

## “To Make the World One in Christ Jesus”

*Transpacific Protestantism in the Age of Empire*

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**ABSTRACT** Scholarship on nineteenth-century missionary encounters emphasizes either how native converts “indigenized” Christian doctrine and practice, or how missionaries acted as agents of Western imperial expansion. These approaches, however, overlook the ways both missionaries and converts understood Protestant Christianity as a call to transnational community. This essay examines the ways that American Protestants and East Asian Christian converts looked for ways to build a transpacific communion. Despite radically different understandings of Christian scripture, and despite the geopolitics of empire, U.S. and East Asian Protestants nevertheless strove to bring together diverse theologies and experiences into a loosely defined, transnational Protestant community. **KEYWORDS** Transnationalism, Protestantism, Pacific worlds, empire, missionaries

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In 1885, Japan’s most famous Christian returned to America. Officially on vacation, in truth Niijima Jō had a mission. He needed help. “I may die as an unceasing beggar for Japan,” he sighed. “It is the whole burden of my soul.”<sup>1</sup> But he knew Americans could be generous. In 1865 when he had stepped off a Yankee clipper with no money and only a sailor’s command of English, a wealthy Boston merchant had volunteered to pay for his education. Nine years later, he went home with degrees from Amherst College and Andover Seminary, an appointment as missionary for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and more than \$5000 in donations to start a Christian school. Reading about his fledgling school in Kyoto, Americans sent more, and more again as he preached and prayed across Japan. Now he was back, and this time money was not enough. He wanted men.

1. Arthur Sherburne Hardy, *Life and Letters of Joseph Hardy Neesima* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1891), 296. Representative overviews detailing Niijima Jō’s remarkable life include Inoue Katsuya, *Niijima Jō: hito to shisō* (Kyoto: Kōyō shobō, 1990); Miyazawa Masanori, *Niijima Jō: kindai Nihon no senkakusha* (Kyoto: Kōyō shobō, 1993); Ōta Yūzō, *Niijima Jō: ryōshin no zenshin ni jūmanshitaru jōbu* (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2005); Yasuhiro Motoi, *Ganso riberarisuto* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku shuppan, 2008); as well as articles in *Niijima kenkyū* (1954–).

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Missionaries frequently stopped by Andover Seminary, always promising that fields were “white for the harvest,” and that the sower and the reaper would soon rejoice together. The students had heard it all many times before, but Niijima still swept them away. In only a decade, he told them, Protestant workers in Japan had established over sixty schools and seven seminaries, and converts rapidly neared thirty thousand.<sup>2</sup> “This may be the very appointed time of God to save our nation,” Niijima said. “We must fight under [Christ’s] banner; we must win the whole Japanese empire for Christ.” Yet at this critical point workers were scarce. “When I think of it,” he said, “my blood boils within my veins and my heart aches.” He began to cry. So did the students. “If we do not discharge our duty now, what will they say to us in that awful day before the throne of judgment?”<sup>3</sup> Niijima convinced four men to act. Daniel Torrey, Walter P. Taylor, Eugene Warren Stoddard, and William H. Noyes each pledged to join the Japan mission “as soon as God should open the way.”<sup>4</sup> Before their ardor flagged, Niijima pressed the nation’s largest mission board, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [ABCFM], to get them quickly in the field. “*It is better to strike while [the] Iron is hot,*” he advised the Board’s president. “Pray don’t let it cool off.”<sup>5</sup> Niijima worried needlessly. All four students kept their promise.

Within months, however, the whole plan collapsed. The ABCFM refused to send Torrey, Noyes, and Taylor into the field because they held dangerous ideas.<sup>6</sup> In particular, the Andover seniors supported a new theological speculation popular among their professors and other progressive Calvinist reformers who rejected the old claim that “heathen” who never encountered the Gospel would nonetheless spend an eternity in hell. Such a teaching seemed cruel and vindictive, a “terrible impeachment of the divine goodness” as one Andover professor put it.<sup>7</sup> It seemed more plausible that, as one of

2. Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998), 17.

3. Arthur Sherburne Hardy, *Life and Letters*, 279–81.

4. *Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1887* (Boston: Stanley and Usher, 1887), 21.

5. Niijima Jō to Nathaniel George Clark, October 28, 1885, *Niijima Jō Zenshū*, 10 vols. (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1983–1996), vol. 6:284. Emphasis in original.

6. The Board did commission Eugene Stoddard, but he decided against a missionary career. See Sharon Ann Taylor, “That Obnoxious Dogma: Future Probation and the Struggle to Construct an American Congregational Identity,” (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2004), 279–80.

7. Egbert C. Smyth et al, *Progressive Orthodoxy: A Contribution to the Christian Interpretation of Christian Doctrines* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1885), 80.

Niijima's recruits speculated, God would give those "who have not received an adequate presentation of the gospel in this world" a chance to hear of "Christ and the operations of the Holy Spirit in the existence beyond death."<sup>8</sup> Only then would God render final judgment.

