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The Nile Expedition, New Imperialism, and Canadian Baptists, 1884–1885¹

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THE 19 MARCH 1885 edition of the *Canadian Baptist* included a map of the Egyptian Sudan and Abyssinia for readers who wanted to be able to picture the recent events surrounding the British advance on Khartoum.² Just a few weeks before, a Baptist pastor at First Baptist Church, Montreal, preached a sermon on General Gordon, the British leader and hero who recently had been killed in Khartoum. A summary of the sermon was also printed in the *Canadian Baptist*.³ While Britain had been involved in a number of imperial conflicts in the preceding years, this particular imperial engagement deep in Africa along the Nile was of special interest to Canadians. There were almost 400 Canadians involved in the Nile Expedition, and their participation in a far-flung imperial conflict, as well as reactions on the home front to their exploits, indicate a significant degree of imperial fervor. As for Baptists, the map and the sermon were just two examples from many that indicate support for the “new imperialism.”

1. I am grateful to *The Baptist Quarterly* for permission to reprint this article. See “The Nile Expedition, New Imperialism and Canadian Baptists, 1884–1885,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2011) 171–86.

2. “Map of the Egyptian Soodan [sic] and Abyssinia,” *Canadian Baptist*, 19 March 1885, 8. The *Canadian Baptist* was a weekly paper published by Ontario and Quebec Baptists.

3. “General Gordon,” *Canadian Baptist*, 26 February 1885, 1.

CANADA AND THE NEW IMPERIALISM

The Canadian Protestant churches were ardent supporters of Canada's involvement in the South African War (1899–1902).⁴ During that imperial conflict they revealed their passionate support for the empire, and indicated that their concept of Canadian nationalism was inseparably intertwined with imperialism. In fact, their activities and attitudes during the South African War were precursors to the ways in which the Protestant churches supported the war effort during the First World War. But what about the Nile Expedition that occurred fifteen years before the South African War? What did the churches think of empire then?

Both Robert Page and C. P. Stacey assert that in the years immediately following Confederation (1867) English Canadians were loyal to Britain, but not all that excited about specific imperial ventures, and imperialism in general.⁵ What the following research indicates is that imperialism in the churches—in this case among Baptists—was already fairly well developed by 1884–85. The South African War may have led to the most ardent expressions of imperial zeal in Canadian history up that point in time, but, if the coverage and commentary in the Baptist press is any indication, new imperialism was an ideology that had begun to capture the imagination of a number of Canadians more than a decade before Canadian troops embarked for their baptism of blood in South Africa. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Canadian response mirrored the Australian colonial response, although one important difference was that the Australians actually sent troops to the Nile.⁶

What little has been written about Canada and the Nile Expedition has dealt with either its political or military features.⁷ Furthermore, no one has explored the churches and the birth of new imperialism. “New imperialism” was marked by a dramatic intensification of imperial expansion and conflict between the end of the Franco-Prussian War (1870) and the start of the First World War (1914). When did the churches begin to support this more aggressive, expansive, and competitive form of

4. Heath, *Silver Lining*.

5. See Page, *Boer War*, 3; Stacey, *Conflict*, 40–44. For French-Canadian views of imperialism, see Silver, “Quebec Attitudes.”

6. See Inglis, *Rehearsal*; Saunders, “Inaccuracy.” The men sent by Canada were not troops (see below).

7. Stacey, “Nile Expedition”; Stacey, “Macdonald”; Stacey, *Records*; Bumsted, “From the Red to the Nile”; Boileau, “Voyageurs”; Michel, “Represent the Country”; Pigott, *Canada in the Soudan*; McLaren, *Canadians on the Nile*.

imperialism that was so prominent during the South African War? This research into post-Confederation imperialism demonstrates that it was in place—at least among Baptists—by at least 1884–85.⁸

A brief comment on sources is in order. This research is based primarily on Canadian Baptist newspapers.⁹ As noted elsewhere, the late-Victorian Canadian Protestant press acted in a nation-building role.¹⁰ And while the press in 1885 did not expend the same amount of space on political concerns as it did in 1899, the press was on a trajectory towards developing into a nation-building press. For instance, the Baptist press in the 1870s was devoted primarily to church-related matters, but increasingly throughout the 1880s its pages included political commentary. By the time of the Nile Expedition, every week had cable news that outlined international events in great detail, and increasingly the editors included commentary or articles on political matters. The impact of the undersea cables on newspapers should not be underestimated, for not only did the cables bring immediate news to readers (and subsequently make the papers a valuable source of imperial propaganda),¹¹ but they also helped to bind together the widely scattered regions of the empire into a global community, or nascent imperial federation.¹²

