CHAPTER 1

The American Missionary Encounter in Egypt

THE MISSIONARY ENCOUNTER

In 1854 American Presbyterian missionaries arrived in Egypt as part of a larger Anglo-American Protestant movement that aimed for universal evangelization. Protected by the armor of British imperial power and later by mounting American global influence, their enterprise flourished during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and enabled them to establish the largest Protestant mission in the country. This book describes the massive, mutual, and ongoing transformations that their activities in Egypt set off.

In the century that stretched from 1854 until decolonization in the mid-1950s, American missionaries opened dozens of schools, medical facilities, and public libraries; initiated rural development programs to improve livestock and reduce the spread of endemic diseases; and vigorously promoted literacy campaigns, especially for the sake of Bible reading. They thought of themselves not only as Christian evangelizers but also as ambassadors for the United States and as promoters of American culture and modernity. However, despite a century of work among Egypt's Muslim majority and indigenous Coptic Christian minority, they gained few converts. By the mid-1950s they claimed some 200 living converts from Islam within a small Evangelical Presbyterian community of just under 27,000 members, most of whom had come from Coptic Orthodoxy.[1]

American missionaries nevertheless exerted a significant social impact on Egypt and influenced many Muslims and Coptic Christians who resisted or rejected evangelical appeals. Missionaries dramatically expanded educational opportunities for Egyptian females, both Muslim and Christian, and contributed to a reconfiguration of gender roles and relations.[2] They inadvertently mobilized anti-colonial nationalists and Islamists against a perceived cultural onslaught, galvanizing men like Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. By associating themselves with British colonial and American consular powers while working closely with local Christians, they planted doubts among many Muslims about the likely pro-Western sympathies of Egyptian Christians—doubts that continue to strain

Egyptian intercommunal relations today. Missionaries established a new Egyptian Protestant church, called the Evangelical Church, and spurred the indigenous Coptic Orthodox Church to revise its modes of worship. They started social service projects such as youth clubs that were so popular that Egyptian Muslim and Coptic Orthodox leaders rushed to develop homegrown alternatives.[3]

Missionary experiences in Egypt also had repercussions for American society, confirming the notion that "nations lie enmeshed in each others' history."[4] With counterparts in other Middle Eastern countries, missionaries in Egypt set a "founding relationship between America and the Arab world."[5] They transmitted information and opinions that influenced U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East.[6] However, they also challenged U.S. policies, particularly after 1948 vis-à-vis Israeli and Palestinian affairs, when American Presbyterians in Egypt voiced loud support for the Arab peoples.[7] Discouraged by social obstacles in Egypt that hindered Muslim conversion to Christianity, missionaries led debates about religious liberty and human rights that continue to resonate in the halls of the U.S. Congress and Department of State.[8] Missionaries shaped many of the underpinnings of American Orientalism—American modes of imagining, speaking about, portraying, and behaving toward the Islamic world—whether these emanated from scholars, military planners, filmmakers, or tourists. Within American universities, they helped define the field that has been variously called Oriental, Near Eastern, and Middle Eastern studies.[9] (Indeed, it was a close ally of the Protestant evangelical cause, the American naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan, who coined the term "Middle East" in 1902.)[10] Missionaries also provided new models for American public philanthropy in the "developing world."[11] Finally, missionaries helped stimulate far-reaching changes in American Christianity. They forced reassessments of Christian mission that still roil American Protestantism and mobilized women within churches to an unprecedented degree, paving the way for women's entry into the clergy.[12]

American missionary encounters bridged the United States to Egypt and were intensely local, global, and transnational at once. In Egypt and the United States, these encounters involved men, women, and children living in places that ranged from small farming communities to large cities. Egyptian participants in these encounters included those who attended missionary schools, sought treatment from missionary hospitals, and read missionary literature in Arabic or English; they even included those who railed against missionaries from the distance of a mosque pulpit or newspaper column. The American base of participation went beyond missionaries, too, to include above all the

churchgoers who looked to a popular literature of Christian journals, travelogues, and storybooks for news and views of the Middle East. Individually, or as congregations, these rank-and-file churchgoers gave the money that kept missions afloat. The most dedicated and financially able gave funds to sponsor specific missionaries, institutions, or scholarships. In this manner, for example, financial bonds and special projects linked Presbyterians in Keokuk, Iowa, and Lyndhurst, New Jersey, to Assiut and Zagazig in Egypt.[13] Donations to missions could also be incidental and small-scale—as simple as putting coins in one of the envelopes that churches distributed during worship services, and then checking off a box to mark the money for "home" or "foreign" missions.[14] If nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain was a country of "absent-minded imperialists,"[15] then the United States in this same period was a country of "absent-minded evangelists." Americans could stay seated in their pews and send pennies to Egypt, or support work among Indians, whether of the Punjabi ("foreign mission") or Navajo ("home mission") variety.