Advocates called their idea "second probation" or, more often, "future probation." They frequently pointed out that hardline Calvinists had gradually stopped preaching infant damnation, and in the same vein needed to abandon any doctrine that "affronts the affections, outrages the moral sense, and blasphemes the name of the Most High."<sup>9</sup> They also pointed out the risks of telling potential converts in "heathen" lands that God had sent their loved ones to eternal torture, for who would convert to such a "severe, gloomy, remorseless system"?<sup>10</sup> Critics, however, lambasted the doctrine, claiming it "stupefies the church at home and stabs Christianity abroad."<sup>11</sup> If sinners could expect Jesus's saving grace in the next life they had no reason to abandon sin in this one, opponents warned. Nor would missionaries risk health, comfort, and even life itself to evangelize "heathen" whom Christ would save on his own time. "Toleration of idolatry is treason to Christianity!" roared a missionary in China.<sup>12</sup>

Future probation particularly roiled Protestant missions in East Asia. Potential converts still considered ancestral rites a fundamental social and religious duty, and they often walked out of sermons preaching ancestors into hellfire and cleaving families for eternity. "Scores of times when I asked some one in my audience . . . why he did not become a Christian," one missionary in Korea noted, "has come the reply: I cannot forsake my parents."<sup>13</sup> Missionaries all across India, China, Korea, and Japan reported similar conversations and confirmed that East Asian seekers and converts effectively argued for future probation. Adopting the doctrine, therefore, removed

8. *Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1887*, 33.

9. Samuel J. Barrows, *The Doom of the Majority of Mankind* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1883), 24.

10. William W. Patton, "The True Theory of Missions to the Heathen," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 15 (July 1858), 555.

11. Edward P. Goodwin, "The Holy Spirit and Missions," *A Sermon Preached before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Seventy-third Annual Meeting, Portland, Maine, October 3, 1882* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1882), 16.

12. *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China, 1890* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1890), 657.

13. Franklin Ohlinger, "How Far Should Christians Be Required to Abandon Native Customs?" *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China, 1890*, 605.

a persistent obstacle to conversion. Besides, as one missionary reasoned, “an honest and earnest question requires an answer.”<sup>14</sup>

Stuck in the middle, the ABCFM pleaded with Niijima’s recruits to reconsider, and when they refused the Board reluctantly postponed the appointments. Niijima was stunned. Why, he sputtered, should “the Lord’s army abroad” suffer “on account of some Theological scuffles at home[?]”<sup>15</sup> But in the 1880s and 1890s as those scuffles escalated into a fractious civil war that nearly tore the ABCFM asunder, it became clear Niijima was wrong. Future probation was not just a conflict over doctrine. It was a complex, transpacific debate about the shape of global Protestantism.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars untangling these kinds of missionary encounters in the imperial age have mostly followed one of two paths. Many focus on U.S. actors, examining the motivations, ideologies, and goals of mission boards, missionaries, and theologians. The best work provides a sophisticated contextual understanding of missionary ideology and demonstrates the complex, often blighting impact of missionaries who sought to, in the phrase of one magisterial study, “implant new hegemonies.”<sup>17</sup> A parallel scholarly impulse shifts the perspective, studying how “native” peoples resisted missionary teachings and cultural imperialism by rejecting Christianity altogether or by “indigenizing” the new faith.<sup>18</sup> “While we have often viewed the adoption of Christianity . . . as passive subjugation to

14. “Recent Missionary Testimonials,” *Andover Review* 6 (July 1886): 75.

15. Niijima Jō to Nathaniel George Clark, June 17, 1886, *Niijima Jō Zenshū*, 6:302.

16. The indispensable work on future probation is Taylor, “That Obnoxious Dogma.” See also Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *A School of the Church: Andover Newton Across Two Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 69–91; William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 102–111; David Everett Swift, “The Future Probation Controversy in American Congregationalism, 1886–1893” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1947).

17. John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier, volume 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 35. Representative works in this genre include Hutchison, *Errand to the World*; Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *American Apostles: When Evangelicals Entered the World of Islam* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015).

18. Here the works are legion. Some prominent examples include Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857–1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Lindford Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Richard Fox Young and Jonathan A. Seitz, *Asia and the Making of Christianity: Conversion, Agency, and Indigeneity, 1600s to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

imperial and colonial authority,” the historian Edward Andrews writes, in fact native preachers “used their sermons, letters, writings, and even identities as fulcrums against colonization, dispossession, and racial slavery.”<sup>19</sup> In short, given the bald-faced bigotry of so many missionaries, and the inspired ways new converts adapted Christian doctrine and practice, scholars of missionary encounter have thus far quite reasonably gravitated toward tales emphasizing domination and resistance.

Recent developments in transnational and transpacific history, however, promise to move beyond this choice between imperialism and indigenization by exploring “reciprocal processes across boundaries.”<sup>20</sup> Jay Riley Case, for instance, has shown in his study of nineteenth-century missions that rather than simply stamping the world with its ideals and prejudices “the missionary movement created conduits by which influences from new movements of world Christianity circulated back to affect American evangelicalism.”<sup>21</sup> Of course imperial ideologies blunted the impact “native” revelations had outside their immediate communities, and the mismatch of military and economic power further degraded possibilities for real communion. But a transnational perspective nevertheless reminds us that even as imperialism atomized global Protestantism, missionaries and converts also worked through each other to explore Paul’s insistence—as old as Christian conversion itself—that in Christ they were “every one, members of another.”<sup>22</sup>

This article, then, explores how Protestant missionaries, “native” converts, and even those on the sidelines used future probation to explore the contours of an emerging transpacific community. While the doctrine particularly enflamed Congregationalists, a denominational approach to the controversy veils the larger issue at stake. The relationship between foreign converts and the American missionary community struck at the heart of the broad

19. Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 6–7.

