

Silent No Longer

The Roots of Racism in Mission

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Abstract

This article, arising from the work of the Council for World Mission's Legacies of Slavery project, investigates the historical roots of racism present in the work of the London Missionary Society (LMS). It offers an analysis of the ways in which a missionary society colluded with Empire in constructing a racist hierarchy that it imposed on White people at home in the United Kingdom as much as it did on African and African descendant peoples. It acknowledges the personal and structural benefits that the LMS and its officers made from enslavement and their efforts to silence calls for emancipation, and offers a class and gender perspective on the forces shaping this distinctively British organization.

Keywords

slavery, London Missionary Society, Council for World Mission, Empire, racism

Not a word must escape you in public or in private, which might render the slaves displeased with their masters or dissatisfied with their station. You are not sent to relieve them from their servile condition, but to afford them the consolation of religion. (Instructions to Missionary Smith, 1816)¹

The legacies of the transatlantic slave trade shape the experience of millions of people in the world today, through the systemic, traumatic, and intentional persistence of racial injustice manifest in political, social, cultural, economic, and religious life. These legacies cannot be written off as a thing of the past, because they daily impact the opportunities, experiences, psychologies, and security of African and African descendant

¹ "Instructions to Missionary Smith," in *Documents on British West Indian History, 1807–1833 (Select Documents from the Public Record Office, London, England, Relating to the Colonies of Barbados, British Guiana, Jamaica, and Trinidad)*, ed. Eric Williams (Port-of-Spain: Trinidad Publishing Company, 1952), 242.

people globally. While those who live in contexts set around the axes of the transatlantic slave trade live with entrenched injustice alongside White communities typically in denial about these legacies and their own privilege, there is yet a global Afrophobia.² This means that all cultures have, through encounter with White European empires, learned to dehumanize African and African descendant people, as well as consider lighter skin tones in their own communities as desirable and beautiful. In this way it especially occupies African diaspora communities' own self-understanding. At the heart of the racism we experience today is the hierarchical construct of race itself by Empire that occupies White and Black minds alike.³ This is the perverse spirituality of Empire that raises the issue of the missionaries' collusion with the racism of Empire.

With this in view, the Council for World Mission – a worldwide partnership of 32 churches – decided to address its legacies of slavery, including those of one of its predecessor organizations, the London Missionary Society (LMS), with four aims in mind:

1. To assess its own story and complicity with the systems of enslavement and Empire.
2. To understand better the urgency of achieving racial justice and the issues which intersect with it.
3. To find ways to advocate reparation with its member churches.
4. To discover anti-imperial models of Christian mission in today's world.

Four hearings were organized around the route of the transatlantic slave trade. They took place through 2017 and 2018, in the UK, in Ghana, in Jamaica, and in the United States.⁴ Each hearing took the same format. We focused both on the historical manifestations of slavery and on contemporary legacies and mixed presentations from academics and encounters with communities.

The London Missionary Society

The LMS emerged in the 18th century at a time when the economy, identity, class, and gender were in flux. The agrarian and industrial revolutions were reshaping British life and society. A century of religious radicalism was giving way to a period of religious quietism, where pietism was the key emphasis of religious life. This was proving good

² For further information on Afrophobia, see resources from the European Network against Racism, <https://www.enar-eu.org/Afrophobia>.

³ For a discussion of this see, for example, Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁴ The United States was included, although this has not been an LMS/Council for World Mission context for mission.

for business, as demonstrated by the new and burgeoning Stock Exchange; the City of London was deeply indebted to and profiting from the transatlantic slave trade. It can come as no surprise that the LMS was born in a coffee house on Change Alley at the heart of the Stock Exchange and next to the Bank of England, and that the five men who dreamed up the LMS were oblivious to their consumption of slave-produced coffee and sugar. One of the five men, the Rev. George Burder, outlined his vision of the pious revolution he was stirring:

May we not indulge a hope that the happy period is approaching, when the Redeemer shall take unto Him His great power and reign? He must increase. His name shall be great. And is there not a general apprehension that the Lord is about to produce some great event? Already we have witnessed the most astonishing transactions; and it is not probable that the great Disposer of all is now about, by shaking terribly the nations, to establish that spiritual and extensive kingdom which cannot be shaken? Let us then, utterly and sincerely disclaiming all political views and party designs; abhorring all attempts to disturb order and government in this or any other country; vigorously unite, in the fear of God, and in the love of Christ, to establish a Missionary Society upon a large and liberal plan, for sending ministers of Christ to preach the Gospel among the heathen.⁵

