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978-0-521-18888-3 - Nature and the Godly Empire: Science and Evangelical Mission in the Pacific, 1795-1850

Sujit Sivasundaram

Excerpt

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## Introduction

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Almost half a century had passed since the violent death of Captain James Cook, when Revd William Ellis of the London Missionary Society sat in a house on the island of Oahu in Hawaii with several local chiefs, a folio edition of Cook's *Voyages* spread before him. While poring over the image of the navigator's demise together with the chiefs, Ellis observed that they were 'greatly affected' by what they saw. 'More than once when conversing with us on the length of time the missionaries had been in the Society Islands, they have said, "Why did you not come sooner? Was it because we killed Captain Cook?"'<sup>1</sup> Ellis intended to convey how times had changed: the Hawaiians had converted and adopted the civilised manners of the British. Their absorbed interest in Cook's *Voyages* supplied evidence of how they could read and write. By describing the Hawaiians' remembrance of Cook, Ellis also testified to how their emotions had been tamed. He added that a missionary station had been built near the village where Cook had been killed. The cave where Cook's remains were deposited for a while was said to be of 'volcanic formation' and 'one of those subterranean tunnels so numerous on the island, by which the volcanoes in the interior sometimes discharge their contents upon the shore . . . The roof and sides within are of obsidian or hard vitreous lava.'<sup>2</sup> Redeeming Cook's memory involved the rearrangement of the landmarks of the bay of the murder, the conversion of the islanders, and the entry of the site and its people into Western knowledge.

The evangelical missionaries who oversaw a dramatic change in the culture of the South Pacific drew the first idea for their campaign from reading Cook's journals. In London, the published narratives of travel were received in a climate of acclaim and controversy. After the journal of the first voyage was published, not a day passed without letters appearing in the press about its contents. Polite readers blushed as they read of the

<sup>1</sup> William Ellis, *A Narrative of a Tour through Hawaii or Owhyhee* (London, 1826), 102.

<sup>2</sup> William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches During a Residence of Nearly Six Years*, 4 vols. (London, 1829), vol. IV, 130–1.

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sexual exploits of their countrymen; while a 'lax magazine culled from the *Voyages* all the warmest passages to make a new art of love'.<sup>3</sup> Cook's achievements were fairly summarised by an anonymous seaman who wrote to the *Public Advertiser* that it was a very 'edifying and entertaining Account of the most extraordinary Voyages ever attempted'. In its pages he had found 'new Features of human Nature'.<sup>4</sup> Cook's description of these far-removed human beings prompted the thought of mission. Among the unlikely readers of Cook's explorations was Revd Thomas Haweis, an Anglican minister. So taken was the cleric by those he described as 'dusky islanders, so favoured by nature' that a mission to the region became the cherished purpose of his heart.<sup>5</sup> When the London Missionary Society was formed, Haweis singlehandedly persuaded its patrons to choose the South Pacific as the first location for missionary labour.<sup>6</sup> Cook's legacy passed therefore into the hands of evangelical missionaries, who subscribed to a form of moderate Calvinism, and who prayed fervently for the moral foundations of the South Pacific to be transformed.

At first the genres of exploration characterised by scientific explorers and evangelical missionaries seem quite distant from each other. Cook's voyages may be cast as romantic, while evangelical mission is now associated with a rational theology and an ideology of improvement.<sup>7</sup> Yet the observation, collection and signification of nature served as an important bridge between the two. Cook set the precedent for an empire of science, and the missionaries became active practitioners of this new knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Cook's ships were fitted with the best scientific instruments and on board his vessels were draughtsmen who invented a new genre of scientific vision and painting. One of Cook's crew on his first voyage wrote to Carl Linnaeus,

<sup>3</sup> The details of the reception of Cook's journals are taken from Helen Wallis, 'Publication of Cook's Journals: Some New Sources and Assessments', *Pacific Studies* 1, no. 2 (1978): 163–94. This quote from p. 166. For more on the reception of Cook's travels, see Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyage* (New Haven, Conn., 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Wallis, 'Publication of Cook's Journals: Some New Sources and Assessments', 173.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society*, 2 vols. (London, 1899).