20. Ian Tyrell, “Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Global History* 4 (November 2009): 464.

21. Jay Riley Case, *An Unpredictable Gospel: American Evangelicals and World Christianity, 1812–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

22. Romans 12:5. All Biblical citations in this essay are from the *King James Version*. Works examining the mutual impact of missionary-native encounters include Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907–1932* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Case, *An Unpredictable Gospel*; Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse, and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

Protestant missionary project. What arrests attention is that, despite varying levels of maturity and tolerance, most everyone preferred consensus, no matter how rough-hewn and ungainly, to simply forcing converts into American molds or conceding that Christ spoke only in local tongues. “The work of the Church,” one of Nijijima’s recruits insisted, “is not merely the saving of a few souls here or there, nor the saving of this or that nation, but the *world* is to be saved.”<sup>23</sup> Without question, East Asian Protestants in the age of empire adapted doctrine to suit local culture. Equally certain, missionaries preached a confounding gospel of equality and intolerance. Confronting this divide, however, converts and missionaries still sought communion. Fraught, frustrating, and exhilarating by turns, this impulse toward transpacific community freed transpacific Protestants to hear new voices in divine revelation and to find new partners in faith.

For centuries Christians had speculated on the eternal fate of those who lived and died never encountering the gospel.<sup>24</sup> The issue became especially urgent, however, in the wake of nineteenth-century imperial expansion, which revealed the staggering total of humanity presumably damned to hell. Many concluded that even heroic effort would still fail the greatest portion. “It is but the fringes of heathenism which we have touched thus far,” mourned a minister in 1885. “The countless hosts of heathenism still include the vast majority of the human race.”<sup>25</sup> A Unitarian minister thrilled at the gospel’s spread into new parts of the world, but even so, he fretted, “there are the six hundred millions still groping in the shadow of death, and, *perishing, twenty millions a year!*”<sup>26</sup> Considered practically, another worried, “it would take us five hundred years to give the heathen population of China, alone, a moment’s look.”<sup>27</sup> This bitter reality intensified speculation about God’s relationship to those whom missionaries would never reach.

For some the answer required nothing more than consulting scripture. They pointed to Mark 16:16: “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Likewise Acts 4:12 told them that

23. *The Next Meeting of the American Board* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1893), 25.

24. Jeffrey Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

25. Judson Smith, “The Future Work of the Board,” *Seventy-fifth Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: Stanley and Usher, 1885), xxx.

26. Barrows, *The Doom of the Majority of Mankind*, 93. Emphasis in original.

27. *Grandeur of the Great Commission, A Discourse by the Rev. E.P. Thwing, M.D., Ph.D., at the Ordination of his Son* (n.p. 1892), 6–7.

“neither is there salvation in any other [than Christ]: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Finally Jesus himself, in John 14:6, insisted “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Gathering these passages together, a Baptist minister concluded that “the plain teaching and the unmistakable drift of the word of God” made future probation impossible.<sup>28</sup> God saved only those who knew and accepted Christ in this mortal life. There was no second chance. “No man has the right conception of missionary work,” an American Methodist in China declared, “who does not deeply feel that the heathen are lost, and that they are in danger.”<sup>29</sup> It was precisely this desperate need, this frantic struggle, they insisted, that had compelled them into the mission field and gave their work meaning. As one ABCFM pamphlet concluded, “nothing but the belief that [the “heathen”] are in a mass going down to eternal ruin can keep modern missions alive.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet others hesitated. For some, their own experiences sparked a new perspective. Even before the future probation controversy flared in the 1880s, for example, an American teenager in Tokyo balked at the idea God would send a kindly old grandmother to perpetual hellfire. Palsied and weak, Mori Sato listened as Clara Whitney offered prayers. Clara noted the contrast, praying to Jesus while the old woman lay under “strips of paper hanging as prayers to [her] idol for health,” but Mori requested she come and pray again the next day. “I believe,” Clara mused, “that although she has served idols all her life and worshipped false gods, because she served them with her whole heart and tried to do what was right, her heart became pure and good.”<sup>31</sup> Clara’s intuition led her to think it inconsistent with God’s character that the earnest, decent Japanese people she had come to know would find themselves in endless hellfire.

After years in the field, a number of missionaries agreed. “The teaching that the heathen goes from this earth into eternal darkness is a libel on God,” one theologian decided.<sup>32</sup> Even as they insisted that Protestant Christianity was the apex of spiritual insight, some felt certain that even so-called heathen

28. Henry M. King, “Review of *Progressive Orthodoxy*,” *The Baptist Quarterly Review* 8 (1886): 278. A sustained exegetical attack on future probation can be found in S. H. Kellog, “Future Probation,” *Presbyterian Review* 6 (April 1885): 226–56.

29. “Salvation for the Heathen,” *The Gospel in All Lands*, September 1886, 421.

30. A. C. Thompson, *Future Probation and Foreign Missions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1886), 27.