As part of a Western colonial "visitation," missionary activity prompted reciprocal migrations. That is, Americans in Egypt helped issue the call—the cultural, political, and economic beckoning—that prompted Egyptian visits to the United States in the form of emigration and settlement.[16] The first members of the mission-sponsored Evangelical Church to make this move appear to have been a woman named Warda Barakat and her husband, Girgis Malaik, who left Egypt in 1882 and settled in Monmouth, Illinois, where there was a large United Presbyterian community.[17] In the twentieth century, Egyptian Evangelicals in the United States helped plant hybrid Arabic-speaking Presbyterian congregations in Pasadena, California, and elsewhere.[18] Many other immigrants were Egyptian Muslims and Copts who came to the United States to study after honing their English in schools that missionaries founded.

The American Presbyterians in Egypt also belonged to a global Protestant missionary order. They exchanged letters and information with missionaries in northern India, the Sudan, and Ethiopia who shared the same sponsor in the United Presbyterian Church, and communicated across denominational boundaries to missionaries arrayed throughout the Muslim world from Algiers to Jakarta. Leaders of the American mission in Egypt participated in conferences with missionaries from British, Dutch, German, Scandinavian, and other American organizations—and met in places like New York and Edinburgh, Jerusalem and Lucknow. In this way they helped foster a movement of Christian ecumenism or solidarity among Protestants. In the Middle East, this Protestant ecumenical movement took shape in the

interwar era in the form of the Near East Christian Council (NECC), an organization that evolved in the early 1960s to become the Near East Council of Churches (also NECC), led by the indigenous Middle East churches. This organization evolved further in 1974 to become the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and included, by 1980, Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic members. The inclusion of Middle Eastern Catholic churches in what had originally been a Protestant organization reflected improvements in Protestant-Catholic relations that followed the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65, when the Roman Catholic Church opened windows to intersectarian and interfaith dialogue.[19]

During their first century in Egypt, American missionaries helped Egyptian church members travel to places like Brazil and India for church conferences and study, and, more rarely, for employment. In this way Egyptian Protestants participated in the burgeoning ecumenical and missionary movements and in the global diffusion of Christian cultures. For example, in 1897, the chronicler of the American mission in Egypt proudly noted that one of its converts from Islam, a man named Ahmed Fahmy, was serving with the London Missionary Society (LMS) as a medical missionary in "Chang Chew" (Zhangzhou), southern China.[20] In another case, in 1911, the Americans sought employment for an Egyptian convert from Islam by placing him with a Danish mission in Aden.[21]

The British Empire and Britons were important to the American Presbyterians in Egypt. The Americans looked to British authorities in Egypt for protection and advice but, more important, developed close ties to British missionaries that led them to strategize and, increasingly by the 1930s, to commiserate together. The American missionaries' connections to the British in Egypt, and to American and global networks of Protestant evangelism, make their experiences a case study in the ambiguity of power. The American Presbyterians enjoyed power because they could marshal financial and political resources—above all, donations from the church at home, and protection from British and American consular authorities on the ground. After the British Occupation of 1882, the American missionaries also qualified for protection under the Capitulations—the set of legal and fiscal perquisites, enshrined in treaties, that Western powers had extracted from Ottoman authorities. Endowed with these advantages, missionaries were able to buy property, build schools, travel along the Nile, and distribute Christian tracts for free or at subsidized prices. For many years they even qualified for reduced-fare tickets on Egyptian railways.[22] Missionaries, in short, had the wherewithal to make their message heard up and down the country. Yet in the century after

1854 they often felt, by their own account, vulnerable—when budgets were cut, when converts recanted, or—increasingly in the twentieth century—when the Egyptian government, supported by Muslim nationalists, worked to curtail their activities. Indeed, the power of the American missionaries fluctuated and eventually waned with British influence in Egypt, and this in itself suggests the intricate relationship of missionary activity to imperial power.

