

cdr

The primitivist missiology of Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853): A radical influence on nineteenth-century Protestant mission

Item Type	Thesis or dissertation
Authors	Dann, Robert B.
Publisher	University of Liverpool;University College Chester
Download date	2026-05-16 02:18:55
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10034/76196

The Primitivist Missiology
of Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853):
a radical influence on nineteenth-century Protestant mission.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements
of the University of Liverpool
for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

by Robert Bernard Dann

May 2006.

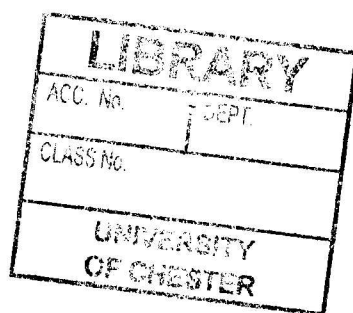


Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Preface.....	7
Acknowledgments	8
Abbreviations.....	8
A. Introduction	9
<i>A.1. Biographical Notes</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>A.2. Literature Survey</i>	<i>10</i>
A.2.1. Primary Sources	11
A.2.2. Secondary Sources.....	13
B. A Primitivist Ecclesiologist	16
<i>B.1. The Development of Groves’s Ecclesiological Thought</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>B.2. The Ecclesiology of A N Groves.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>B.3. The Ecclesiological Influence of A N Groves.....</i>	<i>18</i>
C. A Primitivist Missiologist.....	20
<i>Introduction: a Missionary Missiologist</i>	<i>20</i>
C.1. The Development of Groves’s Missiological Thought (1825-1840)	22
C.1.1. Early Missionary Influences.....	22
John Owen (1766-1822) and the British and Foreign Bible Society.....	23
Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850) and the Church Missionary Society	24
Pietists and Moravians	25
Edward Irving (1792-1834).....	26
Joseph Wolff (1795-1862)	34
William Jowett (1787-1855)	35
Karl Gottlieb Pfander (1803-65) and the Basel Mission	36
Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) of Serampore	37
C.1.2. Contemporary Intellectual Currents.....	42
C.1.2.1. Missionary Motivations.....	42
C.1.2.2. The Romantic Movement	45
C.1.2.3. Evangelical Primitivism	47
C.1.3. Groves’s Missionary Experience.....	49
C.1.3.1. Groves’s Experience in Eastern Europe and Baghdad (1829-33; aged 34-38)	49
C.1.3.2. Groves’s Experience in India (1833-52; aged 38-57).....	51
Initial Impressions	51
Indian Roman Catholicism.....	52
Earliest Protestant Missions	53
Karl Gottlieb Ewald Rhenius (1790-1838)	55
The Rhenius Affair.....	59
Groves and Rhenius	64
Groves’s Later Missionary Career	66
C.1.4. Conclusion: The Development of Groves’s Missiological Thought	74
C.2. The Missiology of A N Groves.....	76
Introduction: An Ecclesiologist Overseas	76
C.2.1. Missions and Churches	78
C.2.1.1. Missionary Societies.....	78
C.2.1.2. Rivalry and Comity	82
C.2.1.3. Church Organisation.....	88
Henry Venn (1796-1873): An Introduction.....	88
Rufus Anderson (1796-1880): An Introduction	91
The Three-Self Principle	94
The “Native Pastorate”.....	95
C.2.1.4. Missionary Appointment	102
C.2.1.5. Spiritual Leadership.....	105
C.2.1.6. Indigenous Initiatives	108
C.2.1.7. Conclusion: Missions and Churches.....	112
C.2.2. Civilisation and Education	113
C.2.2.1. Cultural Identification.....	113
C.2.2.2. Commerce, Civilisation and Christianity	116

