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Fazio, J. I. (2022). *Dispensational thought as motivation for global outreach and social activism among early Plymouth Brethren*. Paper presented at International Brethren History Conference, Dubuque, United States.

Document Version:

Early version, also known as pre-print

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*Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Conference
29-31 May 2022 – Emmaus Bible College, Dubuque, Iowa*

**Dispensational Thought as Motivation for Global Outreach
and Social Activism among Early Plymouth Brethren**

James I. Fazio

Introduction

Over the better part of the past two centuries, the community of Christian believers known as the Plymouth Brethren have been known for several distinguishing features, which stem from their strict adherence to a theologically conservative view of the authority and sufficiency of the Christian Scriptures, being principally understood through a literal interpretative framework. This approach to Scripture has resulted in an evangelical orientation that could be described as fundamentalist, with several distinct nuances, including: a primitivist ecclesiology that maintains a low church tradition; a dispensational-premillennial eschatology that anticipates God's future fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning Israel and the nations; and a Reformed soteriology that emphasizes sanctification through separatism from the world and other corrupting influences. Besides these, several other features may be added; however, it could also be said that the Plymouth Brethren might be every bit as well defined by what they stand against as what they affirm. In this regard, they may be characterized as anti-denominational, anti-creedal, anti-liturgical, anti-clerical, and anti-ecumenical. Many of these named qualities are commonly recognized by those who possess even a feint familiarity with those who identify with the label Brethren. What is less immediately recognized is that among the most prominent contributions made by this community of dispensational-minded believers is the indelible mark they have left on the developing world through their unrivaled efforts in international and cross-cultural missionary outreach and a distinct zeal for social activism.

Many are familiar with the itinerate ministry of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) in Switzerland, throughout Europe, and in North America, as well as his original translation work of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments into English, French, and German. Fewer possess familiarity with the missionary zeal of his colleague, Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853) whose pioneering labors in India and Baghdad earned him the title “the father of faith missions.” Fewer yet are acquainted with the missionary efforts of similarly-minded early Brethren, such as Edward Cronin (1801–1882) and John Parnell (1805–1883) in Mesopotamia, such as were briefly mentioned by Timothy Stunt in the opening plenary session yesterday. One name that I don’t recall hearing yet, whose work must not go unrecognized in a conference such as this, is the significant labors of James Deck (1807–1884) in New Zealand. While the labors of George Müller (1805–1898) and Henry Craik (1805–1866) in Bristol, have been brought to our remembrance. Yet somehow, the work of Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) in China has not yet been brought into the spotlight. However, scarcely has any connection been made between their charitable efforts and the dispensational ideologies which drove them to dedicate their lives to carrying out the social demands of the Gospel of Christ at home and to the most remote corners of the earth. In fact, we even heard yesterday that some detractors have made spurious connections between dispensational thought and “white supremacy”—though its hard not to notice the rampant overuse of this phrase to the effect that it is swiftly becoming as common an insult as “Hilter” or “nazi” once were to detract from anything one finds even moderately distasteful. One scholar has steeped so low as to lazily suggest the “rapture portrays God’s answer to the destruction of the sins wrought in the nineteenth century by war, greed, and white

supremacy, as a move to create a state of cosmic segregation.”¹ Fortunately, this irresponsible claim did not go unchecked. It has been publicly refuted in a paper that’s been presented at several national conferences in 2019, including Bible Faculty Summit and Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, besides running in a theological journal and being made available for free access online.² With that behind us, the present task before us will be to consider how dispensational thought served as motivation for global outreach and social activism among early Plymouth Brethren and stimulated them to pursue cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world.

The Plymouth Brethren’s Legacy of Social Activism

In a recently published book by Oxford University Press, one of the leading international scholars of new religious movements makes a valiant effort at demystifying one of the more complex and generally misunderstood religious groups of our time, the Plymouth Brethren.³ Though Massimo Introvigne’s work has received mixed reviews, its value in painting an outsider’s impression of the enduring presence and activity of this relatively obscure religious minority serves as a reminder that the Plymouth Brethren’s global impact is of no minor significance. He notes that their global reach has been felt in many countries all across the globe, stating their “charitable and humanitarian activities in favour of those who are not members of

¹ Nathaniel P. Grimes, “The Racial Ideology of Rapture,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 219.