Americans had launched their mission in Egypt in 1854 with the expectation or hope that universal evangelization would be possible. They did not expect everyone to convert, but they did presume that Egyptian men and women would be able to exercise individual free choice. They thought that missionaries would be free to deliver a Christian message and that Egyptians would then be free to accept it or not. But in his chronicle of the mission published in 1897, Andrew Watson claimed that when the Americans began work in Egypt, "They found Islam utterly opposed to the idea of religious liberty."[23] He meant that Islamic courts and government authorities favored Muslims over non-Muslims, and that Islamic law, reinforced by Egyptian Muslim social convention, maintained strong deterrents against leaving Islam. (Deterrents included disinheritance, loss of child custody, unilateral divorce for a man, marriage by proxy for a woman, and possibly death.)[24] Yet Andrew Watson believed that Egypt might be changing such that deep-rooted laws and practices might give way to what he expected would be Christianity's advantage. As the twentieth century opened, Andrew Watson's son, the educator Charles R. Watson, was even more sanguine in thinking that modern conditions, reinforced by international diplomacy, might lead to a form of religious liberty that would enable Egyptian Muslims to embrace Christianity and profess it in public.[25] However, the conditions for which Andrew and Charles Watson hoped did not materialize. This was partly because Egyptian Muslims felt beleaguered in the face of Western imperial encroachment and therefore mistrusted the motives of Christian missionaries who clamored for a form of religious liberty that served evangelical interests.[26]

In the history of the American mission in Egypt, the most acute disappointment that the Presbyterians faced was that the Egyptian government (confirming Egyptian Muslim social sentiments at large) never accepted the principle that the exercise of religious liberty and freedom might legitimately allow individuals to renounce Islam. By the mid-twentieth century, some American mission leaders were acknowledging that to be a Christian in Egypt was to live with a social debility, that attempting to evangelize among Muslims was dangerous for Egyptian Christians to do (as Egyptian Evangelical pastors

had been claiming since the nineteenth century), and that conversion out of Islam—the religion of state, the religion of power—would be an unlikely choice for a Muslim.[27]

For missionaries, working in an age of empire had its disadvantages. One unintended impact that American missionaries had on Egypt was to trigger a backlash among Muslim nationalists and activists, who detected in the rare cases of Muslim conversion to Christianity, and in the broad influence of missionary schools, orphanages, and medical clinics, a threat to an Egyptian Muslim public order. By the early 1930s, Christian missionary activities had spurred Egyptian Muslim nationalists to press the government to promote and protect Islam as Egypt's religion of state, particularly by regulating mission schools; their activities also prompted Muslim activists to organize social services as a way of steering Muslims away from Christian missionaries. Anti-missionary agitation ultimately sharpened the lines dividing Muslim and Christian communities in Egypt and pushed missionaries toward a model of evangelism that either focused on the well-being of Christian communities or emphasized Christian faith as the *reason*, but not the goal, of missionary work.

By the late 1930s, it was becoming more difficult for the mission even to attract Copts into the Evangelical Church. Having risen to the challenge of Protestant and Catholic missionaries, the Coptic Orthodox Church was increasingly vibrant in its modes of worship and social outreach such that, as missionaries acknowledged, Copts had fewer reasons to leave it.[28] At the same time the number of Muslim "inquirers" was dwindling, so that Kamil Mansur, a lay preacher who had converted from Islam to Christianity in his youth and whom the mission had hired in 1918 as a special worker to Muslims, was addressing largely Christian audiences in Cairo and Alexandria.[29]

In the 1940s, when the Egyptian government tried to apply laws that forbade mission schools from teaching Christianity to Muslims, missionaries feared that one of their last lines of evangelical contact with Muslims was closing. In 1957, the government of Gamal Abdel Nasser went further: it notified the missionaries that, to continue operating their schools, they would have to continue admitting Muslim students without discrimination and hire government-approved Muslim teachers to instruct Muslim pupils about Islam on the grounds of mission schools. Policies like this encouraged missionaries to focus more of their efforts on social service activities within Christian communities. A retired missionary who had worked in Egypt during this period recalled that he and his colleagues were "of the strong opinion that the future of Christian work in Egypt lay more with the national church itself than with the institutions" like schools and hospitals.[30]

