



## Book Review

Felicity Jensz. (2022). *Missionaries and Modernity: Education in the British Empire, 1830-1910*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Pp. viii+278. Price: £ 85.00. ISBN 9781526152978. Hardcover.

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Great interest has emerged in academe about the missionary dynamic in empire in the past decade. Felicity Jensz's *Missionaries and Modernity* is a timely addition that shifts the dial on how to better interpret their organisational agency at the metropole and how new missionary mentalities were negotiated as the British imperium, within which they operated, also evolved. Taking on this task is no mean feat. Established, now very dated work has offered some of the same perspective, but without the benefit of the enormous strides that have been made since in assessing the broader features of the British colonial play—with the subaltern turn of the 1990s and subsequent scholarship that has repositioned the European in empire.

To scope these changes in central missionary mentalities between 1830 and 1910 (an enormous period of missionary change), Jensz concentrates on key metropole forums: the 'Negro Education Grant' of 1835; the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) 1835-37; the Liverpool Missionary Conference of 1860 and the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910. To further deepen her analysis the author focusses mostly on education—a primary field of endeavour, of course, for most such missionaries. There is also analysis of those who travelled to England and Scotland with direct missionary experience in the field, such as Behari Lal Singh relating the post-1857-Revolt missionary domain of colonial India in Chapter 3, and those from Sri Lanka, presiding over the progressively secularised missionary schools in that colony, in Chapter 4.

The book then turns, in part, to Africa in Chapter 5. Here eugenic murmurings see African races relegated in the racial pecking order—compared to Europeans and even Indians—that also then shifted missionary intent. This was where Africans, (who were seen by missionary bodies, as well as Westminster, as mostly capable of only manual labour), were in fact marginalised through the spurious missionary construct of the 'dignity of labour', that then justified a compromised missionary agency that no longer included 'bookish learning'. More generally, the book concludes by taking African colonies as an example. Here the failure to create converts, the competition of Islam and that of secular modernism (which was also enshrined in emerging local nationalist movements), forced missionaries to reimagine themselves. As a result, and in the powerful post-Enlightenment educational domain of Scotland, Jensz sees these missionaries as orienting themselves, instead, as professional educational experts (knowing that they could claim an unrivalled experience in Africa, even compared to government) to protect their institutional investments in these colonies in the future.

A critical finding of this book is that British missionaries, fighting their weakening position as secularisation and 'modernisation' took hold at the metropole, turned their attentions away from promises of widespread conversions, to claims of being the best educators of non-Europeans in the colonies. This brand of education, no doubt, was an alluring promise to colonial powerbrokers in projecting a harvest of obedience from beneath through the moderating influence of Western-determined social and moral instruction in the classroom.

Yet, as Jensz argues, this change in missionary self-promotion still maintained that schooling without (Christian) religion was no education at all.

Felicity Jensz has dealt with this very demanding and broad topic in ways that have cleverly selected key institutional moments in the missionary experience at the metropole. Her use of extensive archival and secondary material builds a convincing analysis. In this way her work adequately accounts for the broader colonial and imperial narratives that both contextualise missionary frames, and which were shaped by these frames, between the early nineteenth through to the early twentieth centuries. And the conclusions of this well-written work are crisp and innovative. For these reasons this book is a must for any scholar wishing to study empire and the missionary dynamic that operated within it.