping-stone” conception of the function of non-Christian religions served as a genuine stepping-stone in its own right, enabling American Protestants traveling away from the parochialism of the original missionary calling to get to some other place. As so often in history, an outlook later generations found lacking in courage and truthfulness had once served as a crucial means of intellectual transformation.

These men and women were almost always shaped by what came to be called the “mainline” or “ecumenical” denominations that controlled the spiritual capital of American Protestantism through the 1960s. This proud company included Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, Dutch Reformed, Episcopalians, Northern Baptists, Quakers, several Lutheran denominations, and a smattering of smaller Anabaptist and Reformed confessions.²⁴ Each of these groups had internal divisions. Some were sharply divided during the fundamentalist-modernist disputes of the 1920s and 1930s. All contained strongly historicist and social gospel cadres. These classic American denominations saw themselves as part of a single, if quarrelsome family, institutionalized in the Federal Council of Churches and various issue-specific, transdenominational organizations.

There was another churchly family. This second constellation consisted of the Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assemblies of God, the Southern Baptist Convention, and other denominations that were actually defined by fundamentalism or extremely aggressive evangelism. The denominations in this second family were hostile to the social gospel and to historical biblical criticism, and less engaged by Wilsonian efforts to reform international politics. The Protestants in this second family had their own missions abroad, and eventually took over most of the American Protestant missionary enterprise when the liberal groups of the first family pulled back from it in the 1950s and 1960s. Evangelicals developed their own network of periodicals, colleges, seminaries, and recreational facilities.

Since this second family of Protestants cooperated among themselves, one might ask why they are not also called “ecumenical”? Part of the answer is that the first family cooperated earlier and more ambitiously, and on the basis of more flexible notions of what was essential to the gospel. For many in the second family, biblical “inerrancy” was essential, requiring a host of particulars, including the virgin birth and

physical resurrection of Jesus and a literal reading of the creation story in Genesis. For the Pentecostal groups within this second family, immediate religious experience was central. It would be misleading to apply the term “ecumenical” to this second family, especially after the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942. From then on, this second family of Protestants successfully claimed for itself a label—*evangelical*—that earlier applied to any Protestant concerned with bringing more souls into the faith.²⁵ A polemical defense of the evangelical party put the point cogently in a 1956 book title: *Cooperation without Compromise*. The evangelicals “cooperated,” while the ecumenists “compromised.”²⁶

The evangelical family resented the social status of the ecumenical family and generally shunned it for having betrayed the gospel by accommodating too much of modern culture. The ecumenical family largely ignored the evangelicals or patronized them as poor country cousins. This changed when the evangelical family gained political prominence in the Ronald Reagan era. The rise of evangelical Protestantism in public life followed decades of essentially separatist institution building supported by wealthy political conservatives. When the Republican Party developed its no-compromise agenda against the traditions of the New Deal and Great Society, Republican leaders found in evangelical Protestantism a sizable constituency well insulated from the liberal mainstream and eager for a chance to exercise greater influence.²⁷

In the midcentury decades, the overwhelming majority of the missionary-connected men and women who became prominent in American public life were products of one or another of the classically liberal denominations and the colleges and seminaries they had founded. This was true no matter where they fell as individuals on the relevant spectra of personal beliefs and practices. They went to Amherst, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Oberlin, Princeton, Swarthmore, and Yale, or to colleges more closely affiliated with churches, such as Carleton, Occidental, Pomona, and Wooster. The second family sent its children instead to Bob Jones, Calvin, Mercer, Westmont, Wheaton, or one of a number of scattered bible institutes. The adjective “mainline” caught on to describe the ecumenical family because its members were recognized as players in national life and as stakeholders in its major institutions.

Rarely before the end of the twentieth century did missionary-connected Americans from the second family become leaders in any institutional or discursive domain beyond evangelical Protestantism itself.²⁸ They simply did not become outspoken Foreign Service officers, civil rights activists, Ivy League professors, or critically acclaimed writers.

Often, this evangelical family resisted the very changes in American public life promoted by the missionary-connected Americans of the ecumenical family. A study of foreign missions as such—rather than a study like this one, of their impact on American public life—would have much more to say about the evangelical family, which has maintained a robust foreign missionary project all the way down to the present.