Thus in the late 1950s, missionaries developed a series of new grassroots literacy projects among Christian villagers of Upper Egypt. These projects devolved leadership onto Egyptian clergy and were self-consciously ecumenical, insofar as they required Orthodox and Protestant clergy in each village to work together as a term of receiving financial support.[31] Meanwhile, following the Suez Crisis of 1956 (and therefore even before the start of the Second Vatican Council), the American Presbyterians began to cultivate warmer relations with Coptic Catholic leaders as well. This thaw reflected the growing sense that collegiality was in the interests of all Christians in Egypt.[32] Finally, by the late 1950s, American missionaries in Egypt were beginning to endorse a philosophy of interaction with Muslims that emphasized "respectful witness"—a notion of dialogue built on the premise that a worthy exchange with fellow believers in God need not aim for a change of faith. This approach harmonized with what became known as the interfaith dialogue movement.[33]

By the time the association of American Presbyterian missionaries voted to disband in 1966, a year before the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Egypt had become a less cosmopolitan and more homogeneous society. In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis eleven years earlier, longstanding minority communities of Greeks, Italians, Armenians, and others had dispersed, French and British expatriates had left, while most of Egypt's tiny Jewish population was also gone, its members having opted or been pressured to leave.[34] In this context, Egypt's indigenous Christians, the Copts, were increasingly isolated in a Muslim milieu.[35] Meanwhile, several important changes were occurring in the United States. In contrast to Egypt, the American religious landscape was growing increasingly heterogeneous. For example, the American Presbyterians in Egypt noted that more of their former Muslim students were going the United States for advanced study, work, or settlement, thus contributing to the growth of an American Muslim minority.[36] Church attendance among Presbyterians was declining as new varieties of evangelical Protestantism attracted followers.[37] Women were claiming places within the Presbyterian clergy, contributing to what one of the first ordained female ministers later called an "epic social change."[38] Finally, some Presbyterian missionaries and mission executives, reappraising the church's history of complicity in the culture of racism vis-à-vis African Americans, were becoming active in the American civil rights movement.[39] Thus while anti-colonial nationalism may have been forcing overseas Presbyterian missions into retraction, church leaders in the United States had plenty to do in this period of social ferment. Weathering all these developments was the small but flourishing Coptic Evangelical Church, which testified to the century-long influence in Egypt of an

American evangelical movement that was waning in the United States among Presbyterians themselves.

American Presbyterians on the Home Front

The American mission in Egypt reflected the grassroots Presbyterian evangelical culture of its day. Hence it is worth looking at what missionaries in Egypt called the "home front"—the American social field from which the missionaries emerged.

From the eighteenth century to the present, there has never been a single American Presbyterian church, and this has had implications for Presbyterian missionaries in the Middle East and the wider world. To illustrate this point, staff members at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia distribute a chart to visiting researchers to explain the church structures under which records are organized. Titled "The Presbyterian Family Connections," this chart sets out the lineages of Presbyterian churches in the United States from 1706 to the present.[40] Two points become clear at once because of the chart's bewildering arrangement of cross-cutting lines and bi-directional arrows. First, American Presbyterianism has been a plurality from the start, with today's churches descending from lines that arrived independently in the American colonies. Second, the "family" of American Presbyterianism can be graphed as a history of "unions" and "separations." A closer look at Presbyterian history shows that most separations occurred over political or social ideology—for example, over attitudes toward slavery in the mid-nineteenth century or the ordination of women in the late twentieth century. By contrast, most unions occurred when Presbyterians realized that the things they shared in common were more significant than the social issues that had once kept them apart. Presbyterians have shared, above all, an attitude toward church government emphasizing the laity's role in serving as elders (or presbyters) at local and regional levels of church administration. They have also shared a creed rooted in the heritage of the Protestant Reformation and Calvinism, a theological system associated with the French-Swiss thinker John Calvin (1509–1564) that rejected papal authority and elaborated ideas about God's omnipotence and grace vis-à-vis human salvation.[41]