31. M. William Steele and Tamiko Ichimata, eds., *Clara’s Diary: An American Girl in Meiji Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979), 58–60. Emphasis in original.

32. *New York Times*, 13 October 1893.

innately understood God's presence and commandments. "The moral intuitions are permanent and universal," one argued.<sup>33</sup> Of course, he conceded, "heathen" expressions of that intuition were inadequate and faulty and dim-witted, but God saw through to their sincerity. "So far as they had fallen into absurd and evil forms of worship from ignorance, God would overlook it," another minister preached, "and would hold them only accountable for their use of the light which had been, and which should be hereafter granted."<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, these sentiments also invited scorn. A veteran missionary insisted that he had "never met a man without the knowledge of Christ of whom I would dare to say that his character was crystallizing into the love of what God loves and the hate of what God hates." Another agreed, claiming "I have never found man or woman in a heathen or Christian land who lived up to his or her own light."<sup>35</sup> Yet daily encounters with upright non-believers did confound some missionaries nevertheless, opening them to the possibility that God's light shone in all humanity and chipping away at ironclad certainties about who populated heaven and hell.

Future probation's supporters sought wisdom in scripture as well, highlighting Acts 10:34–35 where Peter preaches "God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." They found 1 Peter 13:18–20 particularly suggestive of some future state where the unconverted dead might meet Jesus, because they interpreted the passage to mean that after his crucifixion Jesus preached in hell to rescue the damned. Future probation did not guarantee salvation, its partisans insisted, but neither would God condemn those who simply never encountered the gospel. They admitted their doctrine was guesswork and asked only that it be granted a possibility. "Christ may still have ways unrevealed to us of sending his Spirit to all souls," one theologian offered, "of whatever age or land, before their final decision of character and judgment."<sup>36</sup>

33. D.Z. Sheffield, "The Condition and Hope of the Heathen," *The Chinese Recorder* 18 (May 1887), 189.

34. Patton, "The True Theory of Missions to the Heathen," 562. "They may nevertheless be aiming to do right as they understand it," the author continued, "though with frequent shortcomings over which they grieve and against which they struggle as do we against *our* besetting sins." *Ibid.*, 563. Emphasis in original. See also Barrows, *The Doom of the Majority of Mankind*, 145; J.D. Davis, "The Probation of the Heathen," *The Congregationalist* 5 (August 1886), 2.

35. "Recent Missionary Testimonials," 68.

36. Newman Smyth, *The Reality of Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), 204. A more thorough exegesis supporting future probation can be found in Egbert C. Smyth et al, *Progressive Orthodoxy*, 153–90.

Biblical exegesis and dueling scriptural passages, however, failed to quell the debate. Theologians, missionaries, and people in the pews struggled mightily to reconcile the problem, but in the end many agreed with a Minnesota Methodist who simply threw up his hands. It seemed impossible, he told his congregation, that the “heathen” were all “gathered to heaven or condemned to hell, [because] one would be unreasonable and the other not right.” We must, he concluded, “trust it all to God.”<sup>37</sup>

While midwestern Methodists had the luxury of ambiguity, thousands of Asian seekers found it excruciating. Niijima, the Japanese Christian whose 1885 Andover recruiting drive helped fuel the future probation crisis, had battled through this conundrum himself. Already intrigued by Christianity when he arrived in the United States in 1865, he spent the next nine years in American schools studying, debating, thinking, and praying. As his faith deepened, he grew increasingly alarmed about his family, bereft of any Christian guidance and one short illness away from the crossroads of everlasting life and perdition. They likewise feared his new religion, an illegal faith in Japan; and Niijima hesitated evangelizing them by mail lest intercepted letters lead government interrogators to their door. He could only pray God would spare them “until the light of truth and life will be preached to them.”<sup>38</sup> Disaster struck, however, in 1871 when his beloved grandfather died. Benji never heard his grandson preach, never met a missionary, and never saw a Bible. Niijima knew the old doctrine: Benji had “gone without hope of Christ.” And yet Niijima never knew a more righteous and worthy man. So he left open the possibility that “God will judge him without law, for he lived without law.”<sup>39</sup> Niijima concluded God would somehow reconcile doctrine with real life, but the lack of clarity haunted him.

Many U.S. missionaries in East Asia shared Niijima’s resentment with the theoretical, abstract way colleagues back home debated heaven and hell.<sup>40</sup> They made friends with the unconverted, saw an enormous range of human experience, and grappled with entirely unfamiliar and striking ways of thinking. “People talk vaguely about the heathen, picturing them as scarcely

37. “Probation After Death,” *St. Paul Daily Globe*, 10 January 1887.