² Cory M. Marsh, “The Rapture: Cosmic Segregation or Antidote for Oppression? A Critical Response to the ‘Racial Ideology of Rapture,’” in *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 24 no. 2 (Fall 2020): 60-79. Cf. http://dispensationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019_v2_Marsh-Rapture.Presentation.CDH_.pdf

³ Massimo Introvigne, *The Plymouth Brethren* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Massimo Introvigne is professor of Sociology of Religions at Pontifical Salesian University in Torino, Italy, and managing director of CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions). He is the author of nearly sixty books on religious minorities, including *Satanism: A Social History* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

their community are as old as the Brethren themselves.”⁴ Though Introvigne neglects to pay the pioneering efforts of Anthony Norris Groves and Edward Cronin more homage than a mere sentence or two, and entirely overlooks the work of men such as John Parnell and James Deck in the developing world, he does at least give a slight nod to the Lady Theodosia Powerscourt (1800–1836), noting she “was active in funding the schooling of local poor children in Ireland and supported several educational and charitable initiatives in favour of the poor of all denominations.”⁵ Moreover, he does not fail to mention the “Lieutenant John Blackmore [who] established two rescue houses for ‘fallen girls’ from the London streets in the 1850s, with the personal support of John Nelson Darby.”⁶

Besides these few examples, Introvigne takes notice of several other efforts of early Plymouth Brethren who engaged in social and charitable endeavors, not the least of which includes the extraordinary labors of George Müller and Henry Craik who established homes to rescue orphans from Bristol’s cruel streets.⁷ In the end, his brief survey casts a generally favorable light on the impact of the Brethren, eliciting the following response from one reader “Far from just being a quaint outdated group, the Brethren are a most active community in our contemporary world.”⁸ Anyone taking an impartial look at this religious minority would find Introvigne’s conclusions difficult to dispute: despite their orientation of religious separatism from the world, and moreover, from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have made an indelible impact on the world that is remarkably

⁴ Introvigne, 1–3.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 37–42.

⁸ Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, professor of North American Literature and Civilization, University of Bordeaux, taken from the back cover dust jacket of Introvigne.

disproportionate to their numbers. Introvigne fails, however, to take any notice of the unique thought which motivated their efforts and stimulated them to follow in the primitivist pattern laid out in the Acts of the Apostles.

Dispensational Thought as Motivation for their Efforts

In the section subsequent to this, the efforts of several notable early Plymouth Brethren will be considered as a brief sampling of the impact these pioneering cross-cultural ministers had on the developing world. However, it is necessary to define the specific claim of this paper, namely that dispensational thought served as a motivating factor behind their efforts. For those less familiar with dispensational thought, or who might possess a superficial awareness of its reductionistic identification with premillennial eschatology, some explanation is warranted. In particular, the early Plymouth Brethren were noted for subscribing to several distinctly dispensational ideals, including: 1) a dispensational bibliology as expressed in their predisposition to a theologically conservative view of Scripture's authority and sufficiency as understood through a literal interpretation of the text;⁹ 2) a dispensational ecclesiology demonstrated in a strong anti-clericalism accompanied by a high view of the shared priesthood that is common to all believers;¹⁰ 3) a dispensational eschatology with a compelling expectation of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ to usher in the next age of His millennial kingdom upon earth;¹¹ 4) a dispensational pneumatology with its peculiar notion of the unique

⁹ The term "perspicuity" has been used to describe this Protestant doctrine which speaks to Scripture's accessibility to the spiritually directed reader without need for mediatory agency or magisterium to comprehend the Bible's plain meaning, as literally interpreted.

¹⁰ This stems from a clear distinction between the two peoples of God: Israel and the Church. Specifically, dispensationalism maintains that the Church is constituted an altogether unique spiritual composition (e.g. a "new creation") distinct from both the Jews and the Gentiles.