The Presbyterian missionaries who founded the mission in Egypt in 1854 came from a church known as the Associate Reformed Church that was in the midst of negotiating a union with another branch of the Presbyterian tree in America, namely, the Associate Church. (The use of confusingly similar names for what were actually different organi-

zations seems to have been a common feature of American Presbyterianism; this pattern prevails even today.) The two negotiating churches traced their lineage to dissenters in Scotland who had refused to recognize the authority of the English crown, and of government in general, over Scottish church affairs. However, by the time the Associate and Associate Reformed churches merged in 1858, thereby producing the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA), Scottish dissent and antiroyalism had long receded as issues of concern among the American descendants of Scottish immigrants and had been replaced by a strong antislavery platform.[42] Given this history, it is no accident that the church that sent missionaries to Egypt was also committed, in the United States, to work among African Americans and to what became known after the U.S. Civil War as "freedmen's missions."[43] In the long run, the UPCNA's outreach to African Americans helped diversify what had been until then, in the United States, a Presbyterian community of predominantly Scotch-Irish extraction.

In *The Arabists* (1993), a journalistic account of American missionaries and U.S. foreign-service experts in the Middle East, Robert Kaplan caricatures American Presbyterian missionaries in the Arab world and particularly in Beirut. He portrays them as members of an East Coast, Princeton-educated elite that was firmly connected to nodes of wealth and power. Kaplan's portrayal bears little resemblance to the American missionaries in Egypt, who in any case belonged to a different church from the American Presbyterian missionaries of Greater Syria. The Presbyterian missionaries who struck out in western Asia, as well as in Iran, belonged to the New York City–based Presbyterian Church U.S.A., which drew much of its membership from the mid-Atlantic region. The UPCNA missionaries in Egypt, by contrast, came from a church that had headquarters in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and a membership base in Pennsylvania and midwestern states such as Ohio and Illinois.[44]

Nevertheless, in 1958, the distinction between the UPCNA and PCUSA lapsed when the two churches merged to produce a new entity, the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA). In 1983, the latter church merged again, this time with the southern-stream Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), to produce what is today the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PC[USA]). Based in Louisville, Kentucky, the PC(USA) claimed in 2008 approximately 2.3 million members belonging to more than ten thousand congregations throughout the United States.[45]

To a large degree the UPCNA missionaries in Egypt reflected the demographic of their church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though like most American Protestant missionaries

in this period, they were better educated than the general population.[46] Most UPCNA missionaries were graduates of small midwestern Presbyterian liberal arts colleges (such as Muskingum College in Ohio, Monmouth College in Illinois, and Westminster College in Pennsylvania) that served as feeder schools for the mission.[47]

Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead* (2004), named after an Iowa community, offers an evocation of the home culture to which American missionaries in Egypt had links. Robinson's Gilead—a sleepy town in the 1950s that was once torn by the local history of opposition to slavery—is centered around its Protestant churches, simple structures reflecting the modest means of the people as well as their preference for spending on needs and causes, not architectural adornments. Many of the residents of Gilead never ventured very far beyond Iowa, the novel's narrator, John Ames, recalls, but some did go to college to learn more of the Bible and to study Hebrew and Greek, and a segment of those graduates, "and especially the young women, would go by themselves to the other side of the earth as teachers and missionaries and come back decades later to tell us about Turkey and Korea."[48] Intensely local and yet harnessed to the great world beyond, Gilead, Iowa, seems like the fictional embodiment of the small-town UPCNA communities in places like Oil City, Pennsylvania, that organized late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century "mission circles"—groups within congregations that provided grassroots financial and moral support for the American mission in Egypt.[49]

During its century of existence as a distinct church, from 1858 until 1958 when it merged with the larger Presbyterian Church U.S.A., the UPCNA never had more than about 250,000 members in the United States.[50] Its small size notwithstanding, the UPCNA supported and ran the enterprise in Egypt even as it pursued mission work in Sudan, Ethiopia, and northern India (in a region now mainly in Pakistan), and within the United States among African Americans, Native Americans, Mormons, and urban immigrants, including Chicago Jews, Pittsburgh Roman Catholic Italians, and San Francisco Chinese. Central to the missions of the UPCNA and other American Protestant churches were women, "the hard core of the missionary movement," who raised thousands of dollars annually "through coffee pouring, cookie sales, pennies collected, and the occasional generosity of a rich and pious widow."[51] In a period when the pastorate was restricted to men, UPCNA women also found church careers as missionaries, and by 1901 they outnumbered men in the Egyptian field—a rate of female participation that was in keeping with other American and British Protestant missions in this period.[52]

