

***“Onward Christian Soldiers”: Connections and tensions  
between faith and empire in British accounts and  
memoirs from the Indian Mutiny***

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## I. Introduction

“Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war/With the cross of Jesus going on before....Like a mighty army moves the Church of God; Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod”<sup>1</sup>

These words were penned in 1864. by British clergyman Sabine Baring-Gould for the children in his Sunday School class to sing as they marched to and from Church.<sup>2</sup> The song was an instant success and was soon found in the hymnals of many denominations around the world. Its seminal feature was the conjoining of a religious message with martial terminology. This juxtaposition was not at all uncommon in Great Britain during the mid 1800s. Indeed the Victorian Era was an age of great piety, and even more so, an age in which Christianity was intricately connected to other national institutions such as the army and the empire.

In studying selected accounts and memoirs left by soldiers, civilian observers, and historians concerning the Indian Mutiny (1857-9), a close linkage between Christianity and the empire becomes apparent. The sources are at the heart of the paper and enable the closer examination of the “Christian” empire, how it was constructed in memoirs and accounts, and the moral quandaries that the Mutiny thrust upon the coalition of Church and empire. Remembrances of the Mutiny were often tinged with religious symbolism and imagery. Fighting for the British Empire in India<sup>3</sup> involved a defense of everything that empire stood for, and the Christian religion was a fundamental aspect of British rule in India. In defending the empire, the soldiers were also defending Christianity. The Indian rebels also perceived the connection between

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<sup>1</sup> “Onward Christian Soldiers.” Online. [www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/o/n/onwardcs.htm](http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/o/n/onwardcs.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Olive. “The growth of Christian militarism in mid-Victorian Britain.” The English Historical Review. 86.338 (Jan. 1971) 70.

<sup>3</sup> Also known as the “Raj”.

religion and the Raj. Indeed, the initial revolt of Hindu and Muslim soldiers in May 1857 was prompted by exaggerated concerns that the British government was planning to forcibly convert Indians to Christianity. In the course of the fighting, the mutineers displayed a marked hostility towards the Christian faith, which they viewed as part of Britain's domination of their country and culture.

The ties between Christianity and the empire became problematic when members of the British Army engaged in morally questionable activities of retaliation and repression towards their Indian enemies. There were some soldiers who were able to harness their faith in support of a vindictive crushing of the rebellion. Other individuals felt compelled by their beliefs to speak out against what they saw as unjust and even hypocritical policies by the armies of a professedly Christian nation. But the majority of individuals involved in suppression of the Indian Mutiny were somewhere in between these positions. They were troubled by how to deal with the conflicts of conscience that arose from being participants in a brutal imperial war, yet in the final analysis, many still expressed support for the British Army. The moral confusion engendered by the Mutiny was evident in the competing and in some cases contradictory desires for revenge, and the exercising of restraint. Ultimately, the Mutiny may well have ended the dream of a Christian India, and at any rate, its repercussions certainly exposed the limitations of the bond between Church and empire. Yet connections between Christianity and empire would persist in the literature and accounts of the soldiers who fought against the Mutiny and those Victorian historians who recounted its events, in some cases even years after the fighting had come to an end.

The uprisings in India were a titanic struggle between the great superpower of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a mass of discontented Indians, from princes, to soldiers, to peasants. It was a war

that was very nearly lost, and the ramifications of losing India for Britain's great power status were clear. Shortly after the outbreak of rebellion in May 1857, a retired British Army officer told the London Times that "without India, Great Britain would subside into a third-rate state".<sup>4</sup> British victory ensured that they would remain the leading imperial power for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The conduct of the British Army during the Mutiny was of concern not only to the soldiers themselves but also to the government, leading Church officials, and the general public back in Great Britain. These groups experienced some of the same conflicting emotions and ethical tensions that the soldiers involved in the actual fighting did. The Mutiny was one of the first wars to be extensively covered by on-location journalists, and their reports helped bring the news home to the public, making for a great deal of popular interest in the progress of the conflict. And given the historical significance of the Mutiny, it was an important area of study for Victorian historians.

A complex interaction of spiritual, literary, and cultural forces in Great Britain during the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century helped create an atmosphere in which the ecclesiastical and imperial missions could be intertwined. One influence was the so-called "muscular Christianity" movement. It derived from a philosophy developed by English educational reformers and intellectuals like Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley in the 1850s. Its basic concept was to combine traditional Christian virtues with the improvement of the physical body through sports and athletic training. A strong, disciplined, and healthy body was seen as conducive to moral growth. This theory was promoted rigorously in the famous British public schools such as Eton,

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<sup>4</sup> James, Lawrence. Raj (London: Little, Brown, and Co. 1997) 278.

Harrow, and Rugby.<sup>5</sup> Boys trained on a regimen of games, cold showers, and mandatory chapel attendance. Removed from any potential sources of temptation, they learned strict discipline and formed “character” in an ascetic, all-male environment.

The idea of raising youths in a controlled, same-sex environment hearkened back to a long tradition of Christian monasticism, but also had martial implications. The army barracks, for example could be viewed as quasi-monastic places where young men were molded into coherent and disciplined units while far away from any worldly luxuries.<sup>6</sup> The figure of the muscular Christian was ideally prepared to face the challenges posed by an ever-expanding British Empire. As Andrew Bradstock notes: “muscular Christianity fed easily into the swelling strain of militarism and imperialism which characterized the second half of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century”.<sup>7</sup>

Norman Vance<sup>8</sup> and Donald Hall<sup>9</sup> both examine the phenomenon of the “muscular” Christian. Vance describes how the movement celebrated virtues such as physical strength, chivalry, and moral fortitude. All of these incidentally were attributes that could be considered fitting for the British soldier. Vance also discusses at some length the role of the elite public schools, such as Rugby, Eton, and Harrow in molding young men into soldiers and servants of the empire. Donald Hall edits a text that explores various aspects of the muscular Christianity philosophy. A central argument is that while muscular Christianity did promote the enhancement and training of the physical body, it never advocated the use of physical force for its own sake. The development of the body was only to be used in the furtherance of a moral end.

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<sup>5</sup> These institutions were noteworthy not only for producing many of England’s most prominent statesmen, but also numerous future army officers, including the Duke of Wellington, who attended Eton. They also sent many graduates into imperial service in India.

<sup>6</sup> Watson, JR. “Soldiers and Saints: the Fighting Man and the Christian Life”. Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture. Ed. Andrew Bradstock. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Bradstock, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Vance, Norman. The Sinews of the Spirit. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

<sup>9</sup> Muscular Christianity. Ed. Donald Hall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

David Alderson<sup>10</sup> argues that in promoting “Christian manliness” British educators and reformers such as Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley drew a connection between spiritual and physical health. He also talks about the importance of the “games ethic” in British public schools in which team sports such as rugby or cricket served a larger purpose of teaching discipline and teamwork. These skills were useful especially for future members of the army. Alderson further details how conceptions of a “manly” Christianity became central to British national identity. The Protestant religion was considered a “masculine” faith which promoted reason and self-mastery as opposed to Catholicism which was too emotional, and featured “effeminate” priests who were celibate and asexual.

Related to the concept of muscular Christianity was Christian militarism. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a shift in the traditional attitude of the Church and the public towards the soldier. Historically, the army had been viewed as a repository of vice and immorality that attracted various rogues and outcasts. But with the advent of evangelical movements in many Protestant denominations, the soldier began to assume a different character. The overseas missionary movement was exploding by mid-century, and British soldiers became a natural target of these efforts. The possibility for the soldier to become a kind of missionary, spreading the goodwill of the empire and its Christian faith, as well as defending its interests, took root. Also, military influence worked its way into the Church. Hymns such as “Onward! Christian soldiers” and “Soldiers of the Cross arise!” matched Christian virtues with martial terminology. The actual Church building in many English cities even became a repository for military trophies and regimental banners and standards.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Alderson, David. Mansex Fine. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

<sup>11</sup> Watson, 17-8.

Themes connected to Christian militarism are explored in a series of essays edited by Andrew Bradstock.<sup>12</sup> In one particular essay entitled “Soldiers and Saints: the Fighting Man and the Christian Life”, JR Watson investigates the growth of Christian militarism in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. He also looks at related literary developments, and how popular historical literature of the day helped create the prototype of the “Soldier-Saint”, a dynamic individual who embodied the principles of the muscular Christian on the battlefield. The example is given of Henry Havelock, who became a national hero during the Indian Mutiny. Watson further mentions how far military ideology permeated into popular culture in Victorian Britain when he discusses “martial hymns” and the birth of quasi-military organizations such as the Boy’s Brigade and the Boy Scouts.

Olive Anderson likewise addresses Christian militarism.<sup>13</sup> She argues that the strongly Christian character of the British Empire was a natural outgrowth of trends in Victorian society. These include the emergence of the “soldier-saint” figure in heroic imperial literature and the growth of Protestant evangelical movements which began to focus on proselytizing to the military. By expanding and defending the boundaries of the empire, soldiers opened up more and more of the world to the benefits of British rule, including the teachings of Christianity.

A series of essays edited by John MacKenzie<sup>14</sup> focuses on the power of literature to shape public opinion and support imperial endeavors. “Heroic myths of empire” were propagated through popular literature and periodicals. The protagonists of this literature were real life historical figures who combined a strong Christian zeal with military acumen and manly vigor.

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<sup>12</sup> Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture. Ed. Andrew Bradstock. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000)

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, Olive. “The growth of Christian militarism in mid-Victorian Britain.” The English Historical Review. 86.338 (Jan. 1971)

<sup>14</sup> Popular Imperialism and the Military. Ed. John MacKenzie. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992)



These “Christian soldiers” were especially prominent in juvenile literature, and they motivated their young readers to strive to emulate them in the service of the empire.

The firm belief that the British Empire was Divinely favored was another example of the infiltration of religion into imperial mindsets. The Church and the empire became allies in the expansion of British ideas and religious values around the globe. A current in Victorian thought proposed that God had ordered the various peoples of the world according to a precise hierarchy. The British, not surprisingly, considered themselves especially favored given their vast imperial dominions. With this expanse of territory came a grave responsibility however. The growth of the empire was to be used for the furtherance of the Gospel as much as for any increase of worldly power. Underlying these beliefs were some engrained racial prejudices. The British tended to view themselves, their religion, and their institutions as infinitely superior to those of whom they colonized. It is even worth considering the notion that Christianity, at least as it existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, was an inherently imperial religion. The missionaries of the Victorian Era would have had little patience with 20<sup>th</sup> century pantheism or religious pluralism. They taught that Jesus Christ was the only route to salvation for a sinful mankind, and all other creeds and devotions were idolatrous.

Linda Colley<sup>15</sup> and David Newsome<sup>16</sup> build on the conception of a Divinely ordained empire in their respective works. Colley, in discussing the formation and consolidation of Great Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries looks at the ways in which Britons defined themselves. She argues that the formative experience for Great Britain was warfare, and especially the struggle against Catholic France. Protestant Britain defined itself in opposition to France and in

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<sup>15</sup> Colley, Linda. Britons. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)

<sup>16</sup> Newsome, David. The Victorian World Picture. (London: John Murray, 1997) Newsome makes some similar arguments to Colley, and discusses how Christians during the Victorian Era wished to use the growth of the empire as a springboard for increased missions activity.

addition nurtured a belief as the empire grew that they were a specially favored “chosen” people. The feeling that they were endowed by God to spread the “true” form of Christianity around the world engendered a militant form of evangelical Protestantism in Britain that spread to the imperial dominions.