¹¹ Pretribulational-premillennialism has typically been the singular feature by which most Christians have come to identify dispensationalists. While this eschatological framework is a valid and unique identifier of dispensational thought, it is by no means the only feature that serves to distinguish it.

agency of the Holy Spirit in the present age among Christian believers which empowered and superintended their evangelistic efforts;¹² and 5) a dispensational soteriology, informed by the doctrines of grace, with the attending idea that God’s sovereign election of believers was to be realized in concert with the response of those whom He called, in keeping with the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles:

How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without one who preaches? and how shall they preach unless they have been sent? according as it is written, How beautiful the feet of them that announce glad tidings of peace, of them that announce glad tidings of good things! (Romans 10:14–15, DARBY)

It should be observed that Protestant and Reformed Christians who may not be inclined to identify with dispensational thought may nevertheless hold to several of the above stated ideals. However, the cumulative effect of these points motivated the early Plymouth Brethren to pursue cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world, with the conviction that the Scriptures placed such a unique burden on the Christian minister, being fully motivated by the imminent end of the present dispensation. Other A brief survey of some of the more noteworthy efforts of early Plymouth Brethren will demonstrate this.

A Sample of Noteworthy Efforts of Early Plymouth Brethren

The Plymouth Brethren have left a remarkable legacy of social activism both in the “home mission” and abroad. They are known for having channeled an inordinate amount of energy into cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world; more than one might expect their numbers could warrant. Since it is not possible to do justice to these efforts in

¹² Dispensational pneumatology may be described as one which regards the unique activity of the Holy Spirit in the present age (e.g. Spirit-baptism, gifting for service, etc.) as empowering “Spirit-led” individual Christians as ministers, irrespective of formal ordination.

such a brief survey as is offered below, mention will be made of some of the founding members of the Plymouth Brethren, and a few select prominent figures.

It has been a matter of some disputation whether John Nelson Darby was, in fact, counted among the first coterie of like-minded Christians who broke bread together in Dublin in 1827.¹³ However, the presence and participation of Anthony Norris Groves, Edward Cronin and John Parnell remains undisputed. Like Darby, each of these three men dispatched from the British Isles within just a few short years after their initial gathering to break bread in Dublin around 1827–28. However, whereas Darby’s itinerant ministry carried him through western Europe, and particularly to settle down in French-speaking Switzerland, between the years of 1837–1843, each of these other three men embarked on cross-cultural missionary endeavors which carried them to developing countries such as India, Baghdad, and Mesopotamia.

Anthony Norris Groves

In 1829, ten years before David Livingstone first set off for Africa, Anthony Norris Groves arrived in the heart of the Muslim world with his wife and two young sons to “establish what was to become the first Protestant mission to Arabic-speaking Muslims.”¹⁴ Groves was a

¹³ Introvigne, 29; Cf. William Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 17–21; Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1967), 44–46; Donald Harman Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time: Irish Evangelicals in the Age of Daniel O’Connell*, (Montréal; Kingston; London; Chicago: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 271–273.

¹⁴ Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2004), 13. Dann has produced some of the most impressive biographical research on Anthony Norris Groves, stemming from his PhD research at the University of Liverpool. Besides the title referenced above, he has authored several other works on his subject, including: Robert Bernard Dann, “The Legacy of Anthony Norris Groves,” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 29, no. 4 (October 2005); *The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A radical influence on the nineteenth-century Protestant church in Britain* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2007); and *The Primitivist Missiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A radical influence on nineteenth-century Protestant mission* (PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 2006). More recently, Donald Harman Akenson has undertaken to produce a most cynical evaluation of the life and ministry of Anthony Norris Groves in the second installment of his critical trilogy on John Nelson Darby: Donald Harman Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture: John Nelson Darby and the Victorian Conquest of North-American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

dentist by trade, with a lucrative practice in Plymouth, England. By his mid-20s he was well-established, by English standards, and was married with two boys. However, his reading of the New Testament impressed upon him the conviction to live-out his reading of the teachings of Christ and follow the pattern of the Acts of the Apostles. connection financially, to embark on a mission to the Muslim world that would never yield him any earthly remuneration. The presence of this gentle European family in Baghdad was every bit as startling and perplexing to the indigenous peoples of that day as it comes across to readers of the present day. Secular Irish historian and Brethren-critic, Donald Akenson, has offered the following remark:

The earliest Brethren were not a link in some undocumentable skein of sackcloth-wearing dissidents, but rather a new phenomenon, a group of privileged members of a First World cohort who gave themselves over to an attempt to redeem various Third World cultures. The faith missions of the early Brethren were paradoxical and contradictory, humble in the sense that the missionaries followed St. Paul and put themselves through arduous deprivations, and arrogant in the sense that their goal was to supplant the core beliefs of the indigenous cultures which they targeted.¹⁵