<sup>6</sup> Haweis' speech to the London Missionary Society will be discussed in detail in chapter 1. See *Sermons and Report of the Missionary Society for 1795* (London, 1795).

<sup>7</sup> For more on Cook's views of nature see the work of Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (New Haven, Conn., 1985). For evangelical theologies of improvement, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1780s to the 1830s* (London, 1989), Boyd Hilton, *Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford, 1988). For more on evangelical science, see D. G. Hart, David Livingstone and Mark Noll, eds., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> For Cook's science, see Margarette Lincoln, ed., *Science and Exploration in the Pacific: European Voyages to the Southern Oceans in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1998), David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science and Empire* (London, 1985).

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the celebrated natural historian: ‘they have all sorts of machines for catching and preserving insects; all kinds of nets, trawls, drags and hooks for coral fishing, they have even a curious contrivance of a telescope, by which, put into the water, you can see the bottom at a great depth, where it is clear’.<sup>9</sup> All the instruments, the natural historians and artists came under the direction of Joseph Banks, who upon returning to London became the central figure in a network of field collectors and scientific correspondents. Banks became President of the Royal Society and a guiding force of the London Missionary Society.<sup>10</sup> He advised Haweis on how to conduct the South Pacific mission.<sup>11</sup>

The categories of science and religion occupy a central place in our world. The present work is a concerted attempt to examine the emergence of science and religion and their interdependence outside the West. In doing this it attempts to stretch the burgeoning historiography of science and religion outside its traditional focus on Europe and America.<sup>12</sup> It is my claim that the missionaries who followed in the wake of Cook saw themselves as practitioners of science, while their knowledge was avidly consumed by a religious populace. Today evangelical mission is still justified on the grounds of the introduction of science, the spread of literacy and the extension of Western medicine. By historicising the conduct of global evangelism, it is possible to show its peculiar relations to knowledge and empire, and its moments of strength and weakness. The missionaries who travelled to the South Pacific operated on the premise of a trans-oceanic network of exchange. Commodities such as arrowroot were grown in the islands and sent overseas, even as clothes, livestock and printing presses were imported into the Pacific. The missionaries believed that as the whole world was brought together, civilisation and Christianity would prosper and the millennial return of Christ would be hastened. Universal visions of

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Patricia Fara, ‘Images of a Man of Science’, *History Today* (October 1998): 42–9.

<sup>10</sup> For the biography of Banks, see John Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment: Useful Knowledge and Polite Culture* (Cambridge, 1994), John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Banks’s correspondence with Haweis will be discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> The study of ‘religion and science’ is a thriving area of research. For the current state of the field, see the edited volume of essays, John Hedley Brooke, Margaret J Osler and Jitse M. van der Meer, ‘Science in Theistic Contexts: Cognitive Dimensions’, *Osiris* 16 (2001): 1–376. Good introductions to the issues are John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1991), John Hedley Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature: The Engagement of Science and Religion* (Edinburgh, 1998), Charles Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology: A Study in the Relations of Scientific Thought, Natural Theology and Social Opinion in Great Britain 1790–1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986).

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science's powers to solve the world's problems might be traced back to science's theological foundations in the colonial period. The story revealed here shows that the quest for an improved world linked by knowledge and commerce has an evangelical ancestry.

Missionaries' enthusiasm for science and scientific methods should be placed in the context of the Enlightenment. The notion that evangelicalism was shaped by the Enlightenment runs contrary to the traditional historiography. Yet, following a recent volume of essays edited by Brian Stanley, a case may be made for how the missionary movement was remoulded in the light of new philosophies in the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The theological study of nature, for instance, attracted unprecedented interest at this time. In addition to gentlemen of science, clergymen and even the working classes could summon the confidence to theorise on nature in a spiritual vein.<sup>14</sup> Recent work by Bernard Lightman has shown that evangelical meditations on nature continued to be popular until nearly the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Re-evaluations of the metanarrative of how Darwinism disentangled science from religion are therefore needed. Instead of proposing a clean account of how science became secular in the nineteenth century, historians are emphasising the diversity of contexts in which the relations of knowledge and belief were forged. Learned scientific societies were distinct from popular periodicals, schools and lending libraries or the pulpit, as the work of William Astore, Aileen Fyfe and Jonathan Topham has shown. In each of these contexts the history of science and religion could take a distinct trajectory.<sup>16</sup> The missionary settlements of the Pacific provide another venue for locating the tense cohabitation of these intellectual traditions.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Stanley, 'Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: A Reevaluation', in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. Brian Stanley (Richmond, Surrey, 2001). See also chapter 1 below.