8. Among the four largest Protestant denominations in Canada (Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Baptist), Baptists were the smallest, comprising approximately 6.5 percent of the population (although in the Maritimes they comprised 20–25 percent of the population). Consequently, there is a need for some comparative work to be done on the much larger Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian communities, not to mention some of the even smaller denominations. For a study of Canadian Baptist history, see Renfree, *Heritage*.

9. This research makes use of the following Baptist periodical publications: *Canadian Baptist* (Toronto, Ontario), *Religious Intelligencer* (Saint John, New Brunswick), the *North West Baptist* (Winnipeg, Manitoba), and the *Christian Messenger* (Saint John, New Brunswick). In January 1885 the *Messenger* merged with a Maritime Baptist paper called the *Visitor* to create the *Messenger and Visitor*.

10. For a discussion of the nation-building role of the press, see Heath, “Forming Sound Public Opinion.”

11. John MacKenzie has noted how in Britain there was no pressing need for government agencies to be involved in imperial propaganda, for a number of non-governmental agencies were enthusiastically doing it for them. See MacKenzie, *Propaganda*, 2–3.

12. For developments in cable and communication, see Potter, “Communication.” The London origins of most news reports also no doubt played a part in the English-Canadian papers being decidedly pro-British, whereas reports in French-Canadian papers were primarily from Paris-based wire services. For instance, little more than a decade later, these different sources contributed to different views of Canada’s

COMMENTARY ON KHARTOUM AND THE SUDAN

When General Garnet Wolseley was faced with the daunting task of relieving Gordon in Khartoum, he thought that the best way to get there was to advance up the Nile. Remembering the help he had received from Canadian voyageurs during the Red River Rebellion (1867–70), he sent a letter to Canadian Governor General Lansdowne on 20 August 1884 requesting the assistance of voyageurs. The request was for boatmen, not soldiers, and the men were to take a strictly non-combatant role. The recruitment and organizing was efficient, for shortly thereafter, on 15 September 1884, 386 men departed Quebec City for Egypt. On 7 October 1884 the Canadians arrived in Alexandria. They soon joined Wolseley and his 5400 troops, and once united they headed south up the Nile.¹³

For a number of years the press had been printing cable reports on international events. The reports were often quite extensive, and contained disparate information on numerous imperial conflicts and political situations around the globe. This coverage of imperial events continued during the Nile Expedition, usually with weekly coverage. Initial events surrounding the call for the expedition,¹⁴ the advance and conditions of the relief force,¹⁵ various battles,¹⁶ and Gordon's condition and fate¹⁷ were the main types of printed reports.

involvement in another imperial conflict. See Page, *Boer War*, 17.

13. For a discussion of the larger strategic position, especially in regards to India, see Preston, "Wolseley."

14. For instance, see "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 11 July 1884, 3; "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 8 August 1884, 3; "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 15 August 1884, 3.

15. For instance, see "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 21 November 1884, 3; "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 28 November 1884, 3; "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 5 December 1884, 3; "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 12 December 1884, 3.

16. For instance, see "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 7 November 1884, 3; "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 23 January 1885, 3; *Religious Intelligencer*, 6 February 1885, 2; "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 27 February 1885, 3; *Messenger and Visitor*, 28 January 1885, 1; *Messenger and Visitor*, 4 February 1885, 1; "British and Foreign," *Messenger and Visitor*, 4 February 1885, 8; "News Summary," *Messenger and Visitor*, 11 March 1885, 8; "News Notes," *Canadian Baptist*, 26 March 1885, 8.

17. For instance, see *Canadian Baptist*, 12 February 1885, 1; "Death of General Gordon," *Canadian Baptist*, 12 September 1884, 5; *Canadian Baptist*, 19 February 1885, 1.