What Akenson fails to recognize is that in both of these so called, “paradoxical and contradictory” traits, the earliest Brethren were following the very same pattern laid down by the Apostles. Akenson’s spurning of the Brethren’s “message”—as well as that of St. Paul—prohibits him from valuing their “mission.” He notes well that the Brethren followed the primitivist piety of the apostle to the Gentiles, who assumed a posture of humility in preaching the Gospel of Christ to foreign peoples. St. Paul did not shy away from creating a cultural disruption in Asia, when his introduction of the Gospel risked supplanting the native beliefs of the locals and even putting the native craftsman out of work, as the demand for silver shrines to Artemis was diminishing (Acts 19:21-41). Rather, the apostle esteemed the eternal gain for those

¹⁵ Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 51–52.

he sought to reach to be of much greater value than their temporal-cultural loss. This motivated the apostles to persist in spreading their message though it would cost them their very lives.

Anthony Norris Groves counted the cost when he departed England with his wife, Mary, and his two young sons in tow. Within two years of arriving, Baghdad became riddled with civil conflict, famine, and plague. According to Groves' reports the troubles claimed the lives of between half and two-thirds of the local population.¹⁶ The Groves were subject to these same infirmities, and on May 14, 1831 Mary Groves was numbered among the casualties. Three months later, Groves would be deprived of the baby girl whom Mary had bore him on the mission field less than a year prior.¹⁷ Rather than abandon his efforts, Groves maintained his commitment to the field where he felt called. Within a year, while still laboring in Baghdad, unbeknownst to him, his story was published throughout London, and Groves' faith-missionary efforts received manifold support. In addition to generating increased financial revenue for his field work, Groves received waves of visiting parties from the west, who came to see first-hand the work that he was pioneering in the heart of the Muslim world, the very area referred to in his day as "the headquarters of Islamism."¹⁸ Groves' enthusiasm and sincerity toward his labors was contagious. Before long, he was joined in Baghdad by his friend and apprentice, John Kitto (1804–1854), who is deserving of a story all his own, though space will not permit. Groves' determination inspired visits from Edward Cronin and John Parnell as well as Francis William Newman (1805–1897).

¹⁶ Anthony Norris Groves, *Memoir of the Late Anthony Norris Groves, Containing Extracts from his Letters and Journals* (London: James Nisbet, 1857), 141.

¹⁷ Groves, *Memoir*, 189.

¹⁸ Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, 13.

A few years after the loss of his wife and daughter, Groves learned that a revised charter granted to the East India Company opened the way for unrestricted Christian missionary work in India. After an initial tour from Bombay to Calcutta in 1833, he determined to set his attention on Madras, where he was joined by an entourage of Brethren workers in 1836. Groves continued his work among the Indian natives until poor health forced him to return to England in 1852. Within a year he passed away. Though he felt unsatisfied by his efforts, wishing he had more time and strength to give to the field, his pioneering efforts inspired countless others to follow the path he blazed as a primitivist-missionary and spawned a new generation of “faith missions.”¹⁹

Edward Cronin and John Parnell

Among those first Brethren who broke bread in Dublin in 1827–1828, Edward Cronin was perhaps the most religiously out-of-place, having been brought up a Roman Catholic.²⁰ That fact did not obstruct his kinship to John Varney Parnell, who later took on the title “Second Lord Congleton” or “Baron Congleton.” The two were bound to one another not only by the same energizing Spirit, but by marriage, as Edward Cronin wedded John’s sister, Nancy Parnell. Accompanied by a handful of others, the three set off for Baghdad in pursuit of Anthony Norris Groves in 1830. As Cronin was a doctor by trade, his skills would serve as a tremendous asset in Baghdad, where Groves had been laboring. As seen earlier, Cronin walked a path that intersected with Groves’ in many ways. This is not only true of their travels, but also of their losses. While Cronin was on the mission field in Baghdad during the time of the plague which claimed the life of Mrs. Groves, so too did Cronin’s wife share the same fate. In December 1831, Edward Cronin

¹⁹ For a very helpful timeline of Anthony Norris Groves life and work, see Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, 572–574.

²⁰ Henry Pickering, *Chief Men Among the Brethren* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1986), 16.

lost his wife, and John Parnell lost his sister.²¹ Far from deterring their efforts, both faithful Brethren continued their work in Baghdad, and into India in the years that followed.