Recent research done by Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann<sup>17</sup> explores connections between religion and nationalism during the height of British imperialism. The growth of evangelical movements in British Protestantism is discussed, as well as their influence on politics and public policy. Van der Veer also specifically examines the role of Christianity in India, and how aggressive missionary activity there changed the face of the Raj prior to the Indian Mutiny. Additionally he touches on the British belief that their Protestant religion was responsible for the economic success of the empire because it promoted industry and thrift, a theory made famous by German sociologist Max Weber as the “Protestant Work Ethic”.

Brian Stanley looks at some of the same concepts as Colley and Van der Veer in his study of Protestant missions and British imperialism.<sup>18</sup> His basic assumption is that missionaries served as central agents of imperialism, spreading not only Christianity but the British way of life wherever they went. Thus the influx of Western ideas and modern technology became inevitably associated with the spread of Christianity. The law and order guaranteed by the presence of the British government in a particular country made the missionary’s job much easier. Stanley mentions the British conception of their special status as a “God-fearing and righteous nation”. The author also introduces the theory that Christianity is an inherently “imperial” religion in that, at least during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British Protestants considered theirs

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<sup>17</sup> Nation and Religion. Ed. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

<sup>18</sup> Stanley, Brian. The Bible and the Flag. (Leicester: Apollos. 1990)

the only “true” faith and the sole means of salvation for the peoples of the world. The Christian character of the British Empire is also the topic of a series of essays edited by Robin Weeks.<sup>19</sup>

There are several texts finally which deal directly with Christianity and the Raj. Susan Thorne looks specifically at the work of Congregationalists in India during the 1800s.<sup>20</sup> Arthur Mayhew looks more closely at how Christianity influenced policy making in India.<sup>21</sup> Peter van der Veer studies Anglo-Indian relationships as pertains to Christianity.<sup>22</sup> And finally, Stephen Neill gives an overall and comprehensive history of the Church in India through the inception of the Mutiny.<sup>23</sup>

The primary source materials for this project include not only Mutiny accounts from soldiers, but press reports, and the observations of well-known Victorian historians. They are written at various time periods, some right after the Mutiny, and some nearly a half century later. But all of them allow a closer study of how the relationship between Church and empire was established, and how individuals struggled with the ethical dilemmas posed by the Mutiny.

The account of Sergeant William Forbes-Mitchell is an insightful look back at the Mutiny after some 40 years had passed.<sup>24</sup> Writing at the close of the century, Forbes-Mitchell reflected on his participation in the suppression of the Mutiny. A Scotsman, and member of the crack 93<sup>rd</sup> Highlander regiment under Sir Colin Campbell, Forbes-Mitchell saw plenty of hard campaigning and participated in the capture of Lucknow, a key turning point in the Mutiny. Forbes-Mitchell gave valuable remembrances of the army’s reaction to Cawnpore, which had been the site of a

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<sup>19</sup> British Imperialism: Gold, God, and Glory. Ed. Robin Weeks. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969) Among the concepts mentioned, there is a discussion of how racism, social Darwinism, and a “puritanical” strain of Protestantism could create the mold for a belligerent strains of British imperialism.

<sup>20</sup> Thorne, Susan. Congregational missions and the making of an imperial culture in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1999)

<sup>21</sup> Mayhew, Arthur. Christianity and the Government of India. (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1929)

<sup>22</sup> Van der Veer, Peter. Imperial Encounters. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

<sup>23</sup> Neill, Stephen. A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1858. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985)

<sup>24</sup> Forbes-Mitchell, William. Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny. (London: Macmillan and Co, 1894)

gruesome massacre of British civilians by the rebel forces. He was at times confused by British conduct and although he often put the blame on the rebels, he also lamented the brutal way in which the British conducted the war. He suffered from few illusions about the nobility or grandeur of battle, and while not fully critical of his Mutiny experience, he did not overly glamorize the war either.

A fellow Scotsman, W. Gordon-Alexander provided an account with a different tone, while also writing at the end of the century.<sup>25</sup> He too served with the 93<sup>rd</sup>, but was a Lieutenant Colonel. Gordon-Alexander, like Forbes-Mitchell, was interested in the reactions of his men at the site of the Cawnpore Massacres. In addition, he recorded some of the shocking cruelty displayed by various British officers during the campaigns following Cawnpore as they sought to “avenge” the massacres. But in contrast to Forbes-Mitchell, he rarely voiced an opinion. If he had moral misgivings about the war he was involved in, they were kept private.

Colonel George Bouchier was not in the 93<sup>rd</sup>, but served alongside of it in the Bengal Horse Artillery.<sup>26</sup> Unlike many of the other sources, Bouchier’s account was written directly after his experiences, and before the Mutiny had even been fully suppressed. Thus we get a view of the Mutiny’s immediate impact on the soldier. His writing style was suffused with religious overtones, and his descriptions of Havelock were an excellent example of the “soldier-saint” literature that became popular in the 1850s as part of the growth of Christian militarism.

Frederick Roberts left two different accounts of his tenure in India. He spent the entirety of his military career in the subcontinent, rising from Lieutenant during the Mutiny<sup>27</sup> to the eventual position of Field Marshal by the time of his retirement. At the end of his lengthy career

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon-Alexander. Recollections of a Highland Subaltern. (London: Edward Arnold, 1898)

<sup>26</sup> Bouchier, George. Eight Months’ Campaign against the Bengal Sepoy Army. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co, 1858)

<sup>27</sup> In which he won the coveted Victoria Cross for outstanding bravery in combat.

he compiled a massive memoir covering his whole period of service to the Raj.<sup>28</sup> The account was quite formal in tone, and not very insightful in its coverage of the Mutiny, tending to read more like a government history than an individual. The author exhibited a more personal side in the letters he wrote during the Mutiny.<sup>29</sup> A sensitive individual, and keen observer of the conflict around him, Roberts was profoundly affected and disturbed by the violent scenes he witnessed. Like Forbes-Mitchell, he was often torn between a hunger for combat and feelings of pity for those rebels who were being indiscriminately slaughtered on flimsy evidence.

Historian Wayne Broehl has collected accounts from several different British lieutenants.<sup>30</sup> The only modifications have been in organizing the correspondences according to appropriate chronology and subject heading. The most interesting accounts in this collection are from Vivian Majendie. Like Roberts and Forbes-Mitchell, Majendie experienced some serious ethical misgivings concerning British treatment of the rebels.

Two other intriguing accounts come from Mowbray Thompson and Robert Stewart Fullerton. Thompson, a British captain, was one of only four individuals to survive the infamous Cawnpore Massacres and was thus able to render the closest thing available to an eyewitness account of what actually took place.<sup>31</sup> Robert Stewart Fullerton served as an American missionary in India during the time of the Mutiny.<sup>32</sup> His memoir revealed some of the sufferings undergone by European and native Christians during the fighting. Fullerton also gave a good insight into how some Christians saw the Mutiny as a religious conflict.

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<sup>28</sup> Roberts, Frederick. Forty-One Years in India. (New York: Longman, Green, and Co, 1901)

<sup>29</sup> Roberts, Frederick. Letters written during the Indian Mutiny. (London: Macmillan, 1924)

<sup>30</sup> Broehl, Wayne G. Crisis of the Raj. (Hanover (NH): University Press of New England, 1986)

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, Mowbray. The Story of Cawnpore. (Brighton, Donovan, 1859)

<sup>32</sup> Memoir of Robert Stewart Fullerton, American Presbyterian missionary in North India, 1859-1865, ed. JJ Lucas. (Allhabad: The Christian Literary Society UP Branch, 1928)

Sir John Kaye<sup>33</sup> was an eminent historian of the Victorian Era who wrote a multi-volume history of the Mutiny. His account could be considered one of the foremost full-scale histories of the Mutiny to emerge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is very much a “period” piece and is important in reflecting Victorian views of the Mutiny a few decades later. Kaye’s style was highly dramatic in its tone, and also included many Christian references. He often defined the Mutiny in terms of a struggle between religions. While he denounced various rebel atrocities in sweeping and melodramatic terms, he did try to maintain a balanced perspective and could be quite critical of what he saw as excessive British measures of retribution.

TRE Holmes was another noted historian of the Victorian age.<sup>34</sup> He continued in the vein of earlier chroniclers such as Kaye with heroic descriptions of such by-now legendary figures as Henry Havelock and John Lawrence. Like Bouchier and Kaye, his accounts were filled with Christian imagery. But Holmes, like some of the soldiers’ accounts could be ambiguous in its tone. He raised some troubling moral questions, brought on by British treatment of captured rebels, yet at the same time, he often defended British actions.

William Howard Russell was among the best-known reporters of the 1850s. He had first come to prominence as a pioneering “war correspondent” during the Crimean War. He went to India to report on the progress of the Mutiny for the Times, and kept a diary of his sojourn there.<sup>35</sup> Being a civilian, and thus having no connections with the military or the government in India, Russell provided an interesting account as a “neutral observer”. Although he was obviously biased towards the British, Russell was more critical of the war than any other source. He bitterly criticized the barbaric manner in which the British dealt with their rebel foes, and

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<sup>33</sup> Kaye, Sir John. Kaye’s and Malleson’s History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-8. (London: Longman, Green, and Co, 1870)

<sup>34</sup> Holmes, TRE. A History of the Indian Mutiny. (London: WH Allen, and Co, 1888)

<sup>35</sup> Russell, WH. My Diary in India. (London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge. 1860)

even at times questioned the legitimacy of the British presence in India. He also raised many doubts about the relationship between religion and the empire.

The London Times has long been among the foremost daily papers in Great Britain. Their coverage of the Mutiny was extensive, and included the reporting of on-location journalists such as WH Russell. The Times tended to be a very conservative paper, and it staunchly supported most British actions, including the fearsome punitive measures taken against captured mutineers. The paper's editorials were also informative as a good gauge of public opinion.

The thesis contains three main segments. Chapters Two and Three discuss the origins of Britain's Indian Empire and the course of the Indian Mutiny, along with its immediate aftermath. Chapter Four examines the ties between Christianity and empire in the primary source literature. Having established the close links between Christianity and empire, chapter Five looks at the issue of the Cawnpore Massacres, and the problems that ensue when a supposedly Christian army engages in a brutal form of imperial warfare. The conclusion will briefly reexamine the aftermath of the Mutiny and its implications for Christianity in India, before returning to some main themes of the paper. Was Christianity essential to justifying the suppression of the Mutiny? Was the idea of a "Christian soldier" inherently problematic? And how did the Mutiny and its repercussions change the way in which Britain viewed its empire in terms of Christianity?

## **II. The Establishment of the Raj and the coming of the Mutiny**

Prior to the influx of European traders, settlers, and adventurers, India was under the dominion of the Mughals, Muslim emperors who had established a thriving culture in the Indian subcontinent. During their reign, such architectural splendors as the Red Fort in Delhi and the Taj Mahal of Agra were constructed. Despite the Islamic faith of the ruling classes, the Hindu religion and culture continued to thrive.<sup>1</sup>

India received its first contacts with the West via the Portuguese, who commenced trading in that region in the early 1500s.<sup>2</sup> Sensing the possible commercial profits to be gained, Queen Elizabeth I of England chartered the English East India Company on December 31, 1600. The English company gradually established a string of trading posts along the Indian coast at Madras (1639), Bombay (1664), and Calcutta (1696). The French entered the Indian trade in the 1680s, and soon became England's principal competitor in the Indian market.<sup>3</sup>

In 1717, the Company was granted extensive commercial rights in Bengal, the richest and most populous region of India.<sup>4</sup> This greatly increased profits, and they defended their increasing wealth in a series of wars throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48) saw conflict erupt between the British and French in India and elsewhere. It also demonstrated the relative superiority and effectiveness of small numbers of disciplined European troops in Indian warfare. During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763)

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<sup>1</sup> Metcalf, Thomas R. A Concise History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 26-7.