In a commemorative volume published in 1958 as the UPCNA celebrated its centennial and approached dissolution as a separate entity, a church historian declared that the UPCNA had witnessed two important developments during its century of existence. The first, he enthused, was "the climax of the greatest missionary effort since the first century A.D."[53] He was referring to the Anglo-American Protestant missionary enterprise that had gained momentum in the nineteenth century through the growth of voluntary Christian societies in Britain and North America. During its heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this movement had become associated with a slogan—"the evangelization of the world in this generation"— that conveyed its universal aspirations, global ambitions, and cultural confidence.[54] The second development was the "birth of the Protestant ecumenical movement." Energized by cross-denominational encounters in mission fields overseas, this movement of Protestant cooperation gained a boost in 1910 at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, took institutional shape in 1921 with the formation of the International Missionary Council, and gained a wider platform in 1948 with the debut in Geneva of the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization that Protestant leaders sometimes conceptualized as a "Christian United Nations."[55] The UPCNA also participated in a third important development that this historian overlooked or could not yet detect: the dramatic impact on global Christian culture resulting from the propagation of Protestantism beyond Europe and North America. By the late twentieth century this process had led to the "de-Westernization" of Protestantism, as the demographic world center of Christianity shifted toward the African continent.[56]

The UPCNA was an integral part of the Anglo-American Protestant missionary movement and evinced the strong evangelical commitment that was the movement's paramount feature. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Protestant evangelicals (among them American missionaries in Egypt) explained their impulse to evangelize in terms of what they called the "Great Commission," defined as an obligation to give witness to their faith including belief in Jesus as a savior. Evangelicals, in the past and still today, have traced this imperative to the Christian Bible, and specifically to verses that close the Book of Matthew (28:18–20). According to these verses, Jesus appeared to faithful supporters in the Galilee after his crucifixion and resurrection, and told them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded

to you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age." However, making disciples of all nations was not the only force behind the evangelical impulse; equally strong was the desire to promote a Christian practice that emphasized the individual worshiper's connection to, and importance in the eyes of, God.

The mission enterprises of the UPCNA shared three broad features that distinguished the mainline American Protestant missions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First, they gained momentum from westward frontier expansion within what became the United States so that overseas and "home" missions developed in tandem. Second, unlike Britons and continental Europeans, American missionaries "had no *inhibitions* about money"; they took a businesslike approach to fund-raising, collecting pennies but also seeking big grants from industrial giants. (In this manner, the American Presbyterians in Egypt sought and received grants from the Rockefellers.)[57] Third, they were purveyors of American culture, and their Christianity—whether they realized it or not—was infused with American customs and attitudes.[58] Among these was arguably an American-style privileging of individuals over families and communities, and of individual religious faith and conviction over collective traditional practice.

The experiences of the UPCNA missions also fit the narrative of *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (1987), a magisterial work of American intellectual history by William R. Hutchison, who was the son of a Presbyterian missionary to Iran and the son-in-law of a Presbyterian missionary to Egypt.[59] Hutchison acknowledges the import of the American foreign missionary movement as a grassroots local and grand-scale global affair. "The foreign mission enterprise in its heyday (about 1880 to 1930) was a massive affair," he notes, "involving tens of thousands of Americans abroad and millions at home. . . . It sent abroad, through most of its history, not only the largest contingents of Americans—dwarfing all other categories except that of short-term travelers—but also the most highly educated."[60] Missionaries mitigated American isolationism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in the long run anticipated, substituted for, and perhaps accelerated the far-flung global engagement of the U.S. government and of American peoples.[61]

MISSIONS AND POSTCOLONIAL HISTORY

In the early twentieth century, leading American research universities had professors who published works on the history or practice of Christian missions.[62] But circumstances changed in the mid-twentieth

century along with four developments that pertain to the contraction of interest in and pursuit of missions among the large established Protestant churches.