38. Niijima Jō to Susan Hardy, September 17, 1871, *Niijima Jō Zenshū* 6:92.

39. Niijima Jō to Alpheus Hardy, January 29, 1871, *Niijima Jō Zenshū* 6:80.

40. See, for example, N.G. Clark, “The Message and the Messenger,” *Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1887* (Boston: Stanley and Usher, 1887), xxxvii; William J. Potter, “The Issue between the Heathen and the American Board of Congregational Missions,” *The Index*, October 21, 1886, 194.

human,” a Baptist missionary in China complained.<sup>41</sup> A number confessed that their encounters had in fact deepened their own faith. “In trying to teach the Japanese about Jesus,” one missionary wrote in his diary, “I have found out many new things about Him.”<sup>42</sup> Another in India conceded that he had no greater wisdom than ministers back home, but he felt his theology had “more intensity” because he confronted quandaries immediate and personal and because his parishioners would not let him fudge.<sup>43</sup>

Missionaries were therefore particularly irritated by the ABCFM’s decision in 1886 to reject candidates who confessed a belief in future probation. The problem seemed manufactured and distant from the real concerns missionaries faced. In Japan, for instance, Otis Cary wrote that he considered future probation a silly idea, but turning away men eager to preach Christ merely for some doctrinal hiccup “will prevent many thousands from hearing it before they die.”<sup>44</sup> As the ABCFM dithered, Satan reaped a harvest. Truth be told, one of Cary’s colleagues confessed, “I would not spend five minutes time in trying to convert a Japanese friend who had accepted the theory of future probation.”<sup>45</sup> There was simply more urgent work to do. “The true missionary has very little to do with theories,” a missionary in India grumbled. “He is in a terrible hand-to-hand fight with heathenism, which demands all his energies.” Mind the practical work of salvation, he lectured. “In the name of these dying heathen, whose last chance some of you believe this to be,” he begged, “we entreat the American Board and the churches,—SEND THE MEN WITHOUT DELAY.”<sup>46</sup>

Missionaries feared that antagonists in America did not fully grasp the painful and immediate consequences of their debate, or the harm they caused casually tossing “heathen” into and out of hellfire. “It is not mere speculation on idle questions as to what becomes of the ancestors of those to whom we carry the Gospel,” a missionary in India informed American backers. “It is, I can assure you from an experience of twelve years, an every-day question

41. Lottie Moon, “A Hard Question—An Earnest Appeal” (1887) in *Send the Light: Lottie Moon’s Letters and Other Writings*, ed. Keith Harper (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 225.

42. Charlotte B. DeForest, *The Evolution of a Missionary: A Biography of John Hyde DeForest* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1914), 134.

43. Edward A. Lawrence, “How It Looks in India, A Communication,” *Andover Review* 7 (February 1887), 201.

44. “Harmony in a Mission,” *The Andover Review* 6 (October 1886): 416.

45. Everts Boutell Greene, *A New-Englander in Japan: Daniel Crosby Greene* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 208.

46. Lawrence, “How It Looks in India,” 199–200, 202. Emphasis in original.

with us, and requires an answer which it has been very difficult to give.”<sup>47</sup> A colleague in Shantung explained why. When new converts abandoned ancestral rites, he wrote, neighbors would “inflict cruel beatings, destroy crops when nearly ready for the harvest,” and “treat children in a shameful manner and inflict all manner of injuries.” Converts with businesses inevitably went bankrupt because “their heathen neighbors refuse to deal with them.”<sup>48</sup> A missionary in Korea likewise reported “it has become commonly known that a belief in Christ means the cessation of ancestral worship.” As a result, Koreans “refuse to give any thought whatever to the truths of the Gospel or even listen to a word concerning them.”<sup>49</sup> A journalist in Japan reminded readers “devotion to parents and reverence for ancestors are the foundations upon which Japanese morality has always rested.” Yet missionaries expected converts to “declare the worthlessness of family ties,” and to “consign to spiritual perdition all who have lived in the past.”<sup>50</sup> That hurdle needlessly kept away many potential converts. “As long as the neophyte is called on,” a missionary in China pleaded, “to prove his devotion by defying his fathers, so long will the Christian community be a despised caste.”<sup>51</sup> Setting biblical proof texts aside, in short, missionaries pointed out the futility of preaching a gospel dropping ancestors into eternal hellfire and making new converts a pariah.

This theological shift among American missionaries came directly from their parishioners. With “multitudes pressing upon them at every hand,” a missionary in India noted, he and his colleagues had to “stop and wonder.”<sup>52</sup> Not all agreed, but prodded by their congregants, some missionaries endorsed native efforts to craft Protestant forms of ancestral rites. “Is it not admissible to have one rule for the West and another for the East?,”

47. “Keeping Laborers from the Harvest: The Case of Mr. Hume,” *The Andover Review* 6 (October 1886), 406.

48. “Missions in China,” *The Forty-seventh Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1884* (New York: Mission House, 1884), 133.

49. Horace G. Underwood, *The Call of Korea: Political, Social, Religious* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), 81.

50. Edward H. House, *Yone Santo, A Child of Japan* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Co., 1888), 284.

51. W.A.P. Martin, “The Worship of Ancestors—A Plea for Toleration,” *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China, 1890*, 630–31. Observing from the United States, one journalist went further. “One can but admire,” he wrote, “the unregenerate integrity and robust affection of the heathen heart which turns away from such a gospel” and casts its fate with its ancestors. Potter, “The Issue between the Heathen and the American Board of Congregational Missions,” 194.