<sup>2</sup> James, Lawrence. Raj (London: Little, Brown and Co, 1997) 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> David, Saul. The Indian Mutiny. (London: Viking, 2002) 2.



British and French forces clashed again.<sup>5</sup> The British were slowly gaining the upper hand in India, however, and they won a landmark victory at the Battle of Plassey on June 23, 1757. The power of the Mughal emperors had been in decline for some time, and this reality was exposed at Plassey when a British force under Colonel Robert Clive routed the much larger army of the rebellious Bengal nawab (governor) Siraj.<sup>6</sup> At the Battle of Buxar in 1764, the British confirmed their dominance of the Bengal region.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile the French, riddled by debts, and having suffered serious reverses in other colonial wars, were forced to leave India shortly after the Seven Years' War.<sup>8</sup> From now on Britain would be the unchallenged European power in the Indian subcontinent. The Raj was firmly established.

In 1773, the British government stepped in to formalize its ties with India. The Regulating Act was passed, which made the East India Company directly responsible to London for the running of Indian affairs.<sup>9</sup> Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of India, attempted to regularize and codify law in India with a mixture of indigenous customs and British legal concepts. This creation of a "fixed law" was an early example of the British imposing upon India a European cultural pattern, a practice that would become very problematic in the future.<sup>10</sup> Central to the British mindset at this point was a fervent desire to revamp the governing structures of India, which they believed had long languished under a tradition of "Oriental despotism".<sup>11</sup>

The relative lack of available European women in India in the late 1700s and early 1800s meant that many Britons went "native" and took up with Indian mistresses. Although

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<sup>5</sup> Metcalf, *Concise History* 48-9.

<sup>6</sup> De Schweinitz, Karl. *The Rise and Fall of British India*. (London: Methuen, 1983) 88.

<sup>7</sup> Metcalf, *Concise History* 51-2.

<sup>8</sup> The French did maintain a small enclave at Pondicherry.

<sup>9</sup> Hibbert, Christopher. *The Great Mutiny* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978) 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 57-8.

<sup>11</sup> Metcalf, Thomas. *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994) 6.

these practices were deplored by church officials and many others back in England. who saw native women as “lascivious” and “depraved”, there were actually some benefits to having an Indian wife or mistress. It allowed British officers to stay more in touch with the everyday problems and concerns of their troops. They also became more attuned to Indian languages and customs.<sup>12</sup> By the mid 1800s however, as more and more European women came to India, liaisons with native females became less acceptable.

In fact, the arrival of increasing numbers of British women accelerated divisions between Britons and Indians and hastened the erection of cultural barriers. British men began to refrain from fraternization with natives outside of their official duties, and kept to themselves in their bungalows with their English wives.<sup>13</sup> Most Indian cities had special “European” quarters that were easily distinguished from the dirty, crowded and noisy “native” areas. Public architecture increasingly took on a very European appearance. Isolated Britons lived off imported English luxuries, took to the hills in the summer to escape the heat and hunt, and in general tried to recreate British social and cultural life in India.<sup>14</sup>

Domestic life was not the only sphere of activity to be affected by the growing trend of the British to “Europeanize” their relations with India. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British liberal thought began to infiltrate into the East India Company’s policies. Previously the so-called “Orientalists” had held sway. They had been enthusiasts of Indian culture, such as the famous late 18<sup>th</sup> century linguist, William Jones.<sup>15</sup> As the 1800s progressed however, the new liberals, known as “Anglicists”, were optimistic about their ability to improve Indian society, following the Western model.

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<sup>12</sup> James, 215.

<sup>13</sup> Metcalf, Concise History, 66.

<sup>14</sup> James 166.

<sup>15</sup> Cavaliero, 83. Jones helped to show that Sanskrit was related to ancient Greek, and established the theory that there was a large “Indo-European” family of languages that had common origins.

One leading liberal was James Mill, the father of the eminent philosopher and writer, John Stuart Mill. James Mill was an enthusiastic disciple of Jeremy Bentham and he sought to reform Indian society based on utilitarian principles. India's progress, he felt, was hampered by barbarous customs, cunning priests, and the caste system. In his voluminous History of British India, Mill showed little respect for the native traditions. Hinduism, in his opinion was "built upon the most enormous and tormenting superstition that ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind".<sup>16</sup> Only by Westernizing could India hope to improve.<sup>17</sup> The Anglicists were supported by Christian missionaries, who also expressed the importance of creating a new and modern India in the British image.

The term of Lord William Bentinck as governor-general (1828-35) marked the commencement of this new reform program. One of his first acts was to abolish the practice of "sati" or "widow burning" in 1829. This involved a woman throwing herself onto the funeral pyre of her dead husband as a token of her love. The British saw it as a classic example of a "depraved" Indian custom. Bentinck also crusaded against female infanticide and suppressed the murderous Thuggee cult.<sup>18</sup> Although these practices seemed quite horrific by Western standards, many Indians resented Bentinck's interference. Indian law was systematically reshaped in the British legal tradition, as was the educational system. Thomas Babington Macaulay was a key figure in the process of school reforms. His Minute on Indian Education, published in 1835, recommended that all Company sponsored schools should switch to instruction solely in English. Macaulay had scant respect for India's intellectual heritage, claiming: "a single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Cavaliero, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Mayhew, Arthur. Christianity and the Government of India. (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1929) 128-31. The "thugs" were devotees of the bloodthirsty Hindu goddess Kali, and would befriend travelers before strangling them.

literature of India".<sup>19</sup> After 1835, English became the principal language of instruction in schools and universities, and texts such as Shakespeare and the Bible were staples for Indian pupils.

As the 1800s progressed, the influence of Protestant Christian missionary activity increased. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Company had been reluctant to formally support missionary activity. They were primarily concerned with making a financial profit, and anything that might hinder this, such as attempts to convert the natives, was discouraged.<sup>20</sup> Despite the lack of Company support, there were individuals who spread the Gospel. One of the most notable was William Carey, a Baptist. He was a self-trained linguist who, from his arrival in Calcutta in 1793, went on to translate the entire Bible into seven Indian languages. Carey labored indefatigably on behalf of the faith, and won many converts, while harboring an intense disgust for what he termed the "idolatrous heathenism" of the Hindu religion. Carey also despised the caste system, and insisted that all of his converts renounce former caste affiliations.<sup>21</sup> Carey's attitudes show how Indians could construe Christian missionaries as a threat to their traditional culture. To many natives the attack on the caste system was a dangerous assault on one of the bedrocks of Indian society. While missions activity slowly expanded, British Christians constantly pressured the company to lend them financial support.

A major watershed for the Christians in India came in 1813 when the East India Company finally decided to offer official support to the proselytizing efforts. Missionaries would now be officially licensed and supported by the company.<sup>22</sup> From this point on,

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<sup>19</sup> Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters* 6.

<sup>20</sup> Neill, Stephen. *A History of Christianity in India*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 149.

<sup>21</sup> Cavliero, 85-6.

<sup>22</sup> Mayhew, 101.

Protestant missionary activity in India took on a new vigor. Education was often church sponsored, and missionaries became more aggressive and widespread.<sup>23</sup> There were even cases of certain British officers preaching the Gospel to their native troops.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to their proselytizing, the British steadfastly attempted to “improve” India with the benefits of modern technology and the industrial age. Innovations such as railways and telegraphs had started to appear by the 1850s, but many Indians regarded these developments as suspicious Western intrusions, rather than the harbingers of progress and prosperity that the British felt them to be. All things Western were usually connected with the advent of Christianity in the Indian mind, and the grave fear of many Hindus and Muslims alike remained that the British would one day make mass conversion to the Christian faith a part of their “civilizing” agenda.<sup>25</sup> These tensions would continue to fester in India and would finally explode over in the Indian Mutiny. Thomas Metcalf succinctly sums up the heart of the problem with the British desire for “progress”: “Indians, in other words, were not like Englishmen, and it was fatal to treat them as though they were”.<sup>26</sup>

While they struggled with questions of how to govern their Indian territory, the British continued to appropriate more and more of the Indian subcontinent. After having subdued Bengal in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Company had to guard against periodic rebellion. In the early 1780s Haidar Ali Khan, led a revolt, as did Tipu Sultan in the late 1790s. Both of these abortive insurrections were supported by the French and were eventually put down after some fierce fighting.<sup>27</sup> A large portion of the Indian subcontinent

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<sup>23</sup> Van der Veer, Nation and Religion 22.

<sup>24</sup> David, 72.

<sup>25</sup> James, 174-5.

<sup>26</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies 45.

<sup>27</sup> Cavaliero, 60-3.

had been subdued by 1818.<sup>28</sup> The state of Sind, in the northwest was conquered between 1839 and 1842, and there followed a disastrous and unsuccessful invasion of Afghanistan, as the British tried to establish a “cordon sanitaire” between the Raj and the Russian Empire to the north. Two wars with the Sikhs were more successful and resulted in the annexation of the Punjab region by 1849. The Oudh region was annexed in 1856, just prior to the outbreak of the Mutiny.<sup>29</sup> By 1857, the British were ostensibly the masters of India, ruling through the auspices of the Company which had made a fortune for both itself and the nation.

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<sup>28</sup> David, 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Metcalf, Concise History 89,94-5.

### **III. The Indian Mutiny**

The Indian Mutiny of 1857-9 was a watershed event in the history of the Raj as well as the general history of the British Empire. Britain's most valuable imperial possession was nearly lost, and it was only after extreme exertions and some of the most vicious colonial fighting the British Army would ever face that India would again be secured. The roots of the uprising are myriad and it would be almost impossible to give a thorough discussion of all of the possible factors that influenced the outbreak of the Mutiny. But the key provocation involved British attempts to re-pattern Indian culture and institutions after their own. The Anglicists' push for Westernization was supported by the missionaries and so Indians connected the British desire to modernize India with efforts to spread Christianity. By the start of 1857, an atmosphere of tension prevailed, and a chain of events would lead to revolt by May.

The Indian Army had been traditionally composed almost exclusively from the ranks of high-caste Rajputs and Brahmins. The army offered recruits the chance to don a splendid uniform and gave them a sense of collective pride in participating in Britain's imperial conquests. Yet at the same time, the seeds of dissatisfaction had long festered. The social exclusiveness of the high-caste soldiers made them rigidly adherent to Hindu principles and rituals, and paranoid that the British would attempt to infringe upon their religion or culture. Promotion was strictly according to seniority, rather than merit, and thus it was not unusual for men to serve well into their seventies, waiting in hopes of advancement.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Indian troops had to wear cumbersome European-style uniforms, were poorly housed, and had low pay. Perhaps most significantly, British

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<sup>30</sup> Cavaliero, Roderick. Strangers in the Land. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002) 125.

prejudices ensured that even the most senior Indian officer would be subordinate to any junior British officers. As Doug Peers observes, “Native officers...were never given any real responsibility and were looked upon with a mixture of suspicion and loathing by their European officers”.<sup>31</sup> By not allowing native soldiers to advance equally through the ranks alongside whites, the British created a great deal of frustration and resentment among the sepoys.<sup>32</sup>

There had actually been some prior instances of unrest in the Raj. In 1806 a group of sepoys revolted at Vellore and killed several officers after being ordered to shave their beards and remove their caste markings. No support had materialized however, and the uprising had been quickly suppressed. Another insurrection, at Barrackpore in 1824, had also come to naught.<sup>33</sup> But these episodes showed that Indians were not simply passive colonial subjects, but were willing to resist and even fight, especially if they felt their faith was being threatened. Given the background of Westernization and Indian fears of Christian conversion, it is not surprising that the incident to spark revolt would hinge around a religious issue.