James Deck

James George Deck was not among the first coterie that broke bread in Dublin in 1827–1828, but that does not by all means make him a late-comer to the Plymouth Brethren movement. Evidence of this can be seen in that some of his hymns were published in the one of the earliest Plymouth Brethren song books edited in 1838, titled *Hymns for the Poor of the Flock*.²² James Deck was an officer who was stationed overseas in the East India Company’s service for two terms, first between 1824 and 1826 and again from 1830 to 1835.²³ Shortly after returning to England from his first stint in India, he came under the influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He determined that in his second appointment he would take a strong stand as a Christian. After a few years “he became troubled in his conscience about whether a Christian could be a soldier, and so he resigned from the position.”²⁴ Initially, he aspired to become ordained as a minister, though his introduction to the Brethren in Plymouth changed his mind concerning that ambition, and he resolved to pursue his Christian calling as a lay evangelist wherever he found himself.

When a conflict erupted between a leading brother in Plymouth, Benjamin Willis Newton (1807–1899) and John Nelson Darby, for whom he had great respect, his unwillingness to take a partisan position gave him all the reason he needed to look for ministry opportunities outside of Plymouth. In 1852, Deck resolved to move his family to New Zealand, where he took up

²¹ Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 78.

²² A digital copy of this hymn book, edited by G. V. Wigram (1805–1879) is available online at brethrenarchive.org.

²³ Peter J. Lineham, “The Significance of J. G. Deck, 1807–1884,” *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* no. 107 (Nov. 1986): 4. Note: a repaginated PDF of this article is located at the German Brethren history site: www.bruederbewegung.de. This version was accessed for purposes of this research, and thus the pagination corresponds to that electronic document.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

residence in the Waiwera district to exercise his evangelistic gifts among the indigenous people. Within a year of relocating, Mrs. Deck found herself as maladjusted to the foreign living conditions as were so many other wives of the Plymouth Brethren, and on December 8, 1853, she lost her life, leaving several young children behind.²⁵ Within two years, James Deck remarried a lady by the name of Lewenna Atkinson, with who he had five more children. However, shortly after the birth of their fifth child in 1865, Lewenna and the infant both succumbed to disease on the mission field, leaving James Deck a single father, again, this time of thirteen children.²⁶ We must be careful not to slip into thinking Deck's experience in New Zealand was nothing but tragedy upon tragedy. To the contrary, he lived out the remainder of his days in New Zealand and bore decades of fruitful ministry until at last he received his homeward call on August 14, 1884.²⁷ Three days later his body was laid to rest in the New Zealand soil at the Motueka Cemetery between the graves of his first and second wives.²⁸ At least one observer has attributed Deck's success to his dispensational thought when he remarked: "He was one of the most original of the Christian pioneers in New Zealand. Because he owed allegiance to no foreign church of theology, his assemblies adapted to the local environment to a degree which was rare among colonial churches."²⁹ At the turn of the century, within 40 years of Deck's first arrival in that country, nearly 1% of the total population of New Zealand identified as Brethren.³⁰

George Müller and Henry Craik

²⁵ Lineham, 12.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Pickering, 39.

²⁸ Lineham, 23.

²⁹ David C. F. Wright, "James George Deck," an unpublished biographical paper, 2012. Note: a PDF of this article is located at the Christian history site: www.christian-moral.net.

³⁰ The results of the 1901 New Zealand Census have been made available online as part of the Digitized collection of New Zealand Statistics: Tauranga Adtearoa at: https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historic_publications/1901-census/1901-results-census/1901-results-census.html#d50e1088.

Far better documented are the efforts of George Müller and Henry Craik, whose social work in Bristol garnered, at least the former, international recognition, though they were, indeed two co-laborers whose names should be paired together in the annals of history. Shortly after his conversion in 1825, Müller's Christian interests were turned almost exclusively toward the evangelization of the Jewish people. This drove him from his hometown of Prussia to England in 1829, to study the languages of Hebrew, Chaldean, and Yiddish to prepare for his cross-cultural mission.³¹ There in England he first encountered Henry Craik, who had been an associate of Anthony Norris Groves. Craik convinced Müller to broaden his ministry interests beyond merely the Jewish people. Beyond that, Craik introduced Müller to several dispensation ideals, which he was eager to adopt as his own. These several ideals have been identified by a secular Irish historian and dispensational-antagonist, as follows: "the conviction that the Bible as sufficient for all human guidance and a belief in its literal accuracy, an embrace of the imminent approach of the Second Coming, and an acceptance of the validity of lay-based worship, including the breaking of bread."³² While Akenson understands Müller and Craik as converts "to the beliefs and to the attitudes of Anthony Norris Groves,"³³ they might be otherwise understood as beholden to those ideals which distinguish dispensational thought.