52. Chauncey Goodrich, quoted in “Salvation for the Heathen,” *The Gospel in All Lands*, September 1886, 421.

W.A.P. Martin reasoned after forty years in China. After all, he mused, “our aim is not to Europeanize the Chinese, but to make them Christians.”<sup>53</sup> Yes, the old ancestral tablets must go, echoed another, but by meeting Chinese sensibilities Christians can demonstrate that they, too, respect the ancestors. “The Fifth Commandment still stands as one of the foundation-stones of Christian law,” he pointed out, a commandment “more truly observed in non-christian China than in Europe or America.”<sup>54</sup> Korean converts and Protestant missionaries worked together adapting Confucian ancestral rites to create new rituals, steering what felt like a middle course between filial piety and idolatry.<sup>55</sup> By no means, then, did all missionaries resist indigenous voices or insist on imported worship practices. Many responded positively as native congregants crafted a hybrid theology, and they defended these developments to home audiences.<sup>56</sup>

Such flexibility meant granting Asian converts more control interpreting practice and doctrine, which some missionaries believed their Christ and practical reality required. “They cannot be moulded upon our pattern,” a missionary in Japan wrote, while a colleague in China warned that future probation might be settled “by a dictum of the foreign missionaries, but some day the Chinese themselves will speak and act, and let us beware of any extreme action that will unnecessarily collide with the sentiments and beliefs of the Chinese.”<sup>57</sup> Missionaries did not doubt their own righteousness or the necessity of Christ for salvation. But the earnest strivings of Indian, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese seekers helped many missionaries reassess future probation as well as the relationship between missionary and convert. “Bigoted, hard, orthodox Christians,” a prominent Japanese believer warned, “will find

53. Martin, “The Worship of Ancestors,” 629. See also W.A.P. Martin, *The Lore of Cathay; or The Intellect of China* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), 264–78.

54. Nelson Bitton, *The Regeneration of New China* (London: London Missionary Society, 1914), 134–36.

55. James Huntley Grayson, “Ch’udo Yebae: A Case Study in the Early Emplantation of Protestant Christianity in Korea,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68 (May 2009): 416–22.

56. See, for example, Arthur E. Moule, *New China and Old: Personal Recollections and Observations of Thirty Years* (London: Seeley and Co., 1891), 193–222. The conflict over ancestral worship in Korea is examined in Grayson, “Ch’udo Yebae,” 413–34; Sung-Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions, 1876–1915* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2013), 189–219; Hyun Kwang Kim, “The Controversy on Ancestor Veneration between Confucians and Christians During Yi Dynasty Korea” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2001). For Japan, see Mark R. Mullins, “What about the Ancestors? Some Japanese Christian Responses to Protestant Individualism,” *Studies in World Christianity* 4 (1998): 41–64.

57. Greene, *A New-Englander in Japan*, 208; Gilbert Reid in *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China, 1890*, 658.

it hard work to keep up interest enough to have any religion.” Missionaries, he continued, “must either co-operate or join native churches and become like one of the native workers.”<sup>58</sup>

Some took such advice as a threat. While progressive missionaries interpreted sharp questions, theological debate and ecclesiastical innovation as signs of parishioner vitality, conservatives feared it upset the balance of authority. “I do not know that any real light is shed upon the subject [future probation] by contact with the heathen,” declared a missionary in India.<sup>59</sup> Cyrus Hamlin, a veteran of the Ottoman mission, cautioned colleagues that natives would submit them to a relenting “scrutiny into theological opinions” that would be

minute and searching, sometimes in public, sometimes in private, with an open Bible and with sharp, irrepressible questioners . . . and your answers will be remembered and will perhaps be repeated to you decades of years afterwards. . . . There will be no part of the Old or New Testament that you will not be asked to explain, or to declare your belief with regard to. . . . If you give or decline to give an opinion, it will be remembered. Your views will be compared with the views of your associates. There will be hardly a religious rite, ceremony, dogma, or proof-text of doctrine that you will not be examined upon.<sup>60</sup>

Hamlin’s warning reveals the extraordinary attention “natives” gave to Christian teachings, but he took questions as a lack of deference precipitating a loss of control. Protestant novices, he believed, had no right to determine doctrine on their own, and pandering to their sensitivities reversed the proper relationship between missionary and convert. Too many missionaries rushed to embrace future probation, a Congregationalist minister complained, merely because they “hope that it is true.”<sup>61</sup> Their sympathies for congregants clouded their theological rigor and upended the proper flow of spiritual insight. Amazed by the number of missionaries in East Asia supporting future probation, a South Carolina minister sneered “the natives

58. Hiromichi Kozaki, “Christianity in Japan; Its Present Condition and Future Prospects,” in *Neely’s History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World’s Columbian Exposition*, ed. Walter R. Houghton (Chicago: F.T. Neely, 1893), 492–93.

59. Lawrence, “How It Looks in India,” 200.

60. Cyrus Hamlin, “The New Departure and Missions,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 43 (October 1886): 769–70.

61. George F. Magoun, “Notes on the New Departure: The Proposed ‘Dogma’ of Probation after Death,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 43 (July 1886): 566.

seem to be their teachers.”<sup>62</sup> Those opposing future probation, in short, did not want to segregate new converts, but they stumbled when those new converts made claims on scripture and their fellow Christians. Fellowship had its limits.