Problems started at the Dum-Dum Arsenal in Calcutta in January of 1857. There were widespread rumors that the cartridges for the new Enfield rifles were to be greased with a mixture that contained pig and cow fat. The cow, of course, was sacred to Hindus, while the Islamic religion forbade the consumption of pork. Religious sensibilities were thus enflamed, and once again the old fears of a forced conversion to Christianity

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<sup>31</sup> Peers, Douglas. Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India 1819-1835. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995) 85.

<sup>32</sup> David, 28-31. Sepoy is a Persian word that came to be applied to any Indian soldier.

<sup>33</sup> De Schweinitz, 134.



resurfaced.<sup>34</sup> The air was full of prophecies and predictions, and wandering holy men of both faiths created an aura of fear and tension. A prophecy circulating amongst the natives said that India would throw off the shackles of the Raj a century after the British had first gained ascendancy at the Battle of Plassey in 1757.<sup>35</sup> In addition, Britain had followed up their poor performance in Afghanistan with a dismal showing in the Crimean War, which ended in 1856.

On Sunday, March 29, 1857 a lone individual, Mangal Pande, dazed and angry while under narcotic influence, tried to initiate a revolt on the Barrackpur parade ground outside of Calcutta. He fired at some officers, and the British responded by hastily disbanding the 19<sup>th</sup> Bengal Native Infantry. Another regiment was disarmed in similar circumstances at Lucknow at the first of May.<sup>36</sup> The formal revolt commenced at Meerut on May 10, 1857, after 85 sepoys who had refused to use the new rifle cartridges were publicly and systematically stripped of their ranks. This punishment, rather than being a deterrent actually served to inflame the hatred of the would be mutineers. On the night of the tenth, the 85 were rescued from their prison cells by a rampaging mob that included numerous sepoys. The group then tore through the European quarter of Meerut, looting and destroying property, and even worse, murdering any Europeans they could get their hands on. The Indian Mutiny had begun.<sup>37</sup> At this particular moment, the British were caught in a rather weak position. In May of 1857 there were only about 37,000 British troops on hand

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<sup>34</sup> Hibbert, 63-6.

<sup>35</sup> Hibbert, 229.

<sup>36</sup> James 238.

<sup>37</sup> David, 82-89.

in a country whose population was nearly 150 million. The numerical odds were definitely not in Britain's favor.<sup>38</sup>

Immediately following the disturbances at Meerut, many mutineers fled towards Delhi, where they rallied under the aged Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah.<sup>39</sup> News of the revolt spread like wildfire, and in many instances the situation was aggravated when British officers, either refusing to believe the rumors of the revolt or too trusting of their own regiment's loyalty, declined to disarm the native troops in their command. Thus in some cases, veritable whole regiments transferred over to the rebel side with arms and provisions intact. Rebellion soon spread to the province of Oudh. But while much of north-central India was aflame with turmoil, large swathes of the country remained relatively unaffected, including the central, southern, and Punjab areas. The loyalty of the Punjab Sikhs<sup>40</sup> was crucial for British success, and helped, especially early on, to augment the lack of European manpower.<sup>41</sup>

The revolt took on a different character in different regions. In the recently annexed Oudh region, it essentially became a popular rebellion where hatred towards the British and their Christian faith united rebels across barriers of caste and religion. In the northwest, the upper classes and the landowners tended to remain loyal to the British, figuring it to be in their own economic interests. Those who revolted were more likely to be the economically disadvantaged and the desperate. In general, the high-ranking princes and well-educated Indians, who had been indoctrinated with some Western ideals, also remained true to the Raj. Low-caste men, criminals, dissatisfied sepoys, and impoverished landowners or petty

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<sup>38</sup> Hibbert, 63.

<sup>39</sup> David, 104.

<sup>40</sup> The Sikhs were a monotheistic sect that had broken off from the Hindus in the 1400s.

<sup>41</sup> Metcalf, Concise History 101.

nobility were more likely to throw their lot in with the rebels, having felt cheated by the British. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain from a sudden political upheaval.<sup>42</sup>

Despite their numerical advantages, the rebel cause was beset with difficulties from the outset. On the whole they suffered from poor leadership. There were some exceptions to this, most notably the brilliant leadership of Tantia Topi, but suddenly Indians who had been little higher than sergeants were attempting to lead whole armies against seasoned British commanders. The rebels' tactical problems were compounded by their lack of cooperation and an overall strategic vision. Competing leaders, including Bahadur Shah, Nana Sahib, and the Rani of Jhansi vied for troops and influence rather than working together. Many individuals were simply out for themselves, and had little use or care for the needs or concerns of another region. In some instances, caste barriers proved an insurmountable obstacle to military unity, as did the constant bickering between Muslims and Hindus. And perhaps most crucially, there was not enough of a common agenda to unite the various rebel groups. Religious fervor rallied the mutineers for a time, but gradually the frenzy died down, especially when the British began to make it known that those rebels who voluntarily surrendered would receive preferential treatment. Indian nationalism as such didn't really exist at the time. Rebels identified themselves through regional and religious affiliations, and their opposition to the British government. But they had difficulty in coming up with a common program for who would be in power once the revolt ended. Christopher Hibbert notes that "The Mutiny in fact, was not so much a national revolt as the culmination of a period of unrest, 'a last passionate protest against the relentless penetration of the west'".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Metcalf, Concise History 101-2.

<sup>43</sup> Hibbert 392-3.

Regardless of their difficulties in forming a unified front, the rebels still presented a formidable obstacle to the British armies determined to restore the Raj. They had the key city of Delhi in their possession and had besieged British encampments at Cawnpore and Lucknow. The brutal massacre of British civilians at Cawnpore especially horrified the general public, and became a justification for sweeping and unflinching punitive measures.

When the Mutiny broke out in May 1857, the garrison at Cawnpore had ostensibly appeared to be among the more secure in northern India. The commander, General Sir Hugh Wheeler, was a responsible and capable man who was as popular amongst the natives (whose language he spoke fluently) as his own men.<sup>44</sup> In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, the local Indian prince, Nana Sahib, was a known anglophile and had displayed admiration and respect for the British. He subscribed to English newspapers, collected European artwork, and often feted British guests at lavish banquets.<sup>45</sup> Yet underneath this seemingly placid surface was a very dangerous and discontented man who had long borne the Imperial authorities a grudge for having failed to continue a pension originally dispensed to his father. An inveterate opportunist, he saw the outbreak of the Mutiny as a chance to carve out a small kingdom for himself. Thus, to the shock of the relatively complacent British outpost at Cawnpore, he notified them on June 6, 1857 that their entrenchment would shortly be under attack by rebel forces.<sup>46</sup>

General Wheeler made a serious tactical miscalculation in deciding to take up positions nearer to the Indian lines rather than more defensible quarters on the riverside.<sup>47</sup>

Forced together in a cramped area, burdened with numerous noncombatants such as women,

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<sup>44</sup> Hibbert, 168.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 173-4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 174-77.

<sup>47</sup> Mukherjee, Rudrangshu. "Satan let loose upon Earth: the Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857" Past and Present 128 (1990) 97.

children, and invalids, and facing a rebel force almost ten times their number, Wheeler's little unit would undergo tremendous suffering and deprivation during the siege of several weeks. After some intense fighting, during which time the rebels took heavy losses, Wheeler's forces finally began to crack. Casualties were high, and supplies of food, water, and medicine were dwindling. After some debate, the British garrison decided to accept Nana Sahib's terms for their surrender, coupled with a guarantee of safe passage for British soldiers and their families down the Ganges River to Allahabad.

The surrender was completed on June 26, 1857 and preparations were made for the trip downriver.<sup>48</sup> The next morning the boats were loaded up, but as soon as they pulled off shore, scores of concealed rebels begin firing upon them. Within minutes hundreds of men, women, and children had been slaughtered. Indian cavalymen rode along the river's shallows, finishing off the wounded. Mowbray Thompson was a British captain, and one of only four individuals to survive the bloodbath he described as "one of the most brutal massacres that the history of the human race has recorded, aggravated as it was by the most reckless cruelty".<sup>49</sup> The horrors were not at an end however. Some 125 women and children were subsequently picked up by the rebels and made captives. These were crammed into a small building and held for some time in deplorable conditions. But after a series of reverses in the field, and with the knowledge that British troops under Henry Havelock were rapidly advancing towards Cawnpore, Nana Sahib panicked and in a final orgy of cruelty ordered the execution of the remaining hostages. His own soldiers recoiled from such a cold-blooded order but Nana was unfazed, and ordered a group of Muslim butchers to carry out his wishes.

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<sup>48</sup> Thompson, 151-159.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 165-9.

Over 100 women and children were put to the sword. Most of the bodies were then stuffed into an abandoned well, soon to become infamous as the “Well of Cawnpore”.<sup>50</sup>

On July 15, Sir Henry Havelock occupied Cawnpore after the massacres, and then tried to break through to Lucknow, eventually having to fall back however, for lack of manpower. With the help of Colonel James Outram he finally broke through to the city on September 26, 1857, but having taken heavy losses, his force was too weak to fight its way out, and thus in turn became trapped in the Residency building where the other Britons were entrenched. Meanwhile, the first big British victory of the Mutiny had come on September 16, 1857, when after a protracted siege the city of Delhi was finally retaken. This drastically reduced rebel morale and fragmented one of their primary armies.<sup>51</sup> Sir Colin Campbell stormed into Lucknow in November of 1857 to rescue the trapped civilians, whom he then escorted to safety. Campbell avoided disaster when he wisely chose to retreat from Lucknow rather than risk a potentially dangerous engagement with his small, battle-weary force. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, he defeated Tantia Topi and the formidable Gwalior Contingent at Cawnpore. Finally on February 28, 1858, with a sizably larger force, Campbell redirected his attentions to Lucknow and after an intense struggle, captured the city on March 15. The rebels never fully recovered from the losses at Delhi and Lucknow, although they continued to fight for quite some time in isolated groups. The rest of 1858 and early 1859 consisted largely of chasing rebel forces and finishing off any remaining regional resistance.<sup>52</sup>

Britain’s immediate response to the Mutiny was the Government of India Act, passed on August 2, 1858. It formally liquidated the East India Company and passed all authority over India directly to the British government. A whole series of offices were created,

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<sup>50</sup> Hibbert, 206-7.

<sup>51</sup> Cavaliero, 143.

<sup>52</sup> James 261-2.

designed to facilitate a more efficient governance of the Raj.<sup>53</sup> The British gave formal support to the various princely rulers, who essentially had autonomous control over their individual regions while under the overall aegis of the Raj. These conservative rulers owed their positions and power directly to the British and were correspondingly loyal, helping to serve as a bulwark against future popular unrest.

In response to the religious tensions that had contributed to the outbreak of revolt, Queen Victoria issued a proclamation in 1858. It guaranteed that the British government would be tolerant of all religions, and would never support attempts to forcibly Christianize the population. Missionaries would continue to come to India, but would find it more difficult to receive government grants.<sup>54</sup> The army was drastically restructured. Given their excellent devotion to the Raj during the Mutiny, Punjabi Sikhs and Pathans became the soldiers of choice for the Indian army, eventually making up over half of its numbers. Other reforms included new native-style uniforms and better pay. Units would now be ethnically mixed to permit possible collusion amongst soldiers. The proportion of British to Indian troops was set at a constant ratio of roughly 1 to 2 or 3.<sup>55</sup>

These reforms and many others would help Britain to maintain their grip on India until 1947, but the British would never quite shake the specter of terror and chaos that had been unleashed during the turbulent years of the Indian Mutiny. In addition, the once cozy relationship between the Church and the Empire was forever changed. The strong ties that had been forged between Christianity and empire in India were weakened as a result of the Mutiny. The British began to focus more on maintaining a stable government in India, and

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<sup>53</sup> Cavaliero, 152.