While information on the performance of the boatmen was limited, the Baptist press tried to follow their progress. Their departure from Canada, arrival in Egypt, and return from Egypt were all noted.¹⁸ A few reports on their performance were printed,¹⁹ as was personal correspondence.²⁰ A report on deaths made it into press,²¹ as did a brief comment on the Queen's "hearty thanks" to the contingent.²²

Despite the best efforts of the relief expedition, and the fact that they were just a few days away, they could not get to Gordon in time. On 26 January 1885, the defenses of Khartoum were breached and Gordon was killed. His death was a shock to people used to hearing about imperial victories and believing in the superiority of Anglo-Saxons over against "natives." The news of his death in Britain led to passionate denunciations of the Gladstone government for its lackadaisical support for Gordon, and eventually led to its downfall. His death also fueled war fever in Britain and parts of the empire. In Canada, there was a minor epidemic of volunteering for overseas service to recapture the Sudan and punish the Mahdi, but this abated relatively quickly when Britain decided to abandon the Sudan.²³ The Baptist press briefly mentioned this surge in volunteering, but did not actively recruit for the war effort.²⁴

Although coverage of the Nile Expedition continued into mid-1885, the events with Riel in the Canadian West, as well as a looming British-Russian war, began to eclipse the events in the Sudan.²⁵ The British

18. "English and Foreign," *Religious Intelligencer*, 1 May 1885, 3; "News Summary," *Messenger and Visitor*, 11 March 1885, 8; *Christian Messenger*, 15 October 1884, 5; *Christian Messenger*, 29 October 1884, 5; *Christian Messenger*, 12 November 1884, 4.

19. "The Canadian boatmen have done grand work, —fully justifying their selection." See *Christian Messenger*, 12 November 1884, 4. "Reports from up the Nile show that the Canadian boatmen are experiencing more difficulty in getting their boats up the cataracts than they had anticipated." See "News of the World," *Christian Messenger*, 19 November 1884, 5.

20. "Dominion of Canada," *Christian Messenger*, 26 November 1884, 5.

21. *Canadian Baptist*, 4 June 1885, 4; "Dominion of Canada," *Christian Messenger*, 24 December 1884, 5.

22. *Religious Intelligencer*, 27 February 1885, 2.

23. MacLaren, *Canadians on the Nile*, 129; Morton, *Military History*, 109; Stacey, "Nile Expedition," 325–26.

24. *Religious Intelligencer*, 27 February 1885, 2; "News Summary," *Messenger and Visitor*, 11 March 1885, 8.

25. For instance, see "Russia and England," *Canadian Baptist*, 26 March 1885, 4; *Canadian Baptist*, 30 April 1885, 4; "What Shall the End Be?" *Canadian Baptist*, 16 April 1885, 4; "Wars and Rumours," *Religious Intelligencer*, 17 April 1885, 2.

evacuation of the Sudan after Gordon's death was also a factor in the Nile Expedition eventually disappearing from the pages of the press.

IMPERIAL ASSUMPTIONS

The response to the conflict exposed a number of assumptions held by Baptists. The war commentary revealed an ardent, expansionist, and militant imperialism, significantly similar to that displayed a decade and a half later during the South African War.

Much has been written about Canada's relationship to the empire in the late-Victorian period, and by the end of the nineteenth century the churches' nationalism was inseparable from imperialism.²⁶ Baptists cherished their connections to Britain, praised their "motherland," followed British politics as though they were their own, and looked forward to imperial victories. Hope was expressed regarding the formation of a grand alliance of Anglo-Saxon peoples that would bring peace to the world, and positive commentary on some type of imperial federation was presented to readers.²⁷ Based on the commentary in their papers, it is difficult to see Baptists imagining themselves as anything but both Canadian and British, whose national identity was fused to their imperial destiny. The degree of war commentary during the South African War allows for a clear picture of Canadian nationalism in 1899–1902. Nevertheless, the glimpses of nationalism during 1884–85 are certainly on the trajectory towards what would be seen in the South African War.

It was clear in the press that the conflict in the Sudan was just one conflict in the much larger imperial competition in Africa and around the globe. European nations were in a race for empire, and, for Baptists, the best thing for the "natives" in Africa was that the British Empire would win the race. The reason given, of course, was that the British Empire was a blessing to all it ruled.