Where are African Americans in this story? A number of the churches within each of these two Protestant families had African American congregants, some of whom participated in the missionary project. But not many. The most renowned African American missionary was William Henry Sheppard, sent by the Southern Presbyterians to the Congo, where he gained fame for helping to expose King Leopold II's depredations against the Congolese. But Sheppard persistently refused to criticize white Americans and, as James Campbell has shown, "adapted seamlessly to life in the Jim Crow South" when he returned from Africa in 1909.²⁹ Black missionaries "were sent by white churches only to tropical area of western and central Africa," notes Walter L. Williams, "where disease took a great toll on white missionaries." This toll was exacted from black missionaries, too, of course, which was not always appreciated. Williams adds that by the early twentieth century some of the independent black churches of the United States began to send their own missionaries abroad, mostly to coastal areas in western Africa.

These independent missionary experiences contributed to the development of pan-Africanist ideas within the American black population, but resolutely secular leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois were the most enthusiastic proponents of pan-Africanism. The black missionaries tended to be religiously and culturally conservative. They were even inclined to share "the white stereotypes of African savagery," explains Williams, and they believed that conversion to Christianity would release Africans to the ostensibly fuller humanity of the North Atlantic West.³⁰ Moreover, the black missionary experience was so largely segregated from the missionary projects of both major Protestant families that the latter paid very little attention to it.³¹

What about Americans of Asian descent? Very few were involved in missions, and only a handful of Asian Americans were in a position to influence the public life of the United States in any arena. Their numbers were small prior to Congress's opening of immigration from Asia in 1965, and even the best-educated during the midcentury decades had trouble gaining respectful attention from empowered Anglo-Protestants. The Japanese American men who fought against the Axis powers during

World War II had a hard time gaining acceptance. *Protestants Abroad* does touch upon the lives and activities of some Asian Americans, but usually in relation to missionary sponsors. As whites, the missionaries could get a hearing for things Asian. Hence missionary cosmopolitanism, like the missionary project itself, was largely a white enterprise, reflecting the color hierarchy of the country as a whole.

Du Bois understood this. In the midst of his vigorous attack on white supremacy as a global phenomenon, Du Bois said that white missionaries did as much good as harm. This in itself made them very different from most white people. “The missionaries,” wrote Du Bois in 1945 in his *Color and Democracy*, “represent the oldest invasion of whites, and incur at first the enmity of business and the friendship of natives.” The missionaries have included “all sorts of persons: unworldly visionaries, former pastors out of a job, social workers with and without social science, theologians, crackpots, and humanitarians.” This motley crew has “influenced hundreds of millions of men with results that literally vary from heaven to hell.” The atheist Du Bois reluctantly acknowledged that by 1945, the missionary project was a vital resource for good world politics: “The majority of the best and earnest people of this world are today organized in religious groups,” and the defeat of colonialism depended upon their energies instructed by a scientific understanding of the world. “Missionary effort and social reform” must together put an end to the colonialism.³²

The chronological and cultural distinctions noted above enable us to recognize the difference theology made in how Americans in the mission field reacted to what they found there. The impact of foreign experience was far from unmediated. What people took from the encounter varied to some extent according to the mentalities they brought to it. Missionaries who went abroad with historicist and social gospel perspectives discerned features of local life less visible to missionaries rigidly programmed to see heathens and little else. Overall, the religious orientation of missionaries upon arrival in the field was a good predictor of the speed with which they and their offspring became critics of American provinciality and sympathetic commentators on at least some aspects of the indigenous culture.