<sup>54</sup> Metcalf, The Aftermath of Revolt 94.

<sup>55</sup> David, 399.

anything that might threaten that, including Christian missionary activity was to be closely watched.

The focus now shifts to the primary sources to see how the connection between Christianity and the British Empire was formed in the first place. The source materials allow us to see exactly how the Mutiny came to be viewed on both the British and the rebel side as a war with religious dimensions.



#### **IV. The Christian face of imperialism**

A lasting impression gained from accounts and memoirs of the Mutiny was of the close relationship forged between Christianity and the empire. As mentioned in the introduction, the development of “muscular Christianity”, along with Christian militarism and the belief in a Divinely favored Empire helped to fuel the Christian-imperial alliance in mid-Victorian society. With the influence of Christian militarism, the role of being a soldier in the British Army had come to take on a religious dimension by the 1850s, and the Christian faith became central to understanding the mindset of the Victorian soldier and his motivations for fighting. The Victorian conception that the Church and the empire had an intertwined destiny helped to explain the stance of those British Christians who considered the Indian Mutiny to be “in reality a challenge to Christianity itself”.<sup>1</sup> The rebels were revolting against the power systems of the Raj, and by the 1850s Christianity was potently connected with the idea of British imperialism.

It is not surprising then, that memoirs and accounts of the Mutiny should be infused with Christian themes, including the propagation of the heroic “soldier-saint” prototype. Although the Mutiny would bring an end to formal British endorsement of missionary efforts in India, the ties between empire and faith in the literature of soldiers and Victorian historians remained strong well into the 1880s and 1890s. This persistence underlay the importance of Christianity in justifying the defense of the Raj.

Popular literature was instrumental in solidifying the link between the Church and the armed forces. The period of the 1850s saw the explosion of a series of books and narratives concerning the lives of prominent “soldier-saints” who had risen to fame in the Crimean War and the Indian

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, 49.

Mutiny. One of the most famous of the “soldier-saints”, and undoubtedly the most prominent figure to emerge in historical accounts and memoirs following the Mutiny was Brigadier-General Henry Havelock. Havelock had gained notoriety leading the first relief effort to Lucknow, where he had been trapped until a relief effort led by Sir Colin Campbell in November of 1857 had rescued his force. Although not an especially gifted strategist, his personal charisma and heroic death served to make him a legend in the eyes of the British public. Havelock’s life took on epic proportions when chronicled in various sources and even in sermons. He became an embodiment of everything that the muscular Christians had exalted, sacrificing his life to save the innocent women and children that had been trapped in the city. His military fame was matched only by the reports of his great piety. Through the literature<sup>2</sup> that eulogized him, Havelock became, in effect, a modern day martyr.

A devout Baptist, Havelock had never hesitated to witness to his men. In fact his troops were dubbed “Havelock’s saints” for their allegedly strict adherence to Christian principles of purity and temperance. According to John MacKenzie, Havelock played a special role in the “heroic myths of empire”. The man became a symbol of the British determination to crush the revolt, and their certainty in the righteousness of the cause: “He [Havelock] represented a set of absolutes, a racial and moral fervor which became increasingly fashionable with the Mutiny itself”.<sup>3</sup> Accounts depicted him as a stern and able warrior, and yet also a benevolent father figure, leading his forces militarily and spiritually. The image captured the public imagination, and Havelock became the greatest national hero to emerge from the Mutiny. His statue was placed next to Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square and a memorial fund was established in his name.<sup>4</sup> Reflecting no doubt the

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<sup>2</sup> Here are but a few examples. Books published in 1858 included: WH Ayleen, The Soldier and the Saint: or, Two Heroes in One, W. Owen, The Good Soldier, A memoir of Major-General Sir Henry Havelock, James P. Grant, The Christian Soldier, Memorials of Sir Henry Havelock.

Sermons dedicated to the General’s memory included: O. Winslow, Honoring God, and its Reward: A lesson from the life of the late General Sir Henry Havelock, and F.S. Williams, General Havelock and Christian Soldiership.

<sup>3</sup> MacKenzie, 119.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 50.

prevailing sentiment in India during the Mutiny, wartime correspondent WH Russell praised Havelock as “a pure type of the Christian soldier”<sup>5</sup>

A good example of an account that eulogized Havelock, as well as viewed the conflict in religious terms, was the memoirs of Colonel George Bouchier. He served alongside the 93<sup>rd</sup> at Lucknow, and constantly filled his memoirs with religious overtones. They were written directly after the Mutiny, and for Bouchier the war had obviously been a spiritual as well as military undertaking. At the outset of his writings, Bouchier stated his firm belief God had been watching over the British during the turbulent events of the Mutiny with His special care: “Providence, whose protecting hand had been so marked in our favor during this eventful year”.<sup>6</sup> After describing the initial relief of the Residency by Campbell, he gave way to a kind of spiritual exultation: “With what feelings of a soldier’s pride and thankfulness of heart to the Disposer of all human affairs have these last lines been penned”.<sup>7</sup>

Bouchier even alluded to what he considered “Divine intervention” during the course of the fighting. As Colin Campbell made his way into Cawnpore, his line had been exposed, and the rebel forces could have attacked with a high probability of success. But they failed to do so, and the author accounted for their behavior in the following manner: “the Almighty had allowed the scourge to pass over the land, yet He who placed a bound to the ocean, had, in like manner, limited the successes of the enemy: the decree had gone forth, ‘So far shalt thou go and no further’”.<sup>8</sup> Bouchier thus likened the British to the ancient Israelites, who enjoyed the favors of a God who fought on their side in battle. He became even more overtly spiritual when describing the death of General Henry

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<sup>5</sup> Russell, 138. (Vol. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Bouchier, George. Eight Months’ Campaign against the Bengal Sepoy Army (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1858) 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 166.

Havelock. Like most of his contemporaries, Bouchier held a reverent view of the general and would recall his passing in near hagiographic terms:

On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, that good man and soldier, not more devoted to his country than to his God, breathed his last; his work on earth just completed...No one who knew General Havelock as a Christian, could doubt, as his body was returning to the earth from whence it came, but that his would be a joyful resurrection, to inherit the promises made by his Heavenly Father from the foundation of the world.<sup>9</sup>

Bouchier's eulogy seemed more appropriate for a dead missionary or minister than a general of the British Army. But it was fully indicative of prevailing trends in mid-Victorian popular literature. Havelock was a perfect example of the "soldier-saint". As a good subject of the Queen, he gave his life in the service of the Raj. And as a good Christian man he had, in the words of St. Paul, "fought the good fight" and died with the convictions born of true faith.<sup>10</sup>

Bouchier was not the only author to employ religious terminology in his memoirs of the Mutiny. Victorian Historians Sir John Kaye and TRE Holmes constantly made allusions to Christianity in their writings, proving that even twenty and thirty years after the end of the Mutiny, the bond between Christianity and empire remained strong in historical literature. Describing the day-to-day activities of General Wheeler's entrenchment during the siege of Cawnpore, Kaye made special mention of the chaplain's role:

And not the least heroic of that little band of heroes was the station-chaplain, Mr. Moncrieff, who went about ministering to the sick and wounded, offering the consolations of religion to all who were passing away from the scene, and 'with that access of unexpected strength' derived from prayer sustained the toilers in the entrenchments, who turned aside for a little while from their ghastly work to listen to the sweet promises of the Gospel<sup>11</sup>

Kaye's depiction of the chaplain's duties showed the importance of faith as a consolation during the horrors of war. For a group of religious soldiers, the chaplain was as crucial for the maintenance of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 160-1.

<sup>10</sup> His final words, spoken to his son, were reportedly: "See how a Christian can die". David. Saul. The Indian Mutiny, 1857. (London: Viking, 2002) 331.

<sup>11</sup> Kaye, Sir John. Kaye's and Malleon's History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-8, Volume II (London: Longman, Green, and Co. 1897) 243.

morale as the commanding officer. Kaye also continuously emphasized the harsh and inhuman deaths suffered by the British soldiers and civilians at Cawnpore, turning them into martyrs for their country and faith. In the span of a single paragraph concerning the massacres at the riverbank, he wrote of “cruel deaths for our dear Christian people” and later mentioned that “no aspect of Christian humanity” would suffice to deter the rebels from their bloody work, for after all, “It sufficed that there was Christian blood to be shed”.<sup>12</sup>

Like Bouchier, Kaye also celebrated the figure of Havelock. Kaye described him as “no common man...[but] a God-fearing, self-denying man...rigid and austere”. He hastened to add however that Havelock’s piety did nothing to detract from his skills as a soldier: “the Christian zeal of Henry Havelock never overlaid his martial instincts”.<sup>13</sup> Havelock was also given inspirational qualities, like the Biblical prophets or Apostles: “Havelock challenged them [his troops] a second time with a few of those spirit-stirring words which, from the lips of a trusted general, are as strong drink to the weary soldier, and every man felt invigorated and equal to any work before him”.<sup>14</sup> Kaye’s portrait of Havelock was the literary image of the “muscular Christian”. Endowed with both spiritual and military qualities, he became an imperial hero for posterity to emulate.

As had Kaye, TRE Holmes too promoted the “soldier-saint” ethos with his descriptions of the pious character of Henry Lawrence<sup>15</sup>: “But that which gave its special character to his [Lawrence’s] benevolent toil was the passionate religious enthusiasm which inspired it...Thus, when we behold him in the last scene of his life, we feel that a Christian hero indeed stands before us”.<sup>16</sup> Holmes clearly enshrined Lawrence within the Victorian pantheon of the “soldier-saint”, as further

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>13</sup> Kaye, Vol II 210-11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 284.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence commanded the garrison at Lucknow when it was first put under siege. He died after the initial relief by Havelock.

<sup>16</sup> Holmes, TRE. A History of the Indian Mutiny (London: WH Allen and Co, 1888) 241-3.

witnessed by his reverential account of Sir Henry's final days: "nothing could disturb his holy spirit: for he had long since found that peace which passeth all understanding...When the dying man spoke of himself, it was with such humility as touched the hearts of all who heard him".<sup>17</sup> Holmes also contributed to the idealization of Havelock as the Christian soldier. He discussed Havelock as a driven individual who was ever guided by his personal faith: "he was quite sure that there must be a right path to follow, and that the Spirit of God would guide him into that path; no dangers could appall him, because he really believed that nothing was to be feared, except falling into sin".<sup>18</sup>

A conspicuous reminder of the close associations between religion and empire was the strong support given from the pulpit for repression of the Mutiny. From the start, many leading Church officials in Britain were quite outspoken in their calls for vengeance. In Edinburgh, Presbyterian minister Dr Cumming lashed out at the "whining sentimentalism" of those who dared to question the severity of British treatment to captured rebels.<sup>19</sup> Clergy in Britain tended to view the Raj and its institutions as benevolent attempts by the British to bring peace and prosperity to India, and the Church was a part of that mission. Protestant denominations had been instrumental in education, health care, and poverty relief since the British had been in India. It is not surprising then that Church officials would take great offense at the outbreak of the Mutiny. The Church saw a populace that had been given the benefits of modern European civilization, such as sanitation and railroads. Even more importantly, they had been exposed to the sublime teachings of Christianity. To meet such kindnesses with not only ungratefulness, but outright insubordination and violence was unacceptable. Attacking the Raj meant attacking the Church which was so closely associated with it. Not surprisingly, religious officials tended to see the unfolding events of the Mutiny in spiritual terms, as John Pemble reveals. For example, the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 267.