The LMS needs to be seen as a product of English (middle) class sensitivity, in which it anxiously seeks the approval of the establishment while asserting its own lifestyles and vision as the heart of the new world. The LMS is a lesson in the manipulation of all classes by the new bourgeoisie. It brought together establishment figures to give lustre to their movement. The Annual Members' Meetings, where LMS directors reported to their members, were regularly chaired by political figures such as Sir George Grey (1840), Lord Viscount Morpeth (1841), and William Francis Cowper MP (1842). The missionaries themselves were typically working class and lower middle class. The impact of the class issue is evidenced, for example, in terms of slave ownership. Of all the missionaries that LMS sent in the era of enslavement, only two names appear in the University College of London "Legacies of British Slave Ownership" database that might tally with those of LMS missionaries: a John Edwards in British Guiana (for whom two possible claims are listed), and John Gibson of Jamaica.⁶ This database exists because the British government set up a fund to pay "compensation" to slave

⁵ For the full vision, see Richard Lovett, *History of the London Missionary Society, 1795–1895*, Vol. 1 (London: H. Frowde, 1899), 18–23.

⁶ They are "John Edwards, Appointed to Hanover Station Berbice 1838. John Edwards British Guiana 18th Jan 1836 | 1 Enslaved | £63 0S 1D" (2018 terms GBP7000), <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/7724>; also recorded as "John Arthur Edwards, 23rd Nov 1835 | 13 Enslaved | £820 14S 2D" (2018 terms GBP92,000), <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/8351>; and "John Gibson LMS missionary 378. Sent to Kingston 1838, Ridgemount Mandeville, Davyton; John Gibson Jamaica St James 432. Claim Details, Associated Individuals and Estates 25th Jan 1836 | 5 Enslaved | £128 11S 7D" (2018 Terms GBP14,000), <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/19216>.

owners for the emancipation of enslaved people, and thus records are kept of all who came forward seeking to claim recompense. No compensation or reparation was paid to those who had been enslaved. The combined applications for compensation by John Edwards and John Gibson amount to anywhere between 21,000 pounds sterling and 110,000 pounds sterling in 2018 terms, depending on which John Edwards claim relates to the LMS missionary. In contrast, the two LMS directors discussed below – William Hankey and Sir Culling Eardley Smith – made claims for compensation amounting to nearly 1.5 million pounds sterling between them.

Assessing the Legacies of the LMS and the Council for World Mission

There is evidence of individual and systemic complicity in the economy and theology of racism, as well as the whole White project of colonization of “Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation,” as the celebrated LMS missionary David Livingstone once put it.

William Hankey

The then director and treasurer of the LMS, William Hankey, makes an appearance in the 1831–32 parliamentary Investigation into Emancipation, where he is invited to appear as a representative of the LMS, of which he was a director and treasurer.⁷ This is an extract from the transcript:

Has the result of your experience, as treasurer of the Society, led you to the conclusion, from the progress of civilisation among the slaves, that when instructed they have become more obedient and tranquil?

Hankey – Quite so; I believe their value, even in the market, has risen in proportion as they have been so instructed; we have had instances of that, a slave has been regarded as more valuable in consequence of his being instructed by the missionaries of our own and other societies.

Hankey spoke about the value of enslaved people in the market because the LMS treasurer owned the Arcadia Plantation in Trelawney, Jamaica, where 300 enslaved persons were forced to work. When the British government offered compensation to the slave owners after emancipation, Hankey made a submission for compensation for abolition worth more than 15,760 pounds sterling in 1836 (1,770,000 pounds sterling in 2019). In the end, only 5777 pounds sterling was awarded, just over a third of the submission.