In China, by far the largest of the mission fields, personnel recruited to the China Inland Mission were defiantly more conservative than those recruited as YMCA secretaries, or as teachers and professors at missionary-sponsored institutions like Nanking University, Peking Union Medical College, and Yenching University. Theologian Langdon Gilkey, who was teaching English at Yenching when interned by the Japanese after Pearl Harbor, remembered how differently the two groups of

American missionaries behaved during their nearly three years of captivity. Gilkey marveled at the capacity of some of the fundamentalist internees to close their minds to foreign influences, and to feel at home only when they had fled the company of the liberals. The missionaries “whose religion had been graced by liberalism in some form” were “able to meet cooperatively and warmly with others, even with those who had no relation to Christianity at all,” while the fundamentalists were often petty, sanctimonious, and scornful of any in the camp, including the ecumenical missionaries, who did not agree with them. Only the service-focused Salvation Army missionaries, Gilkey insisted, broke the pattern he found among fundamentalists.³³ Of the China-reared individuals I discuss in *Protestants Abroad*, Foreign Service officer John Paton Davies Jr. is highly unusual for having grown up in the China Inland Mission, where a critical mass of theological conservatives prevailed in the fundamentalist side in the fundamentalist-modernist debates of the 1920s and early 1930s.

Chronology is also important for distinguishing home missions from foreign missions. What missionary societies continued throughout most of the twentieth century to call “Home Missions” were survivors of early nineteenth-century initiatives to create evangelical outposts serving the entire population beyond the Appalachian Mountains, including both slave and free states. These initiatives proceeded simultaneously with the spread of foreign missions, but eventually they diverged as foreign missions grew in size and as more and more Anglos in the West joined churches. Once the Anglos of the Mississippi Valley had affiliated, mostly with the Methodists, the Baptists, and the Disciples of Christ, Home Missions focused on the “foreign-like” populations of African Americans, Indians, and immigrant Jews, Hispanics, and Japanese. By the middle of the twentieth century, Home Missions had become largely social welfare programs, still bearing the starkly hierarchical implication that some Americans were to be treated like foreigners because of their race or ethnicity.

The experience of working in Home Missions could inspire individuals to social action and liberalized practices in their own communities, but home missionaries remained in much closer contact with the culture of their natal community than was true for missionaries living abroad for whom it was not as easy to “go home.” This was the case even for mission outposts on Indian reservations. Some Baptists, Methodists, and others who were active in Home Missions were outspoken antiracist voices within their denominational communities.³⁴ But Home Missions did not have remotely as much influence as foreign missions in the formation of

missionary cosmopolitanism. Gallagher did not mention Home Missions; they were not players in the world-historical drama that impressed him.

As the distinction between foreign and home missions implies, part of the foreign missionary projects' significance was purely instrumental. It got Americans to places where fewer Americans would otherwise have gone, even briefly. It sent them to China, Egypt, India, Japan, Angola and other distant places, and gave them a reason to learn the local languages. Prior to World War II, there were relatively few nonmissionary jobs to be had in countries beyond the North Atlantic West. When historian John K. Fairbank traveled in China in the 1930s, doing research for his doctoral dissertation, his American contacts were primarily missionaries.

The missionary project was a much more powerful instrument than commerce or diplomacy in getting Americans deeply embedded in things foreign. Business executives, military officers, and diplomats rarely remained in one place long enough to become as fluent in the indigenous languages. They and their families were also better protected against the violence that periodically erupted against foreigners, especially in China and Arab lands.³⁵ "American and Asian merchants found they needed each other," according to one sensitive treatment of the relationship, because "they shared a profit motive." Business people did not want religion or ideology to get in their way, and often eschewed contact with missionaries.³⁶ Gilkey observed that the many business families interned in the Japanese camp wanted as little as possible to do with missionaries of any theological orientation. The business families Gilkey got to know belonged, he concluded, to an entirely different tribe. They never concerned themselves with "the wider Chinese culture" around them, remained in their "clubs and offices," and attended to the Chinese only as instruments of their commerce.³⁷ Their children, like the parents, almost never learned local languages.