<sup>18</sup> Holmes, 276-77.

<sup>19</sup> James, 250.

massacres at Cawnpore were a “sign of divine displeasure” but conversely the successful defense of the Lucknow garrison by Havelock was “a portent of divine favor...[it] shone forth as a holy mandate for the continuation of the British raj in defiance of popular will”<sup>20</sup>

Coupled with their desire for harsh retributions, many ministers felt the Mutiny presented an excellent opportunity to “reconvert” India. This was somewhat of a miscalculation, seeing as one of the main reasons that many Indians, both Muslim and Hindu, had initially revolted was that they felt their faith to be threatened. Still, it was the belief of many British clergy and missionaries that the revolts in India were a sort of “punishment” from God for not having been attentive enough to the conversion of the natives. After the atrocities of Cawnpore, ministers in Britain called for a “day of national humiliation” on October 7, 1857. The nation was to atone for its sins, the preachers said, which “consisted largely of a neglect by the company to promote the gospel”.<sup>21</sup> The view that the rebellions were a result of Britain’s negligence in the missions field was echoed by the Bishop of London, in a prayer published by the London Times concerning the outbreak of the Mutiny. The end of the prayer displays the bishop’s desire to renew missionary efforts with even more vigor once the Mutiny should be defeated:

Dispel o Lord, we beseech Thee, the mysterious delusions which have led to this outbreak among the heathen. Maintain...and restore the power and influence of our country over the less civilized tribes which Thou hast committed to our sway; and if of Thy goodness this danger passes, give to each of us...a deeper sense of our Christian responsibilities<sup>22</sup>

For some individuals, British victory in the Mutiny served as divine confirmation that the empire and its religious mission would continue and prosper. Robert Stewart Fullerton, an American missionary in India opined that “The fact that a widespread rebellion has been put down by means

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<sup>20</sup> Pemble, John. The Raj, the Indian Mutiny, and the Kingdom of Oudh, 1801-1859. (Leicester: Harvester Press, 1977) 214-5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> London Times August 3, 1857.

that they [the Natives] at first thought utterly inadequate to the task, is evidence to them that to fight against Christianity is to fight against God".<sup>23</sup> As it turned out, following the Mutiny the British made special and repeated efforts to ensure the natives that their faiths would never be tampered with, nor would there ever be a state-sponsored program of Christian missionary activity.

The strong associations between Christianity and the Raj can be further thrown into relief by examining events briefly from the rebel perspective. The mutineers reviled Christianity as the faith of the enemy, and saw the war as an opportunity to try and stamp out that faith's spread through India. Indeed, the initial uprising at Meerut in May 1857, had resulted from a religious dispute. Not only were sepoys afraid to use the new rifle cartridges because they were regarded as ritually unclean, but also because they regarded them as part of a larger British plot to forcibly convert the army to Christianity. Throughout Britain's time in India, there had been periodic debates about the degree to which the British should preserve native customs and religion. And although there was never an official government program of "conversion". Christian missionaries were given state support, especially in areas such as poverty relief and education. While these activities were well intentioned. Muslims and Hindus remained uneasy about the presence of Christianity in India.

Given this atmosphere, it is not surprising that when the Mutiny erupted, the rebels met both European Christians and native converts with unrelenting hostility. Despite the debate over the motivations of various rebel factions, an indisputable unifying factor amongst the mutineers was a common antipathy to British rule, and the Christian religion that was, in their minds inextricably connected with the Raj. An example of rebel antipathy to the Christian faith was the language of a proclamation issued after the Cawnpore massacres: "rejoice at the thought that the Christians have

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<sup>23</sup> Lucas, JJ, ed. Memoir of Robert Stewart Fullerton, American Presbyterian missionary in North India, 1850-1865. (Allahabad: The Christian Literature Society UP Branch, 1928) 106.



been sent to hell, and both the Hindoo and Mahomedan religions have been confirmed".<sup>24</sup> Significantly, when rebellion broke out in Delhi, one of the first targets of the rampaging mob was the Anglican Church of St. James. Kaye made mention of this fact in his history: "The Church was an especial object of the fury of the insurgents. They gloated over the desecration of all that was held in reverence by our Christian people".<sup>25</sup> And later, in recounting the actions of mutineers at Cawnpore, Kaye stated that among the express goals of the rebels was to "murder all the defenseless Christian people who fell in their way" and that "the troopers...were indefatigable in their search after Christians".<sup>26</sup> Holmes related that as revolt broke out in Allahabad, "every Christian who had not found refuge in the fort was murdered: every Christian home was plundered and burned".<sup>27</sup>

Those Indians who had converted to Christianity were treated with a special disdain. American missionary Robert Stewart Fullerton reported how a Christian Indian woman was forced to convert to Islam by a mob who threatened to kill her baby before her eyes.<sup>28</sup> Others weren't as lucky. Fullerton gravely related how the local Nawab (prince) in the region near Futtehghurh had executed 32 native Christians by blowing them from the mouth of a cannon (as the British sometimes did to captured rebels). The nawab also threatened "those who should harbor them [Christians] with death and the confiscation of their estates".<sup>29</sup>

By virtue of their adopted faith, these natives became traitors and were automatically assumed to be loyal to the crown. This condition partially arose out of the rebels' sense that the Mutiny was a religious war, and if one weren't a Hindu or Muslim, the "purity" of the cause would be soiled. Indian Historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee notes that "The revolt of 1857 visualized itself as

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<sup>24</sup> Mukherjee, Rudrangshu. "Satan let loose upon Earth: The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857" Past and Present. 128 (1990) 110.

<sup>25</sup> Kaye, 62.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 237-8.

<sup>27</sup> Holmes, 215.

<sup>28</sup> Fullerton, 262.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 250-1.

a war of religion...against a perceived attempt at contamination by the British. The maintenance of purity went so far as to label all loyalists as Christians".<sup>30</sup> It was true that many Indian Christians were more inclined to be sympathetic to the British, while many fought openly on the British side. The religious nature of the Mutiny thus made it almost inevitable that Christianity should be viewed in a largely negative light. In waging war against British rule, the rebels were fighting against Britain's cultural imposition. Christianity was a central aspect of this, and so the rebels opposed it and treated its believers and institutions with a marked hostility.

In these accounts, Christianity became a central aspect of the imperial mission to defend India from the hostile attacks of its disgruntled populace. The centrality of Christianity persists in accounts of Victorian historians written some time after the 1850s. Even as British efforts to Christianize India gradually weakened following the Mutiny, the concept of a Christian empire that had been defended from 1857-9 persisted. Men such as Havelock were portrayed as embodiments of the Victorian ideal of the Christian soldier. The trends of muscular Christianity and Christian militarism had made it all the more natural that the Church should embrace the imperial cause. A perception of the war as an attack on Christianity was inherent in the public mindset from the start of the conflict, and was only reinforced by the unrelenting animosity of the rebel forces towards the Church as an extension of the British Empire's dominion in India. The connections between Church and empire were not always so seamless however. Close ties between Christianity and empire could prove a source of anxiety, as will be examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>30</sup> Mukherjee, 116.

## **V. Cawnpore and its consequences: the problematic side of Christian imperialism**

Perhaps never in its long history did the British army undertake a more savage or merciless campaign than in those fateful months during the summer of 1857 following the Cawnpore Massacres. A collective sense of outrage at the crimes committed against British civilians formed the impetus for a series of ruthless reprisals against the rebel forces. Women, children, the old and sick, none were spared from the avenging fury of the imperial armies. The British adopted an intransigent policy towards the mutineers, and the violence of the war they waged made a profound impact on the participants. Soldiers recognized the difficulty of reconciling such behavior with a supposedly Christian Army. Their voices were at times raised in protest against indiscriminate retribution, and the ethical transgressions this involved. But more often than not, individual soldiers were too confused to clearly take a stance. After all, they did on the whole support the British Army's mission to crush the Mutiny. As much as they were repelled by the harsh realities of combat, they also felt the necessity to defeat an enemy who was determined and also prone to barbaric outbursts of cruelty, such as at Cawnpore. The struggle of each soldier to justify his own particular role in the suppression of the Mutiny ultimately became a testament to the inherent strain caused by the juxtaposition of Christianity and the imperial mission.

The revolting events at Cawnpore served to rapidly polarize British public opinion and hardened the army's determination to exact a terrible vengeance upon the rebel forces. As accounts of what had happened drifted back to Britain, the public was seized with a ferocious zeal for revenge that would not abate for the remainder of the Mutiny. Thomas Babington Macaulay, a former official of the Indian government remarked on the public mood: "The

cruelties of the sepoy have inflamed the nation to a degree unprecedented within my memory...There is one terrible cry for revenge".<sup>1</sup>

The Massacres were disquieting because they had been carried out under the authority of a man whom the British had once looked upon as an ally. Nana Sahib had won many British friends with his European tastes and lavish wealth, and those who once trusted him must have been incredulous when this alleged Anglophile became the very byword for Indian cruelty. Cawnpore survivor Mowbray Thompson noted strikingly how "the fêted, honored guest of the London season of 1854, was the prime instigator in the most foul and bloody massacre of 1857".<sup>2</sup> The behavior of Nana Sahib reinforced in the British a certain paranoia. If a supposedly Westernized potentate could suddenly turn on the Raj, then no Indian could be fully trusted.

But undoubtedly the single most disturbing facet of the Cawnpore Massacres was the murder of the women and children. The British felt that they possessed a distinctly different view of the female sex than the Indians. They viewed occasional Indian practices of sati and female infanticide as hallmarks of a barbaric race that had no respect for women. In addition, Indian women usually performed strenuous manual labor, behavior that was quite alien to middle and upper class Victorian sensibilities regarding gender roles.<sup>3</sup> When they came to India, Englishwomen were typically sheltered off in bungalows, isolated and secure with a phalanx of servants to tend to their every want and need. To then have their countrywomen held captive and later so cruelly killed was a crime beyond the pale of the Victorian imagination.

The scenes of the massacres alone had a profound effect upon those British soldiers who visited Cawnpore, instilling in them an almost maniacal craving for revenge. British authorities made no attempt to clean up the site of the final carnage, and according to the descriptions of

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchins, 85.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 87.

Cawnpore survivor Mowbray Thompson the 'house of horrors' was a fearful place indeed: "the rooms were covered with human gore: articles of clothing that had belonged to women and children...were found steeped in blood...There is no doubt that the death of the unhappy victims was accomplished by the sword, and that their bodies, stripped of all clothing were thrown into an adjacent well".<sup>4</sup> Upon viewing the Well of Cawnpore, Lieutenant Arthur Lang directed his ire towards the entire Indian race: "No one who has seen that spot can ever feel anything but deep hatred to the Nana and his fellow fiends and all his fellow race".<sup>5</sup> William Gordon-Alexander, an officer in the 93<sup>rd</sup>, was careful to observe the impression that the site of the atrocities made on his men:

one could hear the men of both services laughing and talking as they approached the small entrance to this yard...but as each little knot of soldiers or sailors entered, a sudden silence would fall on the group, and they all immediately uncovered; the instant silence and the look which came over their faces, first of bewilderment, which quickly turned to anger as they began to realize the situation, was most striking<sup>6</sup>

This description from Gordon-Alexander gives some idea of how Cawnpore was regarded. It became a sacred sight, like a church, whereupon entering, men would naturally cease their chatter and remove their hats. The full horror of what had occurred there was allowed to sink in for each individual soldier, and his thoughts turned from mourning to vengeance. In a letter to his sister, Frederick Roberts made clear what feelings a visit to Cawnpore had engendered in him: "I would undergo cheerfully any privation, any amount of work, living in the hopes of a revenge on these cruel murderers".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson, 215-6.