Hankey’s defence of enslavement was out of step with the British establishment reinventing themselves as abolitionists, and Hankey was forced to resign as treasurer; the LMS finally issued a ban on slave ownership by missionaries. But his resignation as treasurer did not mean that he severed his ties with the organization. The board minutes

⁷ House of Commons, “Report from the Select Committee of Slavery throughout the British Dominions: with Minutes and Evidence, Appendix and Index,” *Parliamentary Papers* 1831–32 (721), vol. 20, 307.

show that Hankey continued as a director until his death in 1859, that he regularly chaired the directors' meetings, and that the bank he founded continued to be used by the LMS long after his death.⁸

The alliance between the LMS, money, and the establishment continued in the person of Sir Culling Eardley Smith, who was treasurer from 1844 to 1863. Smith, the member of parliament for Pontefract, was a prominent evangelical campaigner and religious philanthropist.⁹ He founded the Evangelical Alliance in 1846. He presented an anti-slavery petition from Pontefract Wesleyans on 5 November 1830. What is not mentioned is that he was a plantation owner in St Kitts. He claimed 5065 pounds sterling, worth 563,000 pounds sterling in 2019.¹⁰

Selina Countess of Huntingdon

Selina Countess of Huntingdon, a leading British Non-Conformist of the era, endowed many Non-Conformist chapels and institutions in England and Wales that were engaged in the LMS. Sion chapel in London's East End, where the first LMS missionaries were commissioned before they boarded the *Duff*, the ship that took them to the South Pacific, was part of the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion. She was a slave owner; the enslaved people she owned were inherited from George Whitfield, one of the evangelical heroes of the age. On being asked about emancipation, Selina replied: "God alone, by His Almighty power, who can and will in His own time bring outward, as well as spiritual deliverance to his afflicted and oppressed creatures."¹¹

LMS: Slave Exploitation and the New Capitalist System

As the Rev. Thomas Binney, one of the founders of the LMS, put it, "Dissenters are 'the modern movers and moulders of the world.'"¹² During the first 50 years of the LMS, the political aspirations of dissent went through a transformation. Up until the 1790s, Dissenters were seen as politically subversive and socially disrespectful,

⁸ Hankey's plantation remained in the family, and 100 pounds sterling was paid each year from 1836 to 1862 to the LMS and the Colonial Missionary Society (CMS), when 900 acres was ultimately given to the CMS, who sold it in 1954 for 13,240 pounds sterling. CMS was one of the founder members of CWM. This income amounts to a further 600,000 pounds sterling in 2018 terms.

⁹ See the online biography at <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/smith-sir-culling-1805-1863>.

¹⁰ Research is ongoing into the legacies of slavery of other directors and supporters.

¹¹ See John R. Tyson, "Lady Huntingdon, Religion and Race," *Methodist History* 50:1 (October 2011), 34.

¹² Address to the Congregational Union 1848. Quoted in Lesley Hesselbee and Paul Ballard, eds, *Free Churches and Society: The Nonconformist Contribution to Social Welfare* (London: Continuum, 2012), 112.

but after this they became the powerhouse of British political and economic life. Victorian public opinion was educated from the pulpit. The Victorian bourgeoisie were chapel goers; through them, the middle classes began to emerge as well as the industrial magnates of England, Scotland, and Wales. They were steeped in chapel life, especially the work they did through the LMS committees. The missionary imperial project was central to the construction of Victorian middle-class identity.

Class Consciousness: Class and Gender

The LMS became a space for women to exercise leadership, and in some cases mission movements provided the early beginnings for suffragette movements. The presence of women caused some controversy, and there is correspondence where male ministers tried to stop this and refused to have women's missionary meetings in their chapels.¹³

Jemima Thompson, an LMS missionary, wrote, "If all Christians are bound to exert themselves in [the] cause, surely the obligation which rests on women is fourfold! They far more than men, owe to Christianity their present free and happy state – while it is on their sex that, in other lands, the hard bondage of heathenism presses with the heavier weight."¹⁴

Missionary outreach to women was expressly designed to extend to "heathen" women those advantages that Victorian women reputedly enjoyed. England's happy Christian homes were identified as the foundation for missionary endeavour for women. This confirmation of a gender stereotype by the missionary movement invited its confirmation and subversion through women missionaries, who could escape the Victorian idyll of domesticity. They were also able to enter some of the areas traditionally ascribed to men, such as organizing meetings, handling finances, and, particularly, speaking in public. Louisa Spicer Martindale (1839–1914) was an LMS director who became very active in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and in working for mission and feminism. This opening into feminine autonomy, however, which gave women a stake in the unequal social power of mission and Empire, was at the cost of perpetuating racial and national hegemonies in the British Empire.

The liberation of the colonized women was typically ascribed to values and gifts the English women were bringing from outside the colonized cultures. Women missionaries often began boarding schools to rescue children from their heathen families: "Heathen women were considered to have been rendered incapable of being real

¹³ LMS archives, home, odds box 9, folder 2.