Commentary on the Berlin Conference, where Europeans parceled out much of Africa, reveals the connection between the spread of empires and the advancement of civilization. The superiority of European culture,

26. See Berger, *Sense of Power*; Penlington, *Canada*; Page, "Canada and the Imperial Idea"; Page, *Boer War*; Page, "Berger"; Cole, "Imperialists"; Cook, "Parkin"; Buckner, "Whatever Happened?"; Buckner, "Canada"; Heath, *Silver Lining*, ch. 4.

27. "The British Empire," *Religious Intelligencer*, 24 July 1885, 2; "England and Her Colonies," *Religious Intelligencer*, 22 August 1884, 2.

with its manifold blessings, was now to be extended even more, but this time with a coordinated effort devoid of past conflicts.

The blessing of civilization long bestowed in rich abundance in Europe and North America, and in measure in Asia and South America, seem now destined to overflow, flood with a new life and light the long oppressed, dark continent, with its swarthy races so long victimized by every nation possessed of ships and colonies. Never before in the annals of history of our race, has such a hopeful prospect exalted for the inhabitants of an uncivilized region brought for the first time into contact with strong and civilized peoples.²⁸

Injustices were to end, slavery was to be abolished, and “black men and whites” were to be “equal before the law.” Of course, much of the power of this sentiment came from the belief that “a higher will than that of man” was behind the rise of European empires, and that ultimately the advance of empire would lead to the spread of Christianity. The optimism in the motives and mandate of nations involved in the Berlin Conference can be seen in a brief article extolling Belgium’s King Leopold II’s missionary passion for the Congo.²⁹

While European culture in general was considered to be more advanced than non-European cultures, the British were deemed to be superior to all. British rule, with the help of other English-speaking nations, would eventually be able to bring peace to the world.³⁰ The Anglo-Saxon people had a unique mission as a Christian people, one considered to be superior to that of other imperial competitors:

The historic relation of the Anglo-Saxon to Christianity, and thence to civilization alike, is pronounced . . . The French, the Germans, the Spanish and the Portuguese, pale before the Anglo-Saxon race as qualified by nature, by education, and by all the forces of a long formative discipline, for the planting of new colonies, promising development into communities, and thence into States, into commonwealths, and like our own, into independent nationalities . . . But preeminently the Anglo-Saxon is

28. “The Results of the Berlin Conference,” *Canadian Baptist*, 23 July 1885, 1.

29. “King Leopold and Africa,” *Messenger and Visitor*, 28 January 1885, 2. While Baptists could not have known it at the time, Leopold’s rule in the Belgian Congo became atrocious and one of the worst examples of exploitation and abuse in Africa. See Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*.

30. “The British Empire,” *Religious Intelligencer*, 24 July 1885, 2.

practical; and being practical, he naturally is more devoted to the arts of peace than to those of war . . . It is this characterizing and this distinguishing feature which has made, and which will continue to make the Anglo-Saxon such a marked force and factor in that migratory and extending civilization which constitute the crowning glory of the nineteenth century.³¹

Rev. Dr. Wheaton Smith's message on 15 February 1885 at First Baptist Church, St. Catherine Street, Montreal, provides a vivid example of this belief in the blessing of British rule. The event was the commemoration of Gordon, the text was John 12:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." A great deal of the message was about the life and successes of Gordon in China and Egypt. Tragic as Gordon's death was, Smith concluded, it would lead to the betterment of Africa.

And now for the fruit which the dead seed would bring forth. God meant that the slave trade in Egypt should be abolished . . . The death of Gordon and the fall of Khartoum would not soon be forgotten. They would live in the memory of the civilized world. Thousands of human beings each year would no longer march in misery the arid sands of the Behuda desert. England had drawn the sword, and justice should be done to humanity. The talismanic name of Gordon would electrify the forces of mankind. Regiments without number, he believed, could be enlisted to march to the Soudan and suppress the inhuman Madhi [sic].³²

After promoting Gordon to relative sainthood (at least as much as Baptists were able to), and pointing out the immense good that would come from the inevitable British victory, the message ended with a prayer for the safety and success of the troops in the Sudan.

Not only would the expansion of British rule lead to the spread of civilization and justice, it was also argued that the expansion of empire would eventuate in the spread of Christianity. European empires in general, and the British Empire in particular, had contributed to the global spread of Christianity. Two overt examples of the connection between imperial conflict and the advancement of the gospel reveal remarkable precursors to the response to the South African War. First, while war was deemed tragic, it was still considered to be one way in which God

31. "The Anglo-Saxon Mission," *Messenger and Visitor*, 8 July 1885, 1.