<sup>5</sup> Broehl, 145, cited from Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research (Arthur Lang letter written on October 28, 1857.)

<sup>6</sup> Gordon-Alexander, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, Letters Written during the Indian Mutiny 45. (Frederick Roberts letter written August 25, 1857 to his sister.)

The popular furor surrounding Cawnpore led to extreme policies of indiscriminate retribution towards the rebel forces. No one summed up this severe policy of “no quarter” better than Brigadier General James Neill. On July 17, 1857. Neill, along with Sir Henry Havelock, had occupied Cawnpore after the defeat of Nana Sahib’s troops. Havelock didn’t stay but pressed on towards Lucknow, leaving his subordinate to deal with Cawnpore.<sup>8</sup> On July 25, 1857 Neill issued his infamous “Order” concerning the grotesque manner in which he intended to punish captured rebels:

Each miscreant, after sentence of death is pronounced upon him, will be taken down to the house in question, under a guard, and will be forced into cleaning up a small portion of the blood-stains; the task will be made as revolting to his feelings as possible, and the Provost-Marshal will use the lash in forcing any one objecting to complete his task. After properly clearing up his portion, the culprit is to be immediately hanged.<sup>9</sup>

The proclamation was a horrifying example of how war could harden one’s feelings to the point where there was no more regard for the human dignity of others. Neill’s order revealed not only a sadistic desire to watch the Indians suffer, but also a callous disregard for their religious beliefs, since consumption of blood was strictly forbidden for Muslims and Hindus. Neill’s emphasis was on vengeance rather than justice, with all Indians to be implicitly considered rebels. And he certainly was not alone in adopting this stance. One British magistrate, a Mr. Power is mentioned in the accounts of W. Gordon-Alexander. He described how Power received his nickname: “Mr. Power was very popular in the camp, and was nicknamed ‘Hanging Power’ from the expeditious manner in which he conducted the civil trials of the fugitive scoundrels”.<sup>10</sup> According to Gordon-Alexander, Power wasted little time on such formalities as trials. One day, near the town of Fatehgarh, he apparently captured over 100 “rebels”, “tried”

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<sup>8</sup> James, 252.

<sup>9</sup> Kaye, Vol.II, 300.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon-Alexander, 209.

them, and had them hung before lunch time, leaving the bodies to rot in the branches of trees in the town center.<sup>11</sup> WH Russell made mention of an anonymous British official who “boasted that he had hanged fifty-four men in a few hours for plundering a village!”<sup>12</sup> The majority of British soldiers were only too happy to go along with such directives. They had eagerly called for revenge after witnessing the scenes of the Cawnpore Massacre, and now their desires were sanctioned by official command. In effect, the army gave itself a license to stoop to the same villainous conduct it had condemned in the rebels. For some soldiers, even the diabolical punishments called for by Neill were not enough. Showing a complete disregard and antipathy to native religions, some troops added to the punishments by forcing their Hindu victims to eat beef, and the Muslims pork after they had “cleaned” the floor. The wretched captives were finally hung before crowds of jeering soldiers.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most jarring aspect of this gruesome episode in the Mutiny was that these mandates were issued from a man known to be a “Christian soldier”. The same Neill who ordered captured rebels to lick up dried blood was also a devout man who felt he was doing God’s will by meting out the severest possible penalties. W Gordon-Alexander recorded Neill’s own explanation for his actions: “No doubt this is a strange law, but it suits the occasion well, and I hope that I shall not be interfered with until the room is thoroughly cleansed in this way.... I will hold my own with the blessing and help of God. I cannot help seeing that His finger is in all this”.<sup>14</sup>

It is difficult to understand how an individual could consider it his ‘Christian’ duty to humiliate and torture men. For Neill however, these were the grim realities of war, necessary

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 214.

<sup>12</sup> Russell, 82. (Vol. 2).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 399.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon-Alexander, W. Recollections of a Highland Subaltern (London, Edward Arnold, 1898) 39.

evils in order to achieve the greater good of restoring a beneficent order to India while punishing those who had committed atrocities against British civilians. In spite the sadistic cruelty of his tactics, Neill was held in high esteem by almost all of his contemporaries. W. Gordon-Alexander, who painstakingly recorded Neill's order in all of its grisly detail still considered the general a "magnificent soldier, and a kind-hearted gentleman".<sup>15</sup> Victorian historian TRE Holmes gave a greater indication of the duality of Neill's nature when he noted that the officer was "Tender and loving to those dear to him, merciful to the weak...but a terrible enemy".<sup>16</sup> Neill, like Havelock and Lawrence, made no distinction between his religious life and his role on the battlefield. He possessed a whole-hearted belief in the righteousness of his cause and his faith served to support him in his actions. In accounting for his atrocious policies, Neill argued with a misguided sense of Christian charity that "severity at the first is mercy in the end".<sup>17</sup> However disturbing it may seem to modern ears, in the Victorian era this juxtaposition of religious piety with martial vigor was part of the prevailing cultural context of Christian militarism.

In addition to Neill there were other officers who mixed harsh discipline with a strong Christian faith. In the days following Cawnpore, Colonel John Nicholson pressed repeatedly for the adoption of a bill that would have allowed the British to officially employ torture as a method of execution. Displaying a frightening bloodlust, Nicholson complained: "The idea of simply hanging the perpetrators of such atrocities is simply maddening. If I had them in my power today...I would inflict the most excruciating tortures I could think of on them with a perfectly easy conscience".<sup>18</sup> Nicholson wished to see the captured mutineers suffer just as much, if not more, than the unfortunate British civilians had at Cawnpore. He felt that since the rebels had

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Holmes, 209.

<sup>17</sup> Kaye, 299.

<sup>18</sup> Kaye, 301-2.



committed such appalling crimes, the British were entitled to respond in a like manner. His views were supported with supposed 'Biblical' evidence: "The Word of God gives no authority to the modern tenderness for human life which would save even the murderer".<sup>19</sup> Naturally Nicholson conveniently avoided the blatant condemnation of "an eye for an eye" given by Christ in the New Testament. Like Neill he used his faith selectively as a justification for acts of great cruelty that would seemingly go against the very tenets of Christianity he held dear.

British public opinion concerning the Mutiny's origins and overall goals assisted in garnering support for a violent suppression of the revolt. The Mutiny was popularly portrayed as the work of an isolated group of soldiers and religious zealots, who were out for their own selfish interests. The London Times opined that: "We are only at war with a definite number of regiments of idle and pampered soldiers...who have profited by the disturbances, or been drawn into it, and with a few, very few, mere fanatics and enthusiasts animated by a religious zeal".<sup>20</sup> While they were motivated by a unifying hatred of Christianity, the divisions between Hindu and Islamic rebels, in British public opinion, would keep them from forming a cohesive whole: "Thus, on the whole, there is an utter want of that common cause, that sense of justice, that nationality, or that religion which in other instances has bonded myriads into a successful or desperate resistance to the invader or the oppressor".<sup>21</sup> In framing the Mutiny as the work of a few disgruntled individuals, the British could claim to be fighting on behalf of the majority of "peaceful" Indians who supported the restoration of the Raj.

Many Christian soldiers, although clearly uneasy with the behavior of the army, were only half-hearted in their protestations, failing to come out decisively against the British campaign of retribution following Cawnpore. They certainly experienced some moral

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> The London Times, October 13, 1857.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

uneasiness, but it was subtle and combined with an ever-present sense of duty and a belief in the ultimate righteousness of the British cause.

A good example of this sort of moral equivocation is displayed in the accounts of William Forbes-Mitchell of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Highlanders. He frankly discussed certain aspects of the war, and often did not hesitate to condemn the British. But these criticisms were usually tempered with excuses or justifications for British policies. He also tended to blame the rebels for much of the bloodshed of the Mutiny. He rightly pegged the Mutiny as a “war of the most cruel and exterminating form, in which no quarter was given on either side”.<sup>22</sup> Yet he attributed the brutal nature of the war to the “cowardly treachery of the enemy”, rather than to any doing of the British.<sup>23</sup> In a similar fashion he openly criticized the callousness of the British soldiers: “our men thus spoke of putting a wounded Jack Pandey<sup>24</sup> ‘out of pain’, just as calmly as if he had been a wild beast”.<sup>25</sup> But Forbes-Mitchell then attempted to shift some of the blame away from the British, since the rebels had after all initiated the hostilities: “The only excuse is that we did not begin this war of extermination”.<sup>26</sup>

The assumption was that the British were essentially forced into fighting the Mutiny on the rebels’ terms, implying British cruelties should be seen as a response to previous instances of rebel atrocities. Elsewhere in his memoirs, Forbes-Mitchell observed that “It was both horrible and demoralizing for the army to be engaged in such a war”.<sup>27</sup> Here was a tacit admission that the barbaric policies enacted by figures such as Neill had a degrading effect on the men, and caused pangs of guilt in at least some. But right after this assertion he again rushed to the defense

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<sup>22</sup> Forbes-Mitchell, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>24</sup> British slang for a rebel soldier.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 31.

of the army stating, “with few exceptions, the European soldiers went through the terrible scenes of the Mutiny with great moderation”.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, after soundly castigated what he saw as the excesses of British military justice, Forbes-Mitchell then proceeded to excuse those responsible, feeling they only did what was unfortunately necessary in a time of war. “Wherever a European in power...met a rebel in arms, or any native whatever on whom suspicion rested, his shrift was short and his fate sure”.<sup>29</sup> Having argued that the British were too perfunctory in their administration of martial justice, Forbes-Mitchell then proceeded to completely shift his stance. In a footnote he stated: “these officials knew much more of the terrible facts attending the Mutiny...and...were better able to decide the measures best calculated to crush the imminent danger threatening our dominion in India”.<sup>30</sup>

In other parts of his accounts, Forbes-Mitchell again became ambiguous and unclear in his declarations. In discussing Neill’s order, he felt that while it was severe, it should be taken in context: “in condemning the action we must not overlook the provocation”.<sup>31</sup> Forbes-Mitchell believed that the standard rules of “civilized” warfare, which would have roundly condemned actions such as Neill’s order, held true only for European warfare. Thus they could be ignored when fighting against “savages” such as the mutineers. He mentioned that “Asiatic campaigns have always been conducted in a more remorseless spirit than those between European nations, but the war of the Mutiny, as I have before remarked in these reminiscences, was far worse than the usual type of even Asiatic fighting”.<sup>32</sup> Thus he excused British behavior, saying it was to be expected in “Asiatic” warfare, yet in the same sentence he noted that the Mutiny exceeded the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 178.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 177.

norm even for “Asiatic” campaigns. Forbes-Mitchell was never fully comfortable with British policy, but at the same time he was not willing to take a clear-cut stance against it either.