¹⁴ Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in 19th-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 98.

mothers by the abject conditions of their existence.” As the Ladies Missionary Auxiliary were told in Leeds in 1897 by an LMS missionary, Miss Barclay, “There was no home life in India, there being no mothers in the real sense of the term.”¹⁵

Rather than repudiation of White supremacy, missionary feminism represented a liberal variation on an emergent racist theme. Caring and control was the gendered face of women and Empire, and it went hand in hand with imperial trustees, missionary sisters, and social mothers alike. The LMS actively recruited women missionaries who “have wealth, cultivation and leisure to lay at His [i.e., Jesus] feet,” “women of education and refinement.”¹⁶

Working-class radicals rejected the movement because many saw that the missionary movements did not connect concern for the liberation of foreign souls who were without Jesus with concern for the poor at home. Emma Martin was ejected from an LMS meeting in Manchester in 1844, after which she gave a public lecture entitled “The Crimes and Follies of Christian Mission,” complaining that the supporters of Christian mission “grind the faces of the poor to propagate God’s truth . . . the philanthropic lady, who weeps in the most approved style . . . at the dreadful tale of Chinese ignorance of God” while wearing “a splendid dress over which the weaver’s curse has been poured – over which the sigh of the poor girl expired in its making has been expended.”¹⁷ Other radicals maintained that the exploitation of factory children financed the philanthropy of the anti-slavery movement. Some of the Chartists broke up anti-slavery meetings, demanding they look to “emancipate the white slaves before you think of the black . . . Look to the slavery and misery of the New Poor Law.”¹⁸ One can observe here that Black emancipation continues to be couched in terms of White disenfranchisement rather than common cause being made between the communities that Empire manipulates and divides.

This LMS and its network of chapels were complicit in advocating Empire. This takes the form of occupying Blackness, certainly, but also Whiteness and doing so by reifying White colonial spirit and power and baptizing it as Christian and locating it in domestic life.

¹⁵ Ibid., 103.

¹⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹⁷ Ibid., 128–29.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Preaching the Good News but Preventing Rebellion at All Costs

Burder's vision of LMS preaching the gospel while "abhorring all attempts to disturb order and government" was nowhere clearer and more shameful than in Guyana. Conditions for enslaved people in Guyana were particularly brutal. The White population was outnumbered 20 to 1, so the British plantocracy favoured violence and overwork to suppress the enslaved people of the plantations. In 1823, the British Parliament passed an Amelioration Act, which sought to limit some of these excesses so that Sunday would be guaranteed as a day off. Rumours of this new law reached the enslaved, who took it to mean emancipation. The governor, John Murray, refused to enact this amelioration.

The rebellion was instigated chiefly by Jack Gladstone, an enslaved cooper at "Success" plantation. The rebellion also involved his father, Quamina, and other senior members of the LMS chapel, Bethel. The largely nonviolent rebellion was brutally crushed by the colonists under governor Murray. They killed many slaves: estimates of the toll from fighting range from 100 to 250. After the insurrection was put down, the government sentenced another 45 men to death; 27 were executed. The executed slaves' bodies were displayed in public for months afterwards as a deterrent to others.¹⁹

Quamina was caught and publicly executed. Jack was deported to the island of Saint Lucia after the rebellion, following a clemency plea by Sir John Gladstone, the owner of "Success" plantation. John Smith was implicated and arrested after the rebellion; he died from pneumonia in custody before news of a royal pardon for him reached the governor. As a result, Smith, not Quamina, became famously termed the Demerara Martyr.

Quamina had written to the LMS in 1816:

We find they try every means to stop it in working us [o?]so late at night through all our distress we try to oblige them as far as we can they are more strick [strict] now than ever they was for they are watching us as a cat would for a mouse, blessed be to God that there is not an estate as far as can attend but what have one or two persons that can teach the rest but they are obliged to go thro [through] a great deal of difficult We bless and praise God for his goodness in adding a certain number in our sosiety [society] lately, and we hope the Brothers and Sisters that are with you will not ceace [cease] in praying for us, for we are continually praying for the spread of the Gospel and we hope in a short time God will enable you to send out some more ministers to us how joyfull are we to hear how gladly the people in africa receiving the gospel, we are shriving [striving?] to build up another house of worship and all the people that can attend our meeting give as much as they can to assist in building it.²⁰

¹⁹ See Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Excerpt from letter in the LMS archives.