32. "General Gordon," *Canadian Baptist*, 26 February 1885, 1.

advanced the cause of Christianity.³³ This connection between the progress of Christianity and imperial military success was more fully realized and developed among Baptists during the South African War. Second, the annexation of Burma in 1885 by the British was supported because it was considered a boon for mission work.³⁴ Brian Stanley proposes that British missionaries in the later nineteenth century entered the political arena to protect their interests.³⁵ It was assumed, Stanley argues, that British imperial control could best bring about the much-needed stability and rule of law (not to mention commerce and technology) that would aid the work of the missionaries. Like many British missionaries,³⁶ Canadian Baptists defended imperial expansion when deemed necessary for the expansion of the gospel: in the case of Burma it was. It would also be a significant reason for supporting the future war in South African.³⁷

Stanley also argues: “If you wish to mobilize Baptists (and evangelicals as a whole) on an issue that divides the nation down the middle politically, the way to do it is to persuade them that liberty to preach the gospel is at stake.”³⁸ The examples noted above affirm his claim. Baptists had a vigorous commitment to personal conversion and evangelical missions, and the events of the late nineteenth century fuelled that passion. Carl Berger has identified how Canadian English Protestant imperialism was “infused” with religious emotion.³⁹ It seemed as if God had providentially established an empire that aided in the growth of the church, and Baptists were not ones to argue with God. The empire was good for missions, so how could its expansion be bad?

This support for the expansion of the empire was directly related to Canada’s growing national identity and concomitant providential calling. Berger notes that Canadian imperialists “made the realization of

33. Rev. Elbert S. Todd, “War and the Progress of Christianity,” *Religious Intelligencer*, 8 August 1884, 2.

34. “But however mixed may be the motives that lead to the invasion, and however doubtful its justification, there can scarcely be a doubt that, like many other extensions of civilized government, will redound to the highest good of the benighted natives. A new door will be opened for missionary enterprise.” See “The Annexation of Burmah,” *Canadian Baptist*, 5 November 1885, 4.

35. Stanley, *Flag*, ch. 5.

36. Greenlee and Johnston, *Good Citizens*, 108–10.

37. See Heath, *Silver Lining*, ch. 5.

38. Stanley, “Baptists, Antislavery,” 289.

39. Berger, *Sense of Power*, 217.

Canadian nationhood contingent upon the acceptance of racial responsibility and fulfillment of the mission.” For imperialists, and a number of them were Baptists, mission was central to Canada’s purpose. Canada, they said, “could only be a nation if she acted and functioned like one, and, to them, this meant that she must assume her share of the civilizing work within the Empire and be ready to defend that agency of progress.”⁴⁰

The fusion of the advance of Western civilization with the spread of Christianity can be seen above. The inverse of that equation was that Christianity brought civilization. This sentiment can be seen in an article on the effect Christianity had on civilizing peoples. The article that portrayed the gospel as the “true civilizer” dealt with imperial advances in the Pacific, Australia, and Tasmania, and how commercial and government methods were not always the best suited to deal with “barbarous peoples.” Commercial interests were selfish, and government was often paternalistic; the most effective way to bring civilization to indigenous peoples was to bring the gospel first. In fact, if the gospel arrived first, the civilizing task would be made easier and safer.⁴¹ It was noted that in New South Wales, the government had expended enormous amounts of money to relieve the suffering of the “natives,” but had failed. In Tasmania, it went on, despite the best intentions of British authorities for the past sixty years, the entire indigenous population had been exterminated. The best way to protect people and introduce civilization was to bring the gospel first.

The Gospel will not always save aboriginal peoples from decay, but it does delay the process, preserve the language, redeem a goodly number of the people, and prepare these lands for a better stock, under better auspices. The Sandwich Islanders may become extinct—but if so, it may be said, without wavering, that the Gospel puts brakes upon this process if it did not quite reverse the wheels, and saved scores of thousands unto God and transferred them from the realm of darkness into the Kingdom of God. If we would civilize the nations, give them the Gospel of Christ.⁴²

40. *Ibid.*, 231.