Similar equivocation and indecision runs through accounts from Frederick Roberts and Vivian Majendie, officers in Sir Colin Campbell’s army during the Lucknow Campaign. Roberts mostly supported the harsh martial justice meted out by the British, but at times his tone revealed a curious combination of enthusiasm and reservation. Early in his correspondences, he wrote to his father concerning his mixed feelings on British policies in the recently recaptured Delhi: “Everybody [all the natives] was turned out of the City, and all the houses were plundered. A very necessary punishment, but at the same time a sad sight to see old women and little children...making for one of the gates and leaving their homes”.<sup>33</sup> Later, after having witnessed one too many hangings in Cawnpore, Roberts reported: “It was such a sad sight, however, that I felt quite unhappy and wished most sincerely this horrid war was at an end”. But then to assuage any fears that he was too sympathetic towards the Indians, Roberts immediately qualified his statement: “You must not think...that I pity the Sepoys or blackguards who are rebelling against us. On the contrary, few are more unrelenting than I am. When a prisoner is brought in, I am the first to call out to have him hanged”.<sup>34</sup>

Roberts nearly contradicted himself with these two statements, claiming at the same time to be both sick of the violence and yet arguing for its continued perpetration. He took a stance similar to that of Forbes-Mitchell when he argued that the cruel measures were justified because of military necessity: “unless the severest measures are adopted we shall have no end to our war”.<sup>35</sup> Yet right afterwards, Roberts admitted that the average soldier was not in a position to be a fair arbitrator of justice, since he “cannot be expected to distinguish between the guilty and the

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<sup>33</sup> Roberts, *Letters*, 68. (Frederick Roberts letter written September 26, 1857 to his father.)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 140. (Frederick Roberts letter to sister on February 26, 1858.)

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 140. (same letter)

innocent in the heat of the moment”.<sup>36</sup> Roberts, like Forbes-Mitchell was confused as to what exactly his reaction should be. In trying to sort out his own views, he was careful to not chastise the British too harshly. This behavior could be a result of very practical concerns, since while Roberts did not choose to report it, it is not at all unlikely that he himself participated in the capture and hanging of suspected “rebels”. Part of the confusion then may have been an attempt to come to terms with his own latent guilt.

Vivian Majendie exhibited many of the same tendencies as Roberts and Forbes-Mitchell. He at first steadfastly defended the British practice of “shoot first, ask questions later” when dealing with potential rebels: “I do not mean to say we did wrong in shooting down...any man...who might [have] used arms against us”.<sup>37</sup> However, after this forthright declaration Majendie backed off and confessed. “they [the rebels] at least should be treated as fair enemies, and that unless proved to have participated in or connived at the murder of Englishmen, captives of this class should not necessarily be put to death”.<sup>38</sup> This combination of approval and criticism for British actions was a recurring theme in the soldiers’ accounts.

Military figures were not unique in displaying a sometimes-contradictory attitude about British policies in the Mutiny. These opinions were also shared by civilians and Victorian historians. WH Russell was a reporter in India, and was able to witness first hand much of the carnage of the Mutiny. He characteristically adopted a rather skeptical eye towards the British side and often did not hesitate to condemn actions he felt were unjust or hypocritical. But when Russell viewed the scenes of Cawnpore, his more cynical outlook departed, and his self-recorded reaction was as emotional and biased as that of any British serviceman. “I turned and left the spot

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 140. (same letter)

<sup>37</sup> Majendie, Vivian. Up Among the Pandies. (London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1859) cited in Broehl, 220.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 220.

with every vein boiling, and it was long ere I could still the beatings of my heart”<sup>39</sup>. Later, Russell quoted from the Bible to indicate his feelings about what should be done to Cawnpore: “We will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord”.<sup>40</sup> As a reporter, Russell might have been expected to try and downplay the horrors of Cawnpore, which had already been so exalted in the British popular imagination, often with exaggerations or distortions of historical truth. But he showed that he was not immune to the same infectious wrath and desire for revenge that gripped the soldiers.

TRE Holmes, Victorian historian, also displayed a somewhat unexpected reaction in his writings when he addressed the behavior of Neill following Cawnpore. He stridently denounced what he saw as excessive and irresponsible actions on Neill’s part, and even managed to temporarily empathize with the rebel side: “The system of burning villages, right and politic when pursued with discrimination, was in many instances fearfully abused...they [the natives] must have cursed us as bitterly as we cursed the murderers of Cawnpore”.<sup>41</sup> But right after these statements, Holmes curiously attempted to somehow lessen Neill’s culpability: “to the honor of Neill let it be recorded that to him the infliction of punishment was not a delight, but an awful duty”.<sup>42</sup> Holmes seems to have thought that simply because Neill did not relish punishing the rebels<sup>43</sup>, he should not be blamed completely for the orders he issued.

Despite the reluctance of many individuals to explicitly condemn British actions, there were some persons who clearly disapproved of blind retribution and instead argued for restraint and impartial justice. These individuals in turn were often criticized for their opinions. One such

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<sup>39</sup> Russell, 208. (Vol. 1).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Holmes, 218.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>43</sup> A very debatable view. Neill, who with his ghastly “order” went to such lengths to punish in a cruel and unusual manner, may well have derived considerable satisfaction from seeing these sentences administered.

man was magistrate Joseph Hume, who endeavored to ensure that each suspected rebel in his district would receive a fair hearing, rather than the perfunctory “trial” followed by execution that was all too commonplace. As a result of his sincere efforts to be judicious, he hung only seven mutineers, and yet was roundly abused by other officials for displaying excess leniency.<sup>44</sup>

Lord Canning, the Governor-general of India during the Mutiny, offered perhaps the most noteworthy example of resistance to the prevailing barbarity of British military practices. Although intensely loyal to the crown, Canning was also very mindful of the future, and wished to minimize the feelings of ill-will and rancor which would inevitably follow the restoration of the Raj. With this in mind on July 31, 1857, he issued his soon to be infamous “Clemency Resolution”. It advised British authorities to make a clear attempt to distinguish between those sepoys who had been involved in committing atrocities, and those who had simply mutinied or deserted. The response to this proclamation was a firestorm of public outrage, both in Britain and India. The unfortunate Governor-general was immediately dubbed “Clemency Canning”, and considered a weak and cowardly figure who didn’t have the backbone to deal firmly with the mutineers.<sup>45</sup> Holmes tried to defend him, noting that “Among his many noble qualities were a calm love of justice, a scrupulous respect for the rights of others, which were only misunderstood by his contemporaries because they were not balanced by decisiveness”.<sup>46</sup> In explanation of his actions, Canning himself said simply, “I will not govern in anger”.<sup>47</sup> That he should face so much controversy for merely trying to serve impartial justice is evidence of the feverish and vengeful mindset of many Britons following Cawnpore.

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<sup>44</sup> Hibbert, 215.

<sup>45</sup> David, Saul. *The Indian Mutiny*. (London: Viking, 2002) 237-8.

<sup>46</sup> Holmes, 170.

<sup>47</sup> David, 238.

Though as discussed earlier, many members of the army such as Neill and Nicholson had supported their actions with Christianity, others used their faith to explicitly question British policy. Sir Colin Campbell was one such case. While Neill had supported harsh policies from the commanding level, Campbell was a strident example of an officer who strove to maintain some sense of moral decorum while the war raged around him. Upon arriving in Cawnpore, he promptly put a stop to Neill's order, on the grounds that it was "unworthy of the English name and a Christian government".<sup>48</sup> Forbes-Mitchell went on to record that "Sir Colin Campbell was utterly opposed to extreme measures, and deeply deplored the wholesale executions by the civil power...I once heard him express his disgust when...he entered a mango-tope full of rotting corpses".<sup>49</sup> Campbell took his role as commander seriously and felt it was his duty to set a good example for the men. His faith clearly did not permit him to seamlessly go along with the type of brutal warfare that Neill could apparently wage with a clean conscience.

Faith also caused other individuals to call certain into question certain aspects of the war. Forbes-Mitchell recalled a certain Dr. Munro, a surgeon with the 93<sup>rd</sup>, who although upset when he saw the sites of Cawnpore, felt uneasy about the draconian penalties being applied to the rebels. The dichotomy between the doctor's sorrow for the victims and pity for the *mutineers* was captured when he witnessed captured rebels being forced to lick up blood in accordance with Neill's order: "This is horrible and unchristian to look at, but I do hope these are the same wretches who tortured the little child on the hook inside that room".<sup>50</sup> Though he desired to see the guilty parties brought to justice, Munro appeared aware of the incompatibility of such actions with the tenets of Christianity promoting mercy and forgiveness. Forbes-Mitchell related another incident in which an infantryman in the 93<sup>rd</sup>, Jack Brian, became fed up with the violence taking

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<sup>48</sup> Forbes-Mitchell, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 178-9.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 19.



place around him. After being asked to serve as an executioner to a batch of captured rebels, the incensed soldier allegedly replied: “Wha do ye tak’ us for? We of the Ninety-Third enlisted to fight men with arms in their hands. I widna’ become yer hangman for all the loot in India!”<sup>51</sup>

While cases such as these appear to be more isolated, they certainly show that even low-ranking enlisted men could experience misgivings about the war they was engaged in.

Civilian reporter WH Russell was shocked by many of the atrocities he witnessed from the British side. He was particularly displeased when he considered the contrast between the supposedly Christian character of the army and some of the actions it had undertaken. He referred to one particular incident where the army had executed a man solely because he was related to a rebellious prince: “were our acts those of civilized Christians, when...we hung a relative of the Nuwab of Furruckabad under circumstances of most disgusting indignity, whilst a chaplain stood by among the spectators?”<sup>52</sup> He went on to stridently denounce “all...kinds of vindictive, unchristian....torture, such as sewing Mahomedans in pig-skins, smearing them with porkfat before execution...and forcing Hindus to defile themselves”<sup>53</sup> Russell accused some Britons of ironically stooping to the same levels of cruelty that the Indians had been accused of. Indeed, he claimed that the professed faith of the troops had become lost in the heat of battle: “[the troops]...have lived so long among Asiatics as to have imbibed their worst feelings, and to have forgotten the sentiments of civilization and religion”.<sup>54</sup> Russell, with biting sarcasm mocked the hypocrisy of people who could be so inhumane towards the rebels and yet still profess to be Christian: “We want vengeance!...they cry... ‘we care not if it be indiscriminate. We are not

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>52</sup> Russell, 42. (Vol. 2)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Russell, 259. (Vol. 2)

Christians now, because we are dealing with those who are not of our faith".<sup>55</sup> For Campbell, Munro, and Russell, the excesses of British policies towards the rebels stood in shattering incongruity with the Christian faith which was so prominent among the men and their officers.

There are accounts that even directly counter some of the justifications that men had given for British policies. For one thing, it seems as though the British forces were waging a war of the greatest brutality from the beginning, and not just in response to the Cawnpore massacres. During the devastating march of forces under Sir Henry Barnard, one Lieutenant Kendal Coghill, who was with Barnard reported: "We burnt every village, and hanged all the villagers who had treated our fugitives badly until every tree was covered with scoundrels hanging".<sup>56</sup> This scenario was to repeat countless times, but here it is especially significant because Coghill was writing in the first days of June 1857, before the siege of Cawnpore had even begun. TRE Holmes confirmed the timing of British atrocities. He discussed the brutal progress of British regiments in the area of Allahabad and Benares, before the massacres, when "officers used their power with indiscriminate ferocity".<sup>57</sup> For his part, WH Russell expressed little surprise that the British so quickly resorted to violent measures. He believed that it was simply a reflection of the fundamental nature of the British Empire in India: "That force is the base of our rule I *have* no doubt; for I see nothing else but force employed in our relations with the governed".<sup>58</sup>

There is even some evidence to suggest that stringent British policies failed to accomplish their intended purposes. Historian Christopher Hibbert disputes the effectiveness of overly severe punishments such as the "cleaning" demanded by Neill. He mentions an example of one execution in which "The man [a captured mutineer]...before being hung spoke to the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>56</sup> David, 153.

<sup>57</sup> Holmes, 212.

<sup>58</sup> Russell, 194. (Vol.1)

crowd...He made use of the words that he was satisfied to die and we [the British] need not think we were going to beat the Sepoys because they would yet beat us".<sup>59</