Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940, by Jeffrey Cox; pp. ix + 357. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, $55.00.

Jeff Cox tackles big questions. Even better, he answers big questions on the local ground. The results here, as in his previous work, illuminate the struggle between piety and power that some would deem constitutive of our very humanity. Cox's first monograph, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (1982), took on secularization theory in the kind of place one would not expect to find organized religion in good health even in its Victorian heyday. In the underutilized archives of local churches and chapels in this impoverished south London borough, as well as in the borough press and in the accounts of contemporary social surveyors, Cox uncovered surprising evidence of considerable home missionary success. It was not modern imperatives, much less intellectual enlightenment, that left Britain's churches and chapels bereft of popular support. Declining church attendance in twentieth century Britain was, rather, a function of the Victorian churches' institutional emphasis on social provisions that would subsequently be displaced by a welfare state Nonconformists helped to build.

Imperial Fault Lines tackles the other major question in Protestantism's modern social history, the nature of the relationship between Christian missions and colonialism. As Cox notes in his crisply written and generous introduction, scholarly assessments of Christian missions run the ideological gamut. Anti-colonial nationalist historians have generally viewed missionaries as cultural imperialists, agents of the civilizing mission, universally and inevitably complicit in colonial racism and exploitation. Missionaries' present-day defenders, by contrast, deny that missionaries were interested in politics at all, claiming that their (self-professed) motives were exclusively spiritual. Agnostics on the question levy perhaps the most damning of all charges in their insistence that mission-

aries in the colonies were marginal figures who exerted little or no influence on colonial outcomes. Were missionaries imperialists in Christian disguise or were they sincere in their professions of faith? Were missionary motives primarily religious or political? Were missionaries racist agents of colonial exploitation or "friends of the native"? Did missions matter at all or were missions a simple waste of Victorian time and money?

Cox engages these questions in the local mission fields of colonial South Asia. It is worth noting that Cox began working on this project in the early 1980s, well before British historical studies' recent imperial turn; it was Cox's decision to learn the languages necessary to examine the foreign missionary encounter from as many archival and oral perspectives as possible that delayed publication. Our reward for his diligence lies in the degree to which this book succeeds in bringing converts and missionaries, colonized and colonizers, into the same field of vision. Cox acknowledges the power differentials on which the missionary presence in the Punjab was predicated, as well as the racial prejudice to which most missionaries succumbed. Cox insists, however, that social relations on the colonial ground continually frustrated missionary intentions, whether benighted or benevolent. Cox continually draws attention to the unintended and often contradictory consequences of missionary exertions in the field. Liberal missionaries' efforts to befriend the "natives" were as likely to be foiled by the temptations of racial privilege as their more authoritarian counterparts' efforts to keep the "natives" in their place were to being undermined by the missionaries' dependence on native agency.

Perhaps the most striking example of missionary rhetoric's divergence from colonial reality lies in the fact that the missionary field force was not white and male as missionary hagiography might lead one to expect. Women played a prominent role in the foreign mission field from the outset; and by the twentieth century's turn, the majority of missionary employees were female. Here, as in his study of Lambeth, Cox emphasizes the relatively autonomous logic of institutional development. The professionalization of mission work that accompanied the missionary movement's growing emphasis on establishing schools and hospitals provided employment opportunities for white women as well as Indian converts. Contrary to the conventional wisdom of secular mission historiography, Cox insists that we see the missionary presence in the Punjab, and South Asia more generally, as the multiracial, multicultural, even multireligious movement that it was. This social diversity complicated any efforts by missionaries or the colonial state to utilize missionary institutions as instruments of colonial rule. However subordinate they were supposed to be in principle, white women and native agents were "in practice often independent" of the empire's white, male, and middle-class rulers (186).

The social relations of the missionary encounter, the intimacy and affection, as well as the insults and betrayals, which characterized mission practice on the local ground, were of a far more complex character than the generically predictable propaganda or rhetoric on which most mission studies (including my own) depend. These social relations were often of a character far removed from anything that missionaries, much less their home supporters, sought or intended. The Christian Church in the Punjab, to take the example at hand, was comprised largely of untouchable populations ignored, if not abhorred, by the largely Anglican missionary presence in the region. Particularly fascinating is Cox's discussion of village Christianity and hymnody. He rightly questions secular scholars' eagerness to dismiss as superficial the song-based (as opposed to church-based or text-based) faith especially prominent among village women. He simi-

larly refuses to reduce conversion to "merely a question of schools, jobs, and patronage" (127-28). Cox's recognition of the "unique and genuine piety" of Christian converts in the Punjab is a timely reminder of the mixed motivations of every human subject in all our interactions (152).

From this perspective, the rhetoric and even intentions of the white male leadership of missionary organizations lose their (exclusive) purchase on the center stage of mission history. It is at this point that the contradictions within the missionary movement (as opposed to those between missions and the colonial state) come to the fore. While missionaries themselves, and certainly their rhetoric, were typically loyal to the imperial project, they established institutions that encouraged relationships at odds with the interests of the colonial state. Cox's is certainly not the only mission study to focus on converts and their agency, or on missionary practices as opposed to rhetoric. But he is one of the few active scholars in this field to bring all these perspectives into a single focus. Analytically as well as methodologically, this book has moved the cutting edge of the field.

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