<sup>14</sup> For the popularity of natural history in relation to religion, see Brooke, *Science and Religion*, Aileen Fyfe, 'The Reception of William Paley's *Natural Theology* in the University of Cambridge', *British Journal for the History of Science* 30 (1997): 321–35, Nicholas Jardine, James Secord and Emma Spary, eds., *The Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge, 1995), Jonathan Topham, 'Science, Natural Theology, and Evangelicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Thomas Chalmers and the Evidence Controversy', in *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective*.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lightman, 'The Visual Theology of Victorian Popularizers of Science: From Reverent Eye to Chemical Retina', *Isis* 91 (2000): 651–80.

<sup>16</sup> William J Astore, *Observing God: Thomas Dick, Evangelicalism and Popular Science in Victorian Britain and America* (Aldershot, 2001), Aileen Fyfe, *Science and Salvation: Evangelical Popular Science Publishing in Victorian Britain* (Chicago, 2004), Jonathan Topham, 'Science and Popular Education in the 1830s: The Role of the Bridgewater Treaties', *British Journal for the History of Science* 25 (1992): 397–430.

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The missionaries' science and religion could come together at a number of different levels. Science provided a natural philosophy that complemented evangelical theology at an ideological level: missionaries believed that their account of God and the creation was more rational than that possessed by islanders. As practitioners of science they also presented themselves as more civilised than their charges in the manner in which they related to the material world. In addition to this, the study of nature provided a pool of similes and metaphors that pervaded missionary texts. More particularly, the cyclical processes of nature could provide an analogy for the progress of the spiritual life from conversion to death. There was thus a discursive unity between the representations of science and religion. Institutional links with figures such as Banks, and the transfer of accounts of nature back to the metropolis, allowed the later nineteenth century's professional science to be built upon the edifice of missionary knowledge. In all of these ways – ideological, discursive and empirical – missionaries' views of nature could operate quite distinctly from the emerging genre of professional and elite science. The intimacy of these links between science and religion make it anachronistic to clinically separate the two categories. The passing assumption, made by the prominent historians John Hedley Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, that views of nature were shared between missionaries and local peoples needs modification.<sup>17</sup>

To understand missionary views of nature, it is necessary to leave behind us a modern understanding of scientific knowledge. It was only by the later nineteenth century that the categories of natural history and natural philosophy gave way to specialist disciplines.<sup>18</sup> By this time, the professionalisation of science led to the exclusion of amateurs from contributing to it. If modern science was forged to take this form at this historical juncture, it is reasonable to assume that there were many local contestants to this emergent knowledge in the earlier century.<sup>19</sup> Expert and amateur science, secular and religious science, elite and popular science, took on contesting

<sup>17</sup> Brooke and Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature*. On p. 27 they write: 'Design arguments might assist the religious apologist in attacking the atheist. They might even help to establish common ground in the context of missionary encounters with other cultures.'

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Cunningham and Perry Williams, 'Decentering the "Big Picture": *The Origins of Modern Science and the Modern Origins of Science*', *British Journal for the History of Science* 26 (1993) 418. For more on the definition of science, see Richard Yeo, *Defining Science: William Whewell, Natural Knowledge, and Public Debate in Early Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 1993). See also Simon Schaffer, 'Scientific Discoveries and the End of Natural Philosophy', *Social Studies in Science* 16 (1986): 387–90.