While some missionary children learned only "kitchen Chinese" and its equivalents in other languages, many others counted the foreign tongue as their first language. It was also common to identify as strongly with the foreign country of their upbringing as with America. Even those with a stronger and more unified sense of American identity almost always felt they had been "born a foreigner," as in the title one of the most sensitive of the autobiographies of missionary children, or "a stranger at home," as in the title of another book about missionary children.³⁸

Most of the men and women discussed in this book are missionary children. Therefore, the distinctive features of mission childhoods invite

further exploration. Missionary children were in the missionary project from the start; they were its heirs. Some decided to become missionaries themselves, but most did not. The “mish kids” are an identifiable population; some compared themselves to “an ethnic group.”³⁹ To grow up in a missionary community was not simply to live abroad. This experience they shared with nonmissionary children whom sociologists also refer to as “third culture kids” or “global nomads,” usually the children of business, diplomatic, or military families.⁴⁰ The missionary children were immersed in foreign cultures more deeply than most of the other American children raised abroad. Missionary children, moreover, were surrounded by a highly self-conscious version of their own culture, sharply enough defined to enhance its power to influence the people the mission was designed to serve.

Some of the other “global nomads” interacted with missionary children at missionary-sponsored residential schools. The most important were Kodikanal and Woodstock in South Asia, the Shanghai American School and the North China American School in China, and the American Community School in the Middle East. Not until well after World War II did the Department of Defense develop its own global network of schools designed for the children of military personnel. Whatever the values of the parents, the children were taught by missionary-employed teachers and had as their own classmates and roommates—at least for a brief time—the sons and daughters of missionaries. The missionary-sponsored schools could thus blur the difference between growing up in a missionary family and in a business or diplomatic family, but only temporarily.⁴¹

The special circumstances of missionary children inspired widespread discussion within the churches beginning about 1930.⁴² A study of several hundred Methodist missionary children from India found that the sons and daughters of missionaries were much more likely to attend college and to obtain postgraduate degrees than other Americans, and that they “tend to become cosmopolitan in their interests.”⁴³ More cosmopolitan, but also, it was often said, more traumatized by the cultural shock of adjusting to life in the United States, regardless of their age when they left the foreign mission field.⁴⁴ From the 1930s to the present, missionary organizations have offered advice to missionary children on how to cope with the distinctive psychological traumas associated with a missionary upbringing.⁴⁵

It is far from clear that missionary children as adults were disproportionately subject to emotional problems and mental illness, more likely to be depressed or to commit suicide than others in their age cohort. Nor do I find reliable evidence that parental religious beliefs, parenting

styles, the mission environment, encounter with “natives,” or any other specific set of factors correlate more than others with the psychological stress of missionary children. Yet that such risks were greater for them has been taken for granted. The memoirs of even the most successful of missionary children comment on the psychological challenges they experienced in adjusting to mainstream American life. Princeton University president and ambassador Robert Goheen felt his own experience was relatively easy, in part because he was a younger son and had the experiences of his older siblings to make the entry into American society less traumatic.⁴⁶ So firmly established is this pattern in the self-representation of missionary children that John Hersey included the travails of an emotionally disturbed missionary son in *The Call*, a novel of 1986 designed as a panoramic commentary on the American missionary experience in China.⁴⁷

The literature on missionary children identifies a number of sources for this pervasive sense of psychological risk. Separation from parents to attend boarding school or to live with relatives in the United States was one. Another was the culture shock of immersion in American life as a teenager after having spent one’s childhood in a different environment. Alternating between one household abroad and another in an American community made some children feel that they lacked a single and stable home. Some missionary parents left the impression that their labors were so important (“I must be about my father’s business,” Jesus told followers who wanted his attention, according to Luke 2:49) that the needs of children became secondary.

In one searching autobiographical meditation, Mennonite J. D. Stahl describes his own “quest from loneliness toward belonging” as demanding great efforts to assign meaning to experiences much more diverse than those of the nonmissionary families he knew back home in Virginia. Growing up not knowing just where he belonged, he “even envied bigots” because of “the security of their prejudices.” Eventually, his experience as a missionary son led him to reject “the cultural assumptions that accompanied much of missions: we are saved, you are lost; we are advanced, you are backward; we have the way of the future, you are shipwrecked in the past.” Instead, concludes Stahl, the ultimate message of his own life was expressed in Cromwell’s cautionary reminder “I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.” Connecting the old Puritan past with his own appreciation for scientific modernity, Stahl cited Cromwell as “quoted by Jacob Bronowski in *The Ascent of Man* as Bronowski knelt in the mud at Auschwitz.”⁴⁸