First, Ivy League institutions and other leading universities became increasingly secular or nonsectarian as they moved away from their Anglo-Protestant cultural roots—a trend that reflected, in part, the increasing ethnic and religious diversity of their students. Thus universities became less amenable to Christian missionary agendas. Second, mainline Protestant churches, Presbyterians among them, were compelled to pare down their overseas missions in the face of nationalist opposition. The newly independent governments of the Middle East and South Asia were especially keen to restrict Christian missionary work since many Muslim and Hindu nationalists viewed any spread of Christianity as a threat to religion-based cultural cohesion.[63] Third, the contraction of membership within the long-established American Protestant churches meant that these organizations became less culturally influential in the late twentieth century. The Presbyterians began to see a steep drop in membership in the 1960s as church attendance lapsed in their core northeastern and midwestern constituencies; by the early 1980s, surveys showed that 45 percent of Americans who had been raised as Presbyterians had switched to other churches or had stopped attending church entirely.[64] Fourth, a new generation of American and British historians emerged from the political left, often identifying with a Marxist intellectual tradition. These historians, who produced much of the cutting-edge scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s, were not interested in missionaries or religion per se but drew inspiration from popular resistance, political economy, and peasant or working-class history. Some of these new historians viewed missionaries as colonial collaborators who were as passé as the British Empire itself.[65] A leader of this leftist history was the British labor historian E. P. Thompson, author of *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), who was the India-born son of Methodist missionaries.[66]

Ultimately, the convergence of these trends meant that in the 1960s mission history was falling out of fashion within leading research universities and was becoming the preserve of Christian theological seminaries and church-affiliated colleges. Meanwhile, a rift widened between what one could perhaps call secular academia and Christian academia—a rift that many scholars on both sides may have unconsciously welcomed.

The history of Christian missions came back into vogue in the 1990s as historians of South Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the British Empire took a fresh look at histories of colonialism. In this milieu, scholars recognized missionaries as important agents of social change

during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kindling this interest was the emergence of postcolonial studies as a scholarly field,[67] coupled with a growing awareness of, and access to, colonial-era missionary archives.

Today, many of the postcolonial historians who are based in major research universities regard missionaries as agents or tools of imperialism. But there are also scholars who study mission history while sympathizing with or supporting the propagation of Christianity. Generally working within Christian seminaries and theology programs, these scholars are called missiologists. According to a textbook aimed at an audience of "missionaries, mission administrators and planners, and all Christians interested in the worldwide mission of the church," missiology is a branch of theology that "studies the movement of Christianity in the world, [and] the ways in which Christian faith becomes attached to different contexts."[68] This field is now thriving as non-Western Christianity becomes an increasingly visible and assertive cultural force within Christian transnational forums, challenging North American and British practices in the process. Just as cutting-edge sociologists have recognized the power of globalization to produce new forms of cultural heterogeneity[69]—and not homogeneity, as observers often assume—leading missiologists have been recognizing the power of Christianization to produce locally distinct Christian cultural formations even within unitary or affiliated denominations.

Missiologists tend to use the term "secular historian" to refer to a scholar who writes about the history of missions from a position of non-advocacy, and this term warrants scrutiny here, since this book neither advocates Christian missions nor endorses evangelization. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines secularism as "the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state." It also associates secularism with "the view that . . . the education provided at the public cost should be purely secular" in the sense that it should not profess, advocate, or privilege a particular religion or religious practice, such as prayer.[70]

Writing a secular history of Christian missions means that one does not write as an advocate for a particular religious worldview, in the sense that the dictionary definition conveys. But it does *not* mean that one ignores or minimizes the roles of religion in society, or the potential for religious beliefs to shape individual and collective behaviors.[71] Thus this book acknowledges the capacity of traditional religious structures, such as churches or mosques, to serve as vehicles for innovative social movements and activities, and the ability of religious com-

munities to reconfigure and mobilize for broader social and political causes. It recognizes the power of faith and ideas, not merely money, power, and passions (as Marxists, Freudian psychologists, and others would have it), to serve as driving forces in history. While contending that missionary activities exerted far-reaching and unexpected social influences on Egyptians, it avoids reckoning missionary "success" or "failure" in terms of the numbers of formal conversions, since social realities were more complex than a win-or-lose, all-or-nothing rhetoric can describe.[72] It contends, in short, that people involved in missionary encounters changed significantly—and changed each other—without necessarily "converting" in the sense of either registering or announcing a shift of religious identity or spiritual life.