In 1832 Müller and Craik moved to Bristol, "where they found an open door, and their united ministry, chiefly in Bethesda Chapel, was exceedingly fruitful."³⁴ Within a decade Bristol would rival Plymouth as the most prominent center of Brethrenism, outshining the Irish regions of Wicklow, where the Powerscourt conferences were held, and Dublin, where the Brethren first

³¹ Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 105.

³² *Ibid.*, 104.

³³ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁴ Pickering, 7.

came together to break bread.³⁵ However, Müller and Craik were not content with mere church work. Müller, in particular, was burdened with a heart to care for destitute orphans that littered Bristol's streets. In the years that followed, the city where Müller and Craik labored became better known for its orphan homes, which provided for the needs of thousands of displaced children, than for its thriving Brethren Assembly. Despite their numbers, the Brethren in Bristol were not able to provide support for all of the resident orphans, financially or otherwise. Rather than causing Müller to despair, the care for Bristol's orphans became a national, and even international, affair.³⁶

The Brethren's Extended Influence

Space does not permit further accounts of early Plymouth Brethren, whose stories could fill countless pages. Though it would be remiss not to at least make mention of a few of the more notable efforts of those who were not among the earliest Plymouth Brethren, but whose work extended from their influence. One such name, which should not go unnoticed, is that of James Hudson Taylor. At the age of 17, Taylor made the acquaintance of Edward Cronin, and became inspired by his missionary exploits to Baghdad. Two years later he was baptized by Andrew John Jukes of the Plymouth Brethren in the Hull Brethren Assembly, before spending 51 years in China and famously set up the China Inland Mission.³⁷ Remarking on the magnitude of his impact, one historian assessed: "few missionaries in the nineteenth centuries since the apostle Paul have had a wider vision and have carried out a more systematic plan of evangelizing a broad geographical area than did James Hudson Taylor. His sights were set on reaching the

³⁵ Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 107.

³⁶ Pickering, 9.

³⁷ In later life, as the Plymouth Brethren fractured, Taylor became associated with the Keswick movement.

whole of China, all 400 million people, and to that end he labored.”³⁸ In a letter penned to his sister, Amelia, dated February 14, 1860, Taylor expressed his heart for the people of that developing country with these words: “If I had a thousand pounds, China should have it. If I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China but Christ. Can we do too much for Him?”³⁹ Looking back on the results of his efforts, American historian of China, Japan, and world Christianity, Kenneth S. Latourette, he has described Taylor as “one of the greatest missionaries of all time” as well as “one of the four or five most influential foreigners who came to China in the nineteenth century for any purpose, religious or secular.”⁴⁰

Indeed, Taylor paved the way for a generation of socially and cross-culturally minded Christians. One such man was the English cricket player C. T. Studd (1860–1931), who was so inspired by Hudson Taylor that upon coming into a sizable inheritance he gave away his wealth to support George Müller’s work in Bristol, as well as Moody Bible Institute, and the Salvation Army in India.⁴¹ When his fortune was not enough, he gave of his own life to serve in the China Inland Mission. After spending fifteen years in China, he moved to India for another six years before spending the remainder of his days in Africa, where he founded the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, which is still in operation today under the name WEC International. This interdenominational agency reportedly has over 1,860 workers spread across 85 countries,

³⁸ Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 186.

³⁹ A. J. Broomhall, *The Shaping of Modern China: Hudson Taylor’s Life and Legacy*, vol. 1, *Early–1867*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 480. Note: This title, along with its second volume which covers the dates 1868–1990, is the product of a great-nephew of Hudson Taylor’s who also labored as a missionary doctor in China. Together, these volumes represent the most comprehensive work on the life and impact of James Hudson Taylor, serving as a re-issue of the 7-volume history with expanded material taken from primary sources, including extracts from Taylor’s letters, articles, etc.