C.2.2.3. Groves’s early experience of schools	119
C.2.2.4. Alexander Duff (1806-78) and English Language Schools.....	120
C.2.2.5. Educational Mission	122
C.2.2.6. Vernacular Schools.....	124
C.2.2.7. Social and Medical Mission	125
C.2.2.8. Conclusion: Civilisation and Education	126
C.2.3. Finance and Providence.....	127
C.2.3.1. Missionary Support.....	127
C.2.3.2. Groves’s Life of Faith.....	130
C.2.3.3. Living by Faith: Groves’s Principles.....	135
C.2.3.4. Living by Faith: A Critique	139
C.2.3.5. Living by Faith: Some Early Applications	145
C.2.3.6. Accountability	150
C.2.3.7. Tent-Making.....	157
C.2.3.8. The Rest of Faith	163
C.2.3.9. Conclusion: Finance and Providence.....	165
C.2.4. Conclusion: The Missiology of A N Groves	166
C.3. The Missiological Influence of A N Groves	168
C.3.1. Groves’s Missiology Applied	168
C.3.1.1. Brethren Missions.....	168
The Scriptural Knowledge Institution	168
The Missionary Magazines	172
Early Initiatives	172
Later Ambiguities.....	175
Dan Crawford (1870-1926).....	178
Jim Elliot	180
Zambian Assemblies	181
Mysore Assemblies	182
Conclusion: Brethren Missions	185
C.3.1.2. Faith Missions	187
Groves as a Model for “Faith Missions”	187
Groves and Hudson Taylor	187
Co-operation with All Denominations	188
Living by Faith	190
Recruitment of Unordained and Uneducated Men.....	191
Recruitment of Single Women	193
Internationalisation.....	194
Premillennialist Stimulus	195
Indigenous Evangelists.....	195
Conclusion: Groves as a Model for “Faith Missions”	195
Groves in Contrast to “Faith Missions”	196
Pioneering Unevangelised Fields	196
Systematising Financial Support.....	198
Self-support	199
Establishing Authority Structures	200
Respecting Denominational Traditions.....	201
Evading Ecclesiological Issues	202
Perpetuating the Church / Mission Organisational Dichotomy	204
Other Influences on “Faith Missions”	205
Conclusion: Groves in Contrast to “Faith Missions”	206
Conclusion: Faith Missions.....	206
C.3.1.3. Indigenous Missions	207
John Arulappan (1810-67)	208
Watchman Nee (1903-1972)	209
Bakht Singh (1903-2000).....	211
Conclusion: Indigenous Missions	213
C.3.1.4. Conclusion: Groves’s Missiology Applied.....	214
C.3.2. Mission Thinkers, Grovesian and Other	215
C.3.2.1. Primitivism	216

C.3.2.2. Institutionalism	221
C.3.2.3. Culturalism	225
C.3.2.4. Church Growth	228
C.3.2.5. Primitivism Revisited	236
C.3.2.6. Indigenous Primitivism.....	239
C.3.2.7. Support and Dependence	244
C.3.2.8. Conclusion: Mission Thinkers, Grovesian and Other.....	249
C.3.3. Groves’s Primitivist Missiology: a Hermeneutical Critique.....	251
C.3.4. Groves’s Primitivist Missiology: a Historical Critique.....	257
C.3.5. Conclusion: The Missiological Influence of A N Groves.....	262
D. Conclusion:	266
Bibliography	270

Abstract

With the publication of his tract *Christian Devotedness* in 1825, Anthony Norris Groves joined a growing network of Protestants in the United Kingdom who aspired to follow the teaching of Christ and the example of his apostles in a more literal fashion than was common in the churches of their day. Seceding from the Anglican communion in 1828, he adopted a consciously non-denominational identity. With little interest in buildings, services, finances, organisation, training or ceremony, he developed an essentially primitivist ecclesiology, regarding the principles and practice of the early churches in the New Testament as a model to be followed by every generation.

A number of Groves's closest friends became leading figures in circles soon to be known as Brethren, or Plymouth Brethren. After leaving Britain in 1829, his ongoing influence in this movement was mediated largely through his brother-in-law George Müller, and is reflected in the principles adopted by the latter in his church leadership and in his support of missionaries for more than half a century. One of those influenced by Müller was the young Hudson Taylor, whose financial support during his early years came almost entirely from Groves's personal friends among the Brethren.

It was overseas that Groves himself spent most of his adult life, and in India that we see the clearest practical outworking of his ecclesiology in a cross-cultural context. Identifying weaknesses in existing missionary institutions, he offered an alternative strategy for appointing missionaries, creating churches, maintaining practical unity and stimulating indigenous leadership. His missiological ideas stand in contrast to the consensus of his day, and also to the methods of indigenisation advocated some fourteen years later by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. Indeed, he might be described as the first major primitivist among mission strategists, and as such was an early forerunner of Roland Allen.

Groves encouraged young Indian Christians to ignore Western church tradition and to follow, as closely as possible, the teaching and practice of Christ and his apostles. He advocated the liberty of indigenous Christians to take responsibility without reference to foreign organisations, the freedom of missionaries and Indian believers to seek guidance and provision directly from God, the sending of evangelists by congregations, the gathering of converts into new congregations, the development of local leadership in the course of active Christian service, and the partnership of industrialist and evangelist in frugal living "by faith" for the extension of the gospel. He viewed education, commerce and medicine as aids to evangelising rather than civilising.

Above all, Groves wished to simplify the missionary task of the Church. Where his contemporaries envisaged the creation by one institution (a foreign mission) of another institution (a national church), he drew no distinction between mission and church. And rather than projecting an eventual shift from foreign government, support and propagation to self-government, support and propagation, he would start with no organised government, support or propagation at all, expecting these to develop naturally as local believers helped one another develop their own spiritual abilities and ministries. With no organisation to oversee, no buildings to maintain, no

salaries to pay, his emphasis from the start was on the freedom of local converts to meet together without foreign supervision, and to preach the gospel to their own people without being trained, authorised or paid to do so.