<sup>19</sup> For popular science and its contestation of emergent elitism, see Roger Cooter and Stephen Pumfrey, 'Separate Spheres and Public Places: Reflections on the History of Science Popularization and Science in Popular Culture', *History of Science* 24 (1994) 242. For more on popular science, see Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain*

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existences amongst distinct practitioners. Each of these sciences utilised different forms of material production, while occupying separate spaces of activity. Missionary natural history was one such contestant; it sought to encompass the whole of life within its symbols and theories. Since scripture provided the ultimate word on how evangelicals should govern their lives, missionary science gave language and interpretation a central place. In adopting a distinctive style and starting from a firm belief in its reliability, missionaries hoped to provide a Christian alternative to the proliferation of accounts of exotic nature.

Amongst evangelicals, Pacific islanders were thought to be superstitious cannibals who worshipped nature, and who could not respect the body as the site of the soul. Nature had been benevolent to them; yet they had chosen to worship the created without recognising the Creator. Driven by this characterisation, missionaries hoped to point Pacific islanders to an alternative theology of nature, and away from what was said to be an irrational attitude to the environment. They instructed Pacific islanders to study nature, imitate the European missionaries, convert to rational religion, cultivate the spirit, and become missionaries to other islands. Evangelicals wanted nature to embody theology without drawing adoration. On one occasion, Revd John Williams, who became the foremost missionary to the South Pacific, taught Samoans to see their former god, the sea-eel, as the Serpent.<sup>20</sup> Williams was ecstatic to witness a local chief spear and eat an eel in the presence of all his people, with the statement, 'I have become a *lotu* or Christian.'<sup>21</sup> It was the Serpent that had tempted Adam and Eve, and by eating the eel the Samoan demonstrated his rejection of sin and the devil. Speaking of the eel as the Serpent rather than god and eating it could signify conversion, literally and metaphorically.

(Cambridge, 1984), Adrian Desmond, 'Artisan Resistance and Evolution in Britain, 1819-1848', *Osiris* 2nd series 3 (1987): 77-110, Iwan Morus, 'Currents from the Underworld: Electricity and the Technology of Display in Early Victorian England', *Isis* 84 (1993): 50-69, Anne Secord, 'Science in the Pub: Artisan Botanists in Early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire', *History of Science* 24 (1994): 270-315, Larry Stewart and Paul Wiending, 'Philosophical Threads: Natural Philosophy and Public Experiment among the Weavers of Spitalfields', *British Journal for the History of Science* 28 (1995): 37-62.

<sup>20</sup> Letter dated 8 June 1821, from Revd John Williams, cited in Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860* (Melbourne, 1978), 247. For more on Revd John Williams, see Gawan Daws, *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-Discovery in the South Seas: John Williams, Herman Melville, Walter Murray Gibson, Robert Louis Stevenson, Paul Gauguin* (New York, 1980), Niel Gunson, 'John Williams and his Ship: The Bourgeois Aspirations of a Missionary Family', in *Questioning the Past: A Selection of Papers in History and Government*, ed. D. P. Crook (St Lucia, Queensland, 1972), Sujit Sivasundaram, 'John Williams', in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, ed. David Bebbington, Timothy Larsen and Mark Noll (Leicester, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Ebenezer Prout, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Williams* (London, 1843), 367.

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Ideally, this work would benefit from a study of how islanders responded to these instructions. Despite the constraints imposed by the sources, it is possible to see how local factors always modulated the spread of missionary science, subverting the simple diffusion of knowledge from Britain to the Pacific. For instance, chapter 2 demonstrates how the practices of writing, reading and preaching about nature were resisted and reinvented by islanders. Chapter 6 suggests that when evangelicals sought to distinguish stealing from trade, and to put into force a defined view of exchange with respect to natural commodities, Pacific islanders set up a heretical sect that took a different view of material culture. Elsewhere in this work too, attention will be paid to the fragility of missionary practice. In the process of cultural contact, knowledge about how to relate to nature was changed and reinterpreted through dialogue. The tradition of contemplating nature that predated the arrival of Europeans in the Pacific had an impact on missionary science. Upon evangelisation, local peoples came to an altered view of their environment, which was a mixture of previous customs and evangelical belief. The manner in which colonisers and colonised exchanged scientific ideas is well documented in the historiography of other regions. Christopher Bayly and Fa-ti Fan's work provide excellent examples.<sup>22</sup> This argument has recently been stretched further: it is said to be unhelpful to distinguish indigenous traditions from Western knowledge. Rather, according to Eugene Irschick, coloniser and colonised exchanged views about nature in the same epistemic field.<sup>23</sup>