⁴⁰ Taken from a quote on the back cover of Broomhall. Extracted from Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Mission in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1929).

⁴¹ Norman Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (1933, Repr. Harrisburg, PA: Evangelical Press, 1935), 68-70.

who work to address a host of social concerns facing developing countries, including: education, medical work, rescuing and rehabilitating addicts, caring for children in crisis, offering business skills, among other services, with a view to “helping local Christians share the gospel cross-culturally.”⁴²

Another Christian who was equally impacted by the life of Hudson Taylor was the famous missionary from County Down, Northern Ireland, Amy Beatrice Carmichael (1867–1951). In 1887 she met Hudson Taylor at the Keswick Convention. On account of Taylor’s influence, Amy Carmichael intended to join CIM and spend her life in service to the people of China. However, when her health proved too poor for the demands that journey would put on her, she delayed travel to China. By the time her health permitted, she went to Japan for fifteen months before turning to Dohnavur, India, where she remained for the next 55 years of her life. Carmichael’s energies were turned primarily toward helping underprivileged children, including temple prostitutes, and orphans. She famously founded an orphanage in southern India, which was described by one historian as “a center for humanitarian services.”⁴³ The Dohnavur Fellowship, founded by Amy Carmichael in 1901, is active today, having expanded its social programs to include child services, community development, education, and health services.⁴⁴

It may be seen that the impact of the early Brethren discussed extended far beyond the British Isles. Before the close of the nineteenth century, the influence of these dispensationally-minded Christians reached the shores of North America. There, a Presbyterian minister named Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921), who had attended several of the Niagara Bible

⁴² WEC International, “About WEC” <https://wec-uk.org/about>, retrieved on July 29, 2019.

⁴³ Tucker, 300.

⁴⁴ The Dohnavur Fellowship, “Projects Grid” <http://dohnavurfellowship.org/projects-grid/>, accessed July 29, 2019.

Conferences, made the acquaintance of Hudson Taylor. Scofield caught Taylor's infectious passion for developing countries, and in 1890 he organized the Central American Mission (CAM) in Costa Rica. Within a decade the efforts of CAM spilled over to Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, with as many as twenty-five workers serving in those five countries. By the end of the twentieth century, the organization had as many as three hundred workers serving in six countries, including Mexico.⁴⁵ The organization continues to thrive today under the name Camino Global as a nondenominational Protestant faith mission based in Dallas, Texas.⁴⁶

Thanks to Hollywood, many have become acquainted with the more recent story of the Brethren missionaries, Nate Saint (1923–1956) and Jim Elliot (1927–1956), who lost their lives in an effort to bring the Gospel to a remote tribe in Ecuador.⁴⁷ While those men didn't live long enough to establish works in their field, after their deaths, Jim Elliot's wife, Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015) spent two years working with the very tribe that took her husband's life.⁴⁸

Conclusion

From the brief samplings offered above, it should be evident that the early Plymouth Brethren made a disproportionate impact, relative to their numbers, in countries throughout the developing world. While Evangelical Protestant Christians have come to be known for their charitable efforts directed throughout the world, this particular religious minority stands out from

⁴⁵ Tucker, 350.

⁴⁶ Camino Global, "Who We Are" <https://www.caminoglobal.org/who-we-are>, accessed July 29, 2019.

⁴⁷ The story of the missionaries to the Waodoni tribe who were mercilessly slaughtered in the jungles of South America near the Amazon in 1956 has been made famous by a documentary (*Beyond the Gates of Splendor*, 2002) and afterward a full-feature theatrical release film (*End of the Spear*, 2006).

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Elliot went on to write several books detailing her experience, including: *Elisabeth Elliot, Through Gates of Splendor* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), and *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1978).

the rest. Despite their orientation of religious separatism from the world, and from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have proven to be a group of dispensationally-minded Christians who have taken seriously their reading of the New Testament. They have striven to emulate the example of the good Samaritan as presented in the parables of Jesus (Luke 10:29–37) and acted as neighbors to those whom they perceived to be most in need of the Gospel. Their literal reading of Scripture coupled with their “pessimistic” view of the condition of the world, with its attending optimism concerning God’s deliverance for those who maintain the blessed hope of our Lord’s appearing, have worked together to earn the Plymouth Brethren the reputation of being among the most cross-culturally outreaching and socially-minded religious groups the world has known in the past two centuries.

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