Regardless of the local reception of their efforts, missionaries were aware of themselves as participants in a global movement in which the mere fact of giving witness to their faith was potentially as important as how the message was received. Christian mission advocates described evangelization as an obligation, and it was undoubtedly a "self-constitutive" act.[73] Moreover, many of the American Presbyterians in Egypt did not regard formal declaration of Protestant faith as the only litmus test for successful evangelism. In the nineteenth century as in the twentieth, many saw social and religious reform as a worthy goal. In Egypt, some of the American Presbyterians argued that evangelization could take individuals unaware, so that some people who encountered missionaries but continued to regard themselves as Muslims or Coptic Orthodox might adopt new social values or attitudes toward God that reflected the core of a Reformed (i.e., Protestant) Christian message.[74] In a related vein, a few even suggested that the Christian message, inspired by the example of Jesus, was merely a route to something much larger—the apprehension of God—so that the formality of Christianization need not be the missionary's singular goal.

Writing in 1987 about the foreign mission movement in the history of American Protestantism, William R. Hutchison offered an explanation for why missionaries, despite their cultural importance, had until then "remained shadowy figures in narrations of religious and general history." He wrote, "The reason for such neglect is plain enough: these overseas Americans and their best-known objectives have seemed more than a little embarrassing" with their arrogance, cultural condescension, and zeal. Missionaries appeared in their own historical writings as self-satisfied do-gooders, and by the Vietnam era, "mainline academic[s]" simply avoided them. As the son and son-in-law of missionaries, Hutchison had known many missionaries personally but did not recollect "Bible-thumping soul-savers" among

them; instead, he likened the ones he knew to Peace Corps types: ide-
alistic, socially engaged, and progressive. Hutchison attributed part
of the blame for stereotypes about overzealous missionaries to the
missionaries themselves, who, when "telling the home folks what
they wanted to hear, had regularly exaggerated both the centrality
and the success of evangelism."[75]

Missionary stereotypes have arisen from many sources, including
works of secular history and missiology, portrayals in popular culture,
and even missionaries' own audience-driven hyperbole. This book
tries to overcome these limitations by immersing itself in a vast body
of works by and about missionaries and their activities, drawing on
published books, archival records stored in the United States, Egypt,
and Britain, and newspapers.[76] It draws insights, too, from conversa-
tions with American missionaries, Egyptian pastors, and other church
leaders and participants. Finally, this book benefits from a range of
new works about Christian missionaries in the Middle East, the Mus-
lim world, and the British Empire.[77] The goal here is to produce a his-
tory of the American missionary encounter in Egypt that illuminates
both the Egyptian and American dimensions of this historical ex-
change while attending to the changing landscapes of social attitudes
and religious beliefs. It aims to show that missionary history is not
only "about" Christianity and its transmission but rather covers the
social, cultural, and political lives of individuals and communities.[78]

Five chapters and a conclusion follow. Chapter 2 considers the his-
tory of the American mission in Egypt from its founding in 1854 until
the British Occupation of 1882. It discusses the nature and roots of
the mission's evangelical impulse, and the impact that the mission
had on the Christian culture of the Copts. Chapter 3 focuses on the
years from 1882 to 1918, when American missionaries pursued more
aggressive efforts to evangelize among Muslims, and when women
assumed numerical preponderance within the mission, thereby en-
abling the American Presbyterians to expand their activities among
Egyptian females. Chapter 4 examines the rise of Egyptian Muslim
nationalist opposition to missions, particularly in the late 1920s and
early 1930s, and the ways in which missionaries responded by articu-
lating a philosophy of individual religious liberty. It also considers
the "rethinking" of foreign missions that representatives of several
American Protestant churches, including the United Presbyterian
Church, were beginning to promote, with consequences for the
Americans in Egypt. Chapter 5 concentrates on the mission of the
American University in Cairo, which opened its doors in 1920, and
traces the evolving thought of its founder, Charles R. Watson, who
spent a long career mulling over what an American Christian mis-

sion to Egyptians should mean. Chapter 6 surveys the period from 1945 to 1967, when political forces, arising out of Egyptian decolonization and the Arab-Israeli conflict, buffeted the American mission and contributed to the dissolution of the American Missionary Association in Egypt. In this period, the American Presbyterians also began to cultivate relations with Coptic Orthodox and Catholic clerics that were unprecedented for their warmth. The book concludes by evaluating the long-term impact of this missionary encounter as it occurred through the convergence of American history, Egyptian history, and the history of modern "world Christianities," and considers the mutual "conversions" and transformations that this encounter entailed.[79]