The influence of Groves on his own and subsequent generations has been seriously underrated. This may be attributable partly to the opposition he encountered during his own lifetime, partly to the commercial failures that clouded his final years, and partly to the inaccessibility of his own writings and works about him. Described twenty years ago as a “neglected missiologist”, and largely unknown today, his significance might seem somewhat negligible, but to Groves we can trace back ideas that stimulated the birth of a new generation of missions following what have been called “faith principles”. These included Brethren initiatives in many countries in addition to numerous interdenominational “faith missions” inspired by the example of Hudson Taylor.

With some justification, Groves has been called the “father of faith missions”. Nevertheless, his idea of using the New Testament as a practical manual of missionary methods was taken up with greatest effect not by Anglo-American missionaries but by the leaders of some remarkable indigenous movements. Notable among these was his own disciple John Christian Arulappan and, at a later date, Bakht Singh and Watchman Nee, all of whom had direct or indirect links with him.

Our research concludes that the primitivist missiology of Anthony Norris Groves exerted a significant radical influence on Protestant mission in the nineteenth century, and indeed to the present day, for his ideas find many points of contact with current missiological thinking.

Preface

The period in which, as a young man, Groves developed distinctive views concerning church and mission embraced the years 1825 to 1835. As it happens, this was a highly significant moment in the religious history of the British Isles. Indeed, David Bebbington identifies, in these second and third decades of the nineteenth century, a particular crisis in the evolving religious history of Britain:

It was a clash between those who inherited the eighteenth-century beliefs in order, design and gradualness and those who, in the iconoclastic spirit of the nineteenth century, wished to substitute the free, the dynamic and the cataclysmic... From as early as the 1820s a new force was in the field.¹

It is the contention of this thesis that Anthony Norris Groves was a significant participant in the rise and spread of this “new force” both within the United Kingdom and especially overseas.

The methodology of our thesis is essentially historical, drawing on primary archive material from Groves himself and a number of his contemporaries in addition to secondary works that shed light on the wider context.

As a contribution to scholarship, our study identifies Groves as a major early primitivist among mission thinkers, and one largely unknown to modern missiologists. It contrasts his “indigenous principles” with those of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, and shows him an early forerunner of Roland Allen. It investigates previously unresearched phases of his missionary career that contributed to the development of his strategic thought.² It attempts a thorough assessment of his involvement in “The Rhenius Affair”. It evaluates his view of commerce as a means of support for Christian mission, of education as an agency for evangelisation rather than civilisation, and of medicine as a means of spiritual rather than physical benefit. It discusses the concept of “living by faith”, as understood by himself, by his contemporaries, by later missionaries, and by some recent critics. It suggests that insufficient value has previously been given to his influence on early Brethren ecclesiology in Britain and overseas, mediated especially through George Müller. It identifies significant links between his circle of personal friends and Hudson Taylor, whose early principles owed much to these relationships. It compares and contrasts his mission policies with those subsequently adopted by Brethren missions and by “faith missions” (especially the CIM), and it suggests that his primitivist principles were most fully appreciated by indigenous movements in his own day and later. It engages with modern missiological thinking and identifies points where his thought could usefully contribute to some current controversies.

¹ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 92

² In particular, no previous work has made use of the correspondence of John Bilderbeck of Chittoor, and little has been written about Groves’s links with Joshua Marshman, or the contrast between his thought and that of Edward Irving.

Acknowledgments

I would like to offer special thanks to Christopher Partridge, Timothy Stunt, Tim Grass, Stephen Chilcraft, Alan Millard, David J Clark, David F Wright, and to my examiners, Keith Ferdinando and Eric Christianson.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for particular missionary agencies:

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
BFBS	British and Foreign Bible Society
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
CIM	China Inland Mission
CMA	Christian and Missionary Alliance
CMS	Church Missionary Society
LMS	London Missionary Society
LSPCJ	London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

English translations of the Bible are identified as follows:

AV	Authorised Version (King James Version)
GNB	Good News Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

Primary sources are indicated in footnotes using the following abbreviations accompanied by the appropriate page number(s):

D	Christian Devotedness (2 nd edn., Raven, Belfast)
J	Journal of a Journey to Baghdad
M	Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves (3 rd edn.)
R	Journal of a Residence at Baghdad

Secondary Sources are:

BDEB	Lewis, Donald M (ed.), <i>The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography</i> (1995)
DNB	Lee, Sydney (ed.), <i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> (1893)
FOFM	Dann, Robert Bernard, <i>Father of Faith Missions</i> (2004)
PEANG	Dann, Robert Bernard, "The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853): a radical influence on nineteenth-century Protestant church in Britain"