The first conversation I ever had with a missionary child, many decades before I ever imagined studying missionaries, was about a feeling of having been abandoned. A family friend told me that when she was eleven her missionary parents left her and several younger siblings with an aunt and uncle in Ohio while the parents returned to India after a year's furlough. She never forgave them, and I have never forgotten how affected she was, forty years later, describing her experience. Her parents told the story in different terms, in keeping with the official ideal of stoic, self-effacing children: the girl tearlessly assured her mother, "We'll get along all right," as she bade farewell to her parents. This religiously correct version of the goodbye found its way into the hagiographic biography of the girl's father published by church authorities.⁴⁹

There were plenty of "casualties," one missionary daughter reminded a girlhood friend when they were both middle aged in the 1970s, marveling that they had survived as well as they had.⁵⁰ One of the most frequently mentioned casualties was Pearl Buck's brother, Edgar Sydenstricker, who managed a successful career as an epidemiologist before alcoholism seriously disabled him while still in his forties. Another widely noticed casualty was Joan Smythe. In 1963, this China-born daughter of a leading Disciples of Christ missionary couple took her own life at the age of twenty-nine, while a graduate student at Harvard. The death surprised her family and friends, several of whom still remember her as an unusually tough, sophisticated woman and cannot fathom why she ended her life.⁵¹

Joseph Littell had a sister who killed herself in the family kitchen when she was in her early twenties. Littell eventually had a successful career as a publisher, but "Let's face it—our family statistics are staggering," he wrote of himself and his siblings. All were born in the 1910s and 1920s to Episcopalian missionaries to China. Referring to himself and his siblings as "we mish kids," Littell noted that "of the eight of us, three remained single," and the other five "accumulated a sorry record of fourteen marriages and eight divorces." A brother was diagnosed as schizophrenic.⁵²

Missionary children who escaped becoming "casualties" were often high achievers. Of the twelve missionary sons who finished high school at the Kodikanal School in India in 1949, eleven later obtained either MD or PhD degrees.⁵³ Most made similar career choices. The missionary children who left a mark on American life did so most often in education, scholarship, science, medicine, literature and the arts, or social services. Only a few pursued careers in business, law, or engineering. Those who went into medicine often did so as missionary doctors. Many testified that the most important legacy of the missionary experience for their career choices was

a desire to live a life of “service,” however defined. “We were supposed to make the world a better place,” as Goheen put it.⁵⁴ “I had been raised to think that the purpose in life,” wrote Edwin O. Reischauer, “was to make one’s maximum contribution to society, however humble that might be.”⁵⁵ Few were comfortable with openly profit-making vocations.

The missionary children who made their way into the *American National Biography* exemplify this pattern decisively. Thirty identifiable missionary children born between 1860 and 1920 to parents stationed outside the North Atlantic West are the subject of biographical articles in the *ANB*.⁵⁶ Six of the thirty spent all or a substantial part of their careers in the mission field themselves, several as doctors. These six earned a place in the *ANB* through their contributions in the mission field, and are less pertinent to an inquiry into the role of missionary-connected Americans in the public life of the United States. The remaining twenty-four constitute an ideal sample of high-achieving missionary children who spent their adulthoods in America.

Half of the twenty-four were writers, academics, or scientists who worked largely outside academia. In addition to these dozen intellectually focused individuals, one was a composer and another was an architect. This vocational pattern differs somewhat from that of Jewish counterparts, many of whom had distinguished careers in business and law as well as science, scholarship, and the arts. Only two of the twenty-four *ANB* missionary children went into business and another two into the legal profession. None of those four had typical careers. The publishing magnate Henry Luce got into business through journalism and, for all his moneymaking, was always more interested in changing the world than adding to his fortune. The oil company executive William A. Eddy did not get into business until he was fifty, after substantial careers as a professor of English literature and as a Marine Corps intelligence officer. James Landis was primarily an academic administrator and government official, serving as dean of Harvard Law School and as chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission.⁵⁷ The other lawyer, Jerome Greene, was a close adviser to three Harvard presidents and was a senior consultant to the Rockefeller Foundation.