In studying the place of science in missionary practice, it is possible to intervene in the thriving historiography of science, nature and cultural contact. This body of scholarship has until recently been heavily influenced by the developmental models proposed over the past few decades.<sup>24</sup> According to Roy Macleod, for instance, a chronology might be drafted of

<sup>22</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), Fa-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire and Cultural Encounter* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004). For the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into Western science, see also Richard Grove, 'Indigenous Knowledge and the Significance of South-West India for Portuguese and Dutch Constructions of Tropical Nature', in *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and South-East Asia*, ed. Richard Grove, Vinita Damodaran and S. Sangwan (1998), and Deepak Kumar, *Science and the Raj, 1857–1905* (Delhi, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994). For a theoretical account of how to speak of the relations between science and indigenous knowledge, see Richard Gillespie and David Wade Chambers, 'Locality in the History of Science: Colonial Science, Technoscience, and Indigenous Knowledge', *Osiris* 2nd series 15 (2000): 221–40.

<sup>24</sup> The model proposed by George Basalla continues to influence the field, despite being grossly outdated. George Basalla, 'The Spread of Western Science', *Science* 156 (1967): 611–22. See also Roy Macleod, 'On Visiting the "Moving Metropolis": Reflections on the

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how science was transported from Europe on exploratory voyages, such as Cook's travels, until it was successfully institutionalised in the colonies. Non-European science was first controlled from the metropolis, until there was leverage for greater local independence, which eventually gave way to co-operation between the centre and the periphery. Many have followed Macleod's lead by focusing on expeditions and the formation of disciplines, careers and formal institutions, in order to come to an idea of science's relations with empire.<sup>25</sup> Instead of interpreting science as a discrete body of ideas that could justify colonial expansion and strengthen governance, I hope to pay serious attention to the symbolic and material functions of natural knowledge. For my purposes, science and missionary practice were so closely entangled that it is difficult to speak about the relations between science and empire. Missionary science does not fit a model of diffusion and institutionalisation: it existed in tension with more elite knowledges and it drew on local traditions. It was a popular and religious view of nature, a way of seeing as much as an exercise in theoretical speculation.<sup>26</sup>

Richard Drayton's suggestion, that Christian ideologies of man's place in nature lay at the taproot of imperial expansion, provides a valuable starting point for this work.<sup>27</sup> Drayton uses botany and Kew Gardens as vehicles to explore how Britons attempted to find nature's divine laws and to apply those principles in ordering human social arrangements. For Drayton, Christian theology appears as a primal cause in scientific imperialism. In my work the focus is enlarged. Adamic responsibilities to subdue the earth also had their place in the ideology of Christian missions. Furthermore, in bringing agronomy, mapping and the display of nature together with botany, it is possible to subscribe to a wider notion of

Architecture of Imperial Science', in *Scientific Colonialism: A Cross Cultural Comparison* (Washington, 1987), Roy Macleod, 'Passages in Imperial Science: From Empire to Commonwealth', *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 117–50.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, the recent *Osiris* volume: Roy Macleod, 'Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise', *Osiris* 2nd series 15 (2000): 1–317. For other valuable work on the history of science, nature and empire, see Saul Dubow, ed., *Science and Society in Southern Africa* (Manchester, 2000), M. H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (London, 1997), Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge, 1995), John M. MacKenzie, *Imperialism and the Natural World* (Manchester, 1990), D. P. Miller and P. H. Reill, eds., *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany and Representations of Nature* (Cambridge, 1996), Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, *Empire and the Sun: Victorian Solar Eclipse Expeditions* (Stanford, Calif., 2002), and Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, N. J., 1999).

<sup>26</sup> For the placement of vision in relation to colonial nature, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven, Conn., 2000).



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nature's improvement. My suggestion is that the Christian rhetoric, to which Drayton pays heed, did not become a secular utopia as the century progressed. Christian ideologies of nature continued to have a crucial place in the public sphere even after they had ceased to hold credibility in the circles that Drayton discusses.