41. “Hence it has come to be said that the missionary is the best possible police force in the islands of the Pacific; and even in Ebon, no long time since a cannibal island, human life is safer than in San Francisco.” See “The Gospel the True Civilizer,” *Canadian Baptist*, 6 August 1885, 1. For a discussion of the variety of views among evangelicals regarding the need for civilization before Christianity, or vice versa, see Stanley, “Christianity and Civilization.”

42. “The Gospel the True Civilizer,” *Canadian Baptist*, 6 August 1885, 1.

Missionaries, in this type of discourse, were imperial agents, preparing the way for a benevolent and civilizing imperial rule.⁴³

Associated with the benevolent role of empire was the idea of national righteousness. The idea was rooted in the Old Testament concept of God's covenantal expectations for the nation of Israel. If the nation followed God's commands, God would bless the nation. If the nation sinned, then God would foil the plans of rulers and generals. In other words, the temporal success of the nation depended on its spiritual condition. The same idea was applied to Britain, Canada, and the entire imperial enterprise.

As a new nation with vast resources and a sound government, Canada had great potential, but that potential could only be reached if Christians did all that they could do to make the nation truly righteous. As one article concluded: "The duty the Christian owes to his country is amongst his most solemn obligations. Righteousness, alone, can truly exalt a nation, and every Canadian Christian must desire to see Canada exalted by righteousness."⁴⁴ Because Canada was such a new nation, and because the "Canadian national character" was just being formed, it was imperative that Christians exert themselves to shape the nation's character in order to shape the nation's destiny.⁴⁵ If Christians were to make Canada truly a Christian nation, then the nation would be successful, prosper, and live up to its divine calling. On the other hand, if Canada failed to act justly, unrest and even war would be wrought upon the nation.⁴⁶

It was this sense of righteousness that justified the spread of empire and could make for such a potent degree of confidence going into battle. The "God of battles" could be called upon for victory in the Sudan because God would ultimately come to the aid of the side of "right."⁴⁷ When it looked in early 1885 as if Britain and Russia were going to go to war the same principle applied:

43. For a broader treatment of missionaries in advance of empire, see Barker, "Missionary Frontier." Interestingly, it has been recently noted that Christian missions have contributed to the preservation of indigenous languages and culture. See Sanneh, "Christian Missions," 331–34.

44. "National Exaltation," *Canadian Baptist*, 3 April 1884, 4.

45. Ibid. See also "Christian Statesmanship," *Canadian Baptist*, 14 May 1885, 4.

46. For instance, the events with Riel in 1885 were seen to be due to the unchristian actions of the Canadian government towards the indigenous peoples of the West. See *ibid.* For a poignant Canadian example of this attitude during the South African War, see Heath, "Sin in the Camp."

47. *Messenger and Visitor*, 11 February 1885, 1.

To those who view the matter from the loftiest standpoint, a question of still greater moment than that of victory or defeat is that of right and wrong. Will the war, if waged, be on the side of either a righteousness war? Can the British forces, for instance, go forth to the conflict feeling that they are clad in the triple steel of the just cause, and that the Lord of Hosts is with them?⁴⁸

If right was on their side, those within the empire could have the unshakable faith in ultimate victory, for God, they believed, would ultimately aid the imperial cause.

For those uncomfortable with this language of righteousness bolstering the imperial cause, it needs to be remembered that it was that very same demand for righteousness that led to denunciations of jingoism and abuses of empire.⁴⁹ Over the past number of decades there has been a considerable amount of energy expended exploring the relationship between missions and imperialism, a relationship most often explained in terms of power. While power certainly is an important part of the analysis of missionary attitudes and actions, Jane Samson argues convincingly for a more nuanced approach to power and motives.⁵⁰ Andrew Porter's recent book on the history of British Protestant missionaries is an example of such an approach.⁵¹ Porter's work shows that the relationship between British missionaries and empire was more complex and ambiguous than previously thought. Baptist commentary during the Nile Expedition reveals that while Baptists were supportive of empire, their support was not unqualified.⁵²

Harsh words were printed for the waves of jingoism in Britain, and it was hoped that the "leaven of Christian purity will be found sufficient to purge the land speedily of so gross abomination."⁵³ The spread of military parades in Canada on Sunday was troubling for churches so committed

48. "What Shall the End Be?" *Canadian Baptist*, 16 April 1885, 4.

49. In this regards, Baptists were not alone among evangelical Protestants. For a discussion of the connection between righteousness, sin, and the support for (and criticism of) empire in Britain, see Bebbington, "Atonement."