The same vocational pattern is evident in what we know of other missionary sons and daughters, most of whom did not, of course, find their way into the *ANB*. In the 1970s, Sarah R. Mason surveyed two hundred former students of the Shanghai American School. She found that the most common occupations were higher education, Foreign Service or CIA, clergy or other church work, and elementary or secondary education.

Only two of Mason's two hundred were lawyers. Some became doctors or nurses, many of whom then worked in missionary hospitals.⁵⁸

Not all missionary-connected Americans were engaged in the kinds of careers on which I focus in this book. My attention is directed at people who affected the public life of the country. Some missionary-connected individuals simply pursued one profession or another with great distinction. Missionary daughter Anne Tyng (1920–2011) was an influential architect. Missionary son Bentley Glass (1906–2005) was a leading biologist and a president of the American Association of University Professors. Actresses Jayne (1919–2015) and Audrey (1922–1996) Meadows were the daughters of Episcopalian missionaries to China. Brigadier General David “Tex” Hill (1915–2007), born in Korea as the son of Presbyterian missionaries, was a successful fighter pilot during World War II and had a distinguished military career after the war. Labor economist John T. Dunlop (1914–2003), who served briefly as secretary of labor under President Gerald Ford, grew up in the Philippines as the son of Presbyterian missionaries. China-born John Espey (1913–2000) was an accomplished literary critic and memoirist, as well as the celebrated pseudonymous coauthor of what were called the “Monica books,” a series he candidly described as “airplane literature for smart people.”⁵⁹ There are many others.

One missionary son who made a distinctive mark as a novelist in 1941 but was never heard from again invites attention here because he was the first person to use the word “multicultural” in print. So the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us. The term did not achieve wide use until nearly fifty years later. Edward F. Haskell (1906–1986) was born in a Bulgarian province of the Ottoman Empire as the son and grandson of missionaries. His *Lance: A Novel about Multicultural Men* tells the story of Lanceton Tenorton, a British officer in World War I who had grown up in Germany after having been adopted there as a foreign orphan. Tenorton is accused of treason because of his contacts with the German military. At Tenorton's court-martial, his advocate explains that the accused is “mixed, not only biologically but also culturally and legally.” In the dock stood a British citizen who “speaks, reads, and writes six languages” and is an example of a future the court should contemplate: a global future in which all peoples “are rapidly being scrambled.”⁶⁰ The hero had indeed been in contact with the enemy. Haskell does not resolve his fate, but focuses instead on the meaning of the trial, which was, above all, that multicultural individuals glimpse enough of the world to be worried about their own ignorance about the rest of it.

Tenorton's communist-influenced American wife, along with the couple's closest friend, an American who had grown up in South Africa,

try to understand what world-historical transformations have done to them. “We, being children of the great age of transportation and communication,” the friend remarks, “have contacts with *many* languages, *many* faiths, and *many* nations. We are *multicultural*.” When facing the globe’s vastness, “we and all multicultural people . . . crawl shakily out of the national narrows.” We are equipped with “no more than half-evolved world feeling and world knowledge.”

We see things relatively instead of as absolutes. We think multiordinarily instead of in fixed patterns. We find ourselves at odds with strong, sure unicultural people. We feel sure that our vision is much truer than the vision of provincial people. We see their mistakes. We try to save us and them from themselves, and lead everyone to a higher, and we hope, happier way of life.⁶¹

Read today, the prose in *Lance* comes across as rather wooden, and its tone and substance heavily didactic. Some of Haskell’s efforts to create a new vocabulary—“multiordinarily,” for example, and “unicultural”—seem clunky now, just as *multicultural* must have seemed in 1941. For all the literary limitations of *Lance*, it stands as a register of the antiprovincial feelings common among missionary-connected Americans of Haskell’s generation. It serves also as ideological bridge to the preoccupations of later generations, as exemplified by Nathan Glazer’s book of 1997, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*.⁶²