The case of Noyes seemed to confirm these suspicions. Born in India in 1862 to missionary parents, Noyes had been one of Nijijima’s recruits whom the ABCFM rejected in 1886. The next year, after graduating from Andover, he once more applied to the ABCFM, but it “postponed” his appointment again when he refused to back down on future probation. His congregation at the Berkeley Street Church in Boston then brought together pastors and delegates from twenty-two neighboring Congregational churches to examine the possibility of sending Noyes without ABCFM backing. After much discussion and prayer, and after reading a plea from Japanese Christians begging for missionary help, the assembled voted to send Noyes and pay his expenses for five years.<sup>63</sup> Noyes and his wife served happily in Japan, but as the Berkeley Church’s obligations expired, he applied yet again for ABCFM backing, bolstering his case with testimony from colleagues urging his appointment. Critics immediately pointed out that “the brethren in Japan have swallowed future probation whole” so it was “no wonder they wish Mr. Noyes.”<sup>64</sup> Still, the Board, weary of constant agitation, finally gave Noyes an appointment. Not long after, and much to conservative chagrin, Noyes quit the ministry and returned to the United States. The papers claimed he no longer felt certain “whether he believes some of the doctrines inculcated by the board,” but more ominous rumors circulated. It was said he had lost his faith and converted to Buddhism.<sup>65</sup> The whole saga seemed a cautionary tale, demonstrating the perils of conciliating native sentiment.<sup>66</sup>

Even worse, it suggested that a global communion would unleash theological innovation on American Protestants. Doctrine required consistency; God did not speak in separate revelations to separate peoples. Either future

62. C. A. and M. Peace, [untitled], *The Abbeville Press and Banner*, 13 December 1893.

63. The Japanese letter read during the meeting was “Missionaries for Shikoku, Japan,” *The Missionary Herald* 84 (August 1888), 333–34.

64. “Today’s Proceedings,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, 12 October 1893.

65. “American Missionary Resigns,” *New York Times*, 13 August 1897; Taylor “That Obnoxious Dogma,” 365.

66. The William H. Noyes saga was covered extensively in the *Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1887* (Boston: Stanley and Usher, 1887), 14–43; *The Case of the Rev. William H. Noyes, Foreign Missionary of the Berkeley Street Church, Boston* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1889); and Taylor “That Obnoxious Dogma,” 268–72, 321–28, 354–63.

probation was true or it was not, and if it was true then it applied to sinners in Beijing and Boston alike. Missionaries could not keep it quarantined in Asia. For old-line Calvinists the doctrine rankled, therefore, because it implied that East Asian converts and seekers could make demands on missionaries, on orthodoxy, on U.S. Protestants, and on God. As one Presbyterian missionary frankly confessed, “It is not easy for any Anglo-Saxon, however assisted by divine grace, to take a second place in a non-Christian land, especially when he has been for a long time in the first place.”<sup>67</sup> Many American Protestants struggled to relinquish control of their “universal” gospel.

Those refusing to bend did find allies among some East Asian converts. When Nijijima returned home in 1874 after ten years abroad, he got off the ship, went straight to his father’s house, took down “all the paper, wooden, earthen and brass gods from [the] shelves where they were kept, and burned them up.”<sup>68</sup> Likewise, an ailing Korean who came to a missionary clinic for treatment went home and threw the family altar onto a bonfire. Then he cut his topknot “to show that he had severed his connection with the past.”<sup>69</sup> Song Chaniun, a Korean convert in Wonsan, explained that he quit ancestor worship for two reasons: “My first reason for not sacrificing is, it breaks God’s commands; and my second reason is, it is foolishness.”<sup>70</sup> And in a case that made the newspapers, a Korean Christian forbade his wife from continuing ancestor worship. She committed suicide rather than concede, but the tragedy again suggests that some East Asian Protestants were just as likely as American conservatives to refuse ancestral rites and future probation and to follow a consistent doctrine.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, a Christian relative, not a Western missionary, convinced Zhang Yunfa to quit ancestral worship.<sup>72</sup> Rather than bullied by missionary doctrine, East Asian Protestants consulted each other, the sacred texts they translated, and Western missionaries. Abandoning

67. Arthur Judson Brown, *Report on a Second Visit to China, Japan and Korea 1909; with a Discussion of Some Problems of Mission Work* (New York: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. 1909), 32.

68. Nijijima Jō to Alpheus and Susan Hardy, December 22, 1874, *Nijijima Jō Zenshū*, 6:154.

69. *Minutes of the Korea Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1914, 58. See also *Ibid.*, 1917, 40.

70. *Ninety-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 1896, 162.

71. Grayson, “Ch’udo Yebae,” 421–22. See also Hyun Kwang Kim, “The Controversy on Ancestor Veneration,” 223–28; Moule, *New China and Old*, 200; Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 208–9.

72. Jessie G. Lutz and Rolland Ray Lutz, *Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850–1900* (London: Routledge, 2015), 113.

ancestral rites and forsaking future probation, in other words, was for some also an indigenous expression of faith.<sup>73</sup>

For many in East Asia, Protestant conversion meant a new birth, an emancipation from personal and societal marginalization.<sup>74</sup> (Indeed, missionaries sometimes worried about Christianity's local reputation should the number of social outcasts frighten away high status converts.) Membership in a new, global fellowship formed part of that new self. Worshippers in India, for example, put up a church in Gothic style, defending their aesthetic by arguing they did not want a traditional style used by their enslavers.<sup>75</sup> And when English supporters designed what they perceived as a native clerical vestment, topped with a turban, the Indian Bishop V.S. Azariah resisted, opting instead for an Anglican cassock and leather shoes.<sup>76</sup> For missionaries and native converts, in short, indigenizing the faith did not require the communion to follow nation-state borders or cut ties to a transnational community.