I am heavily indebted to the work of Niel Gunson, who has provided a detailed history of the South Pacific mission in its social context. Because the current work is primarily concerned with the status of natural knowledge, it is possible to rely on Gunson for a wider account of the character of the evangelists sent to the Pacific, and the challenges that awaited them there.<sup>28</sup> Gunson has also published an article on the scientific contributions of these missionaries, but has focused specifically on their role as guides and advisers to visiting naturalists, and their stance with respect to Darwinism.<sup>29</sup> I take a different route in discussing how missionaries saw their science as more credible than that of the secular visitors. In addition to Gunson, Rod Edmond, Vanessa Smith and Nicholas Thomas provide useful moorings for a study of the material culture of the South Pacific mission.<sup>30</sup> These scholars have pioneered the discussion of how the production, consumption and display of artefacts allowed meanings to be changed and exchanged in the context of the London Missionary Society's operations in the islands. Their methods are useful in making sense of missionary science as material culture.<sup>31</sup>

Through reading, writing, observing and collecting, the missionaries generated artefacts which made faith take form. The material culture of the missionary movement provides useful insights that help explicate how evangelicals ticked. A history that focuses on the production and reception of such objects can clarify the reasons for the popularity and pervasiveness of evangelicalism. There is much value in attending to the theological debates that framed this movement, yet it is the burden of this work to identify how missionaries regulated their time and lives in relation to the world around them.<sup>32</sup> Throughout this work a practical definition of evangelicalism will therefore be adopted, which takes the lived experience

<sup>28</sup> Gunson, *Messengers of Grace*.

<sup>29</sup> Niel Gunson, 'British Missionaries and their Contribution to Science in the Pacific Islands', in *Darwin's Laboratory*, ed. Roy Macleod and Philip Rehbock (Honolulu, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge, 1997), Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge, 1998), Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> For a starting point for science as material culture, see Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (London, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> For a start in the cultural history of evangelicalism, see Doreen Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (Aldershot, 1992).

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of believers more seriously. In this mode of analysis a missionary becomes an individual who meditated on nature, educated children, translated scripture and preached on the Sabbath. Such practices defined his sense of self and the community to which he belonged. The intellectual life of British expansion has often been restricted to studies of abstract theories and elite debate. But the knowledge that missionaries cultivated can also be understood if belief is seen as embodied activity.<sup>33</sup>

The way in which missionaries engaged with nature was central to the articulation of identity, and the first part of this book is concerned primarily with such private practices. Chapter 1 sets the context of the London Missionary Society's emergence, considers its attitude to learning, and the composition of its membership. The manner in which colonialism is used as a category in relation to missions will be explained here. Chapter 2 then considers how nature was implicated in the making of evangelicals, by considering how scientific methods were employed in education. Chapters 3 and 4 widen the discussion by suggesting how, upon conversion, meditations on flowers, oceans and the seed were vital in coming to terms with the passage of the spiritual life. As these chapters suggest, the practices of reading, writing, preaching and meditating on nature allowed missionaries far away from home to define their identity. This private and theological language of nature was also adopted by converts. But the process of replication was not simple; it involved creative appropriation and defined resistance. A close reading of objects exemplifies these claims. Chapter 2 analyses the depiction of a sloth and a beaver in order to show how natural historical creatures fitted into a typology of progress in education. A portrait of a Pacific islander called Temoteitei who was brought to London for conversion and treated like an animal is discussed in chapter 3. By studying an engraving of the demise of John Williams at the hands of alleged cannibals, chapter 4 suggests how a natural history of the environment was linked with notions of demise. The naturalisation of ideas of conversion, civilisation and death indicate how the religious self was linked with nature. Paying heed to the religious and the natural is vital in bringing to light forms of self-definition that operated side by side with race, gender and class.

<sup>33</sup> This theoretical move is inspired by the work of Barry Barnes, 'Practice as Collective Action', in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. Karin Knorr Cetina, Eike von Savigny and Theodore R. Schatzki (London, 2001) 19. The term 'practice' is borrowed primarily from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977), Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London, 1986), and Pierre Bourdieu, *Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge, 1996).