What most connects Haskell with the multiculturalist enthusiasms of the 1990s is his insistence on a balance between challenging and respecting particular cultures. Against the model of “assimilation of ethnic minorities and immigrants,” explains literary scholar Werner Sollors, Haskell presents Tenorton’s having become German “as a reversible process through which a new identity is added while the old one is not erased.” *Lance* espouses a cosmopolitanism that incorporates several identities within a single individual. Haskell encouraged his readers to believe that deep awareness of the particularity of the world’s communities could produce “social engineering” that would eventually end war as a means of resolving conflicts. Ultimately, it is the United States, not Soviet Russia, which *Lance* holds out as the best possibility for appreciating the highly idealistic version of multiculturalism that his characters represent.⁶³

Lance was well received. The *New York Times* and the *Saturday Review* published appreciative reviews. But it has been given almost no critical attention.⁶⁴ Haskell never wrote another novel, or a book of any kind. He was briefly a political activist, serving as executive secretary of the

International Committee for Political Prisoners, an organization close to the American Civil Liberties Union. After a hit-and-miss academic career as a sociologist and philosopher, Haskell lived quietly in New York on an inheritance, working on a polymathic study of “unified science” that remained incomplete when he died in obscurity in 1986.⁶⁵ That apparently abortive effort to bringing things together—so typical an aspiration for missionary children—was mentioned as being in progress forty-five years earlier, on the dust jacket of *Lance*, which is one of the few sources of information about this elusive figure in American literary history. The dust jacket also described Haskell as a convert to Quakerism, a religious persuasion obviously compatible with his political and social ideals, and represented Haskell’s own life as an embodiment of a multicultural experience and of a multiculturalist ideological stance toward diversity:

When he was three, his American father, Swiss mother, and Bulgarian neighbors so affected him that he was speaking a conglomeration of English, Swiss-German, and Bulgarian. However, as his primary schooling progressed—in America, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Switzerland—he was obliged to differentiate sharply not only among languages, but among customs, rules of behavior, and politico-religious views. . . . He was forced either to become a human chameleon, changing his world-view with every change in country . . . or else to develop a world-view that fitted everywhere, a multicultural view.⁶⁶

Three of Haskell’s most famous and globally engaged contemporaries are the subjects of the following chapter. Their debates with each other and their self-interrogations blend with the conversations of Haskell’s fictional characters. Just what did it mean to try to embrace the whole world in a single cosmopolitan vision? Henry Luce, Pearl Buck, and John Hersey were all missionary children from China who knew each other as adults. Their lives have never been extensively considered in relation to one another. Their differences and similarities highlight the major themes of *Protestants Abroad*, including the strong Asian component in missionary cosmopolitanism.

Before turning to this remarkable threesome, I want to observe that few missionary-connected Americans understood the world as fully as they supposed they did. In this failing, they resembled almost everyone else. Often, missionary cosmopolitans retained hierarchical assumptions and Orientalist attitudes, even if less pronounced than among the people against whom they struggled. From a twenty-first century perspective, the anti-imperialism of many of the people discussed in *Protestants Abroad*

looks less complete than they thought it was, and more functional than they realized in the advancing of distinctly American national interests. Some of their formulations come across now as naïvely hopeful about the capacities of different kinds of human beings to work together.

Yet a substantial measure of what these people said and did resists condescension. Insofar as poor comprehension of the world's peoples continues to be a prominent and dangerous feature of American politics and culture, the saga of missionary-connected Americans is all the more instructive. They learned it was hard to be a "citizen of the world," but they put more effort into it than most of their contemporaries. They experienced to a higher degree and within a broader context than most Americans the tension between inclusion and identity, between an impulse to bring everyone together and a need to make a community viable by defining it in some particular set of terms. This tension existed first in the missionary project itself: How could Christianity be configured so it could work for all human souls and still be Christian? Second, it was manifest in the national project of the United States: how could the liberal ideals for which America ostensibly stood become instruments of human progress without either losing their character or being exposed as mere masks for the interests of a single nation? In both cases, the world's prodigious diversity heightened the tension between a drive to include and a drive to define.⁶⁷ Understanding how far these proto-multiculturalists and proto-world-citizens got—and where they stopped or were derailed by others—can be part of the ongoing effort of Americans to figure out the boundaries of their community and to decide just what their role in the world can and should be.