From the outset, U.S. and East Asian Protestants believed they shared a common gospel, a common faith, and a common savior. In 1812 when a Massachusetts minister sent off the nation's first missionaries to Asia, he reminded them that the men and women they would meet there were "offspring of the same heavenly Father; children of the same family. In every human being," he preached, "you see a brother or a sister."<sup>77</sup> Noble sentiments with biblical foundations, certainly, but imperial bombast, bigotry, and contempt quickly polluted the effort. Many Asian colleagues wondered at the contrast. "Christianity out to produce great-heartedness, activity and progress," Nijijima once fumed, but "I find some Christians

73. Chad M. Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India, 1868–1947* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 243–44.

74. Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 75; Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 77–80; Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants*, 32–47; Dilip M. Menon, "Religion and Colonial Modernity: Rethinking Belief and Identity," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37 (April 27–May 3, 2002), 1662–67; Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion*.

75. Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 225.

76. Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 140–42; 149.

77. Leonard Woods, *Sermon Delivered at the Tabernacle in Salem* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1812), 13.

narrow and stupid.”<sup>78</sup> The future probation controversy forced a reckoning with this contrast.

Highlighting indigenous spiritual autonomy or tracing American missionary ideology, therefore, neglects how future probation was also about transnational relationships. Converts and missionaries tried imagining a new, broader communion. “Being part of a world religion inherently involves a desire to share the ideas and practices of people elsewhere in the world,” the historian Henrietta Harrison reminds us.<sup>79</sup> New converts, then, did not always isolate themselves through “indigenized” Christianity. Nor did missionaries always reject insights from new believers. Through future probation, transpacific Christians confronted themselves and each other with fundamental questions of identity, belonging, and sacred truth. They wrestled with what historian Jeffrey Cox calls “the conflict between universalist Christian religious values and the imperial context of those values.”<sup>80</sup> But the solution, all agreed, could not be separate revelations.

“It is often assumed that missionaries are a narrow and bigoted class of men,” wrote the progressive minister Washington Gladden in 1909, and yet “we are indebted to them for much sound thinking on the great problems of Christianity.”<sup>81</sup> Future probation showed that Protestant missionaries could stretch themselves and embrace new partners in Christian revelation. And yet Gladden overlooked the role native converts and seekers played in educating U.S. missionaries and their allies. “He had come to the Far East with a message that he was on fire to give,” an observer wrote, “but in the process of transmission the East had spoken its message to him.”<sup>82</sup> East Asian audiences asked hard questions, argued missionaries into corners, and taught them to see the gospel in refreshing ways. More than private reflection or doctrinal disputes back home, for instance, moved Robert A. Hume to embrace future probation. Born in Bombay to missionary parents, Hume devoted fifty-two years to the mission in Ahmednagar. Day after day people stopped by to ask him questions about the God he preached, and he often stumbled on the answers. The questions about ancestors particularly troubled him. “The Gospel of love and

78. Arthur Sherburne Hardy, *Life and Letters*, 263.

79. Harrison, *The Missionary's Curse*, 207.

80. Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818–1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 6.

81. Washington Gladden, *Recollections* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), 290.

82. Early H. Cressy, “Converting the Missionary,” (1916), quoted in Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries*, 207.

mercy which I was seeking to give was followed by a feeling of bitterness in their hearts," he told a U.S. audience, "because they thought it implied an eternity of sorrow for their ancestors."<sup>83</sup> The more he considered it, the more it anguished him, too. Indian seekers made Hume a seeker as well.

By sending Hume home with new insights, moreover, they reversed the flow of revelation. "The true Christian position is not that the apprehension of Christ which has already been attained by one church, or any one race, is the full apprehension of all that the Lord Jesus Christ is," Hume concluded. "Contact of the East with Christianity will enrich the apprehension of God in the West."<sup>84</sup> Plenty of U.S. Protestants found that an alarming proposition. Others were more open.

This flow of debate and revelation, working in multiple directions at once, reminds us that even as East Asian Protestants adapted doctrine to suit local culture, and even as missionaries offered a confounding message of brotherhood and bigotry, few wanted segregated communions. Few wanted a theology responsive only to local concerns. Instead, they struggled to realize a transpacific communion, even as the ideology of empire made that a heart-breaking and often failed venture. Future probation, then, was part of an emerging global conversation about what one of Nijjima's Andover recruits had promised. "The work of the Church," he said, "is to make the world one in Christ Jesus."<sup>85</sup> Nearly two thousand years of failure on that point still did not discourage transpacific believers from together trying again to love their neighbors as themselves. ■

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83. "Keeping Laborers from the Harvest," 406.

84. Robert A. Hume, *Missions from the Modern Point of View* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1905), 220, 204

85. *The Next Meeting of the American Board* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1893), 25.