50. Samson, "Problem of Colonialism."

51. Porter, *Religion versus Empire*. Porter's introductory essay on missions and empire also provides a sense of this complexity. See Porter, "Overview."

52. For examples of Baptist criticism at the end of the nineteenth century, see Heath, "When Missionaries Were Hated."

53. "The Mother Land," *Canadian Baptist*, 23 July 1885, 4.

to maintaining the Sabbath, and the practice was discouraged.⁵⁴ “Land grabbing” by France and Germany was criticized.⁵⁵ One article even had kind words for the Mahdi.⁵⁶ The Mahdi’s rebellion against the British in the Sudan was described as a legitimate reaction to the corrupt rule of the Egyptians, and he was described as a freedom fighter in the likes of Cromwell, MacKenzie, or Papineau. If Britain was going to smash the Mahdi, it had better be for righteous reasons.

If England is not in the Soudan to terminate the slave trade, nor to establish a government and civilization; if she stays there now with no other object than the popular brutal one of revenge—that of killing the prophet and making Arab blood flow—if the England of the nineteenth century goes back to that old law of “eye for eye,” she will be guilty of a crime before heaven and the law of love. Why cannot she, in the moral strength that refused to revenge the death of Colley and the Majuba death, on the Boers, leave those Soudanese to themselves, so long as she feels she has no mission nor evangel to proclaim.

In other words, Britain could not just be in the Sudan for conquest and revenge; there needed to be a higher and nobler moral purpose.

The concern for righteousness cut both ways: if the cause was righteous, then they could confidently wage war and expect to win with God’s help, but if the cause was unrighteous, then the cause could be criticized and would most likely fail. Of course, Canadian Baptists, in an imperial twist to nation-building, were to do all that they could to encourage the nation and empire to pursue righteousness.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

Almost a decade and a half later, Gordon’s death was avenged on 2 September 1898 when the British under the leadership of Major-General Kitchener captured Khartoum. This battlefield success that made

54. *Canadian Baptist*, 23 April 1885, 4.

55. *Messenger and Visitor*, 11 February 1885, 1. This criticism seems somewhat disingenuous (or at least very inconsistent), for if Britain could grab territory why not France and Germany?

56. “The Mahdi,” *Canadian Baptist*, 5 March 1885, 1.

57. The nation-building theme so prominent in Canadian religious historiography has neglected the imperial element of national identity. For instance, see Airhart, “Ordering a New Nation.”

Kitchener famous allowed for the expansion of British imperial rule in the Sudan. As the following announcement of the victory in the *Canadian Baptist* indicates, it was believed that British control would better the lot of the Sudanese:

Following the advance up the Nile and the capture of Khartoum and Omdurman, comes a proposition from the victorious General that a college and medical school be established at Khartoum in memory of General Gordon. The whole to cost about \$300,000, which General Kitchener thinks the British public would gladly provide. Such a memorial would avenge the murder of Chinese Gordon in a spirit akin to his own, and would show the barbaric tribes of the Nile tributaries the great difference between the religion of Christ and the cruel fetishism of the Mahdi.⁵⁸

By 1898 the new imperialism had captured the imagination of many Canadian English Protestants, and the acquiring of Khartoum fit quite nicely into the paradigm of British advances and blessings. The following year would see Canadians embark for South Africa to wage an imperial war against the Boers, and at that time imperialism among English Protestants reached a feverish pitch. However, the beginnings of such imperial zeal can be traced back to the Nile Expedition of 1884–85.

Of course, the events of 1884–85 need to be appreciated in their own right, not just seen as precursors to something greater down the road. Nevertheless, the Baptist press's response to the Nile Expedition does provide glimpses of an ardent passion for empire that indicates support for the convictions of the new imperialism. It appears that what kept Baptist commitment to imperialism from reaching a feverish pitch at that time was more the circumstances of the conflict than a lack of imperial passion. If Canadian soldiers had been sent (many volunteered to do so after Gordon's death, but were not needed), if the British had not abandoned the Sudan, and if the domestic dealings with Riel had not drawn attention away from foreign events, the imperial zeal of the South African War may very well have been seen during the Nile Expedition.

58. "Editorial Note," *Canadian Baptist*, 22 September 1898, 1.

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