What are enslaved people doing when they write to the LMS asking for notice of the harsh conditions under which they live as fellow Christians committed to the spread of the gospel? And yet the LMS policy was still to leave six days' enslavement unquestioned and press only for the plantocracy to give the Sabbath day to slaves so they could go to church. It seems that they didn't understand the appeal Quamina was making. Or, rather, they clearly did, when they replied to Smith and not to Quamina, "Not a word must escape you in public or in private, which might render the slaves displeased with their masters or dissatisfied with their station. You are not sent to relieve them from their servile condition, but to afford them the consolation of religion."²¹

Internalized Racism

The weight of the LMS advocacy of foreign mission worked on the colonized mind and the colonizing mind. "When the Word of God came among us, we were like the wild beasts, we knew nothing . . . I thank the English nation for what we have received at your hands. You are our own friends; we are your children." These are the words of Tazatzoe, a "Christian Caffre chief," from the statements he made while on deputation around the UK for the LMS in 1836, raising the profile of and financial investment in the LMS. Hankey chaired the meeting where Tazatzoe spoke.²² Ironically, what went unreported was the claim he added: "If we are the children of England, and if one with yourselves, let us enjoy the privileges of Britons."

Teaching White Supremacy

The LMS ran many successful pamphlet and journal publications, including the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*. This was the chief means to influence the minds, attitudes, and giving of the home congregations. In the following, I provide some examples.

To Sunday Scholars

My dear young friends, in the present age of the Missionary effort, it is the duty of all persons, and especially of Christians, to do their best to aid the cause of God, and even children, especially Sunday School children, should all be active in the work.

Several reasons why this cause should engage your greatest energies, and draw forth your earnest prayers.

The first, the chief reason, is Gratitude to God that you are not as they are; next, Obedience to his commands; and lastly Compassion for their wretched condition.

²¹ "Instructions to Missionary Smith," in Williams, ed., *Documents on British West Indian History*, 242.

²² *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (September 1836), 56.

No my dear children, just compare your condition with theirs; see what a vast difference lies between you, You live in a country where the true God is worshipped; your parents do not wish to destroy you, but have sent you to a Sunday-School, where you are taught to serve your Creator, you have kind teachers who instruct you, pray for you and endeavor to lead you to Christ, the only Saviour. Then be active and zealous, in all you can, that the Heathen may be taught the same thing.

How is this to be done? I will tell you. In order that the Heathen might have a knowledge of the true God imparted to them, a society was formed . . . to send out men to preach the Gospel. In order to send these men, the Society collects money . . . and if you become a subscriber of a halfpenny or a penny a week or month this means you will thus be the means of instruction to the Heathen. If only you pray, “O Lord convert the Heathen!” He will hear your prayer and in answer to your prayer . . . Heathen children may be led to trust in Jesus.²³

And again,

Many heathen parents still sacrifice some of their children to idols, Hindoos who would think it a great sin to kill an insect or harm a bird will yet drown their children in the Gangees . . . Hindoo parents who do this think that their innocent children’s blood will atone for their sins. Is it not well that you were born of Christian race?²⁴

Silent No Longer: Living Beyond the Legacies through Reparative and Restorative Justice

Emancipation was sought on an appeal that “Am I not a man and a brother?” The years leading up to emancipation were founded on a vision of the universality of humanity, which the LMS also embraced at its founding. But after emancipation, attitudes hardened. The so-called liberals “expected more” of emancipated Black people than was possible in the conditions they created at emancipation. Freed slaves were expected to work for their masters for free for 25 years. Thus, emancipated people were still yoked to poverty and hardship. As White liberals judged this a disappointment, they began to succumb to the racist supremacy theories of the mind of 19th-century High Empire and social Darwinism.

Who taught this racist worldview to all ages, at home and abroad? Missionaries. Through mission, Christianity was offered as a way to access and exercise privilege, as the way for the domineered to navigate the Empire and the hierarchies that dominated them. The global nature of racism and xenophobia is intimately tied up with the global White missionary project. As the Council for World Mission has identified these elements in its own life and story, it moves now to consider how to commit itself to racial justice as one element of its reparation.

²³ *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (July 1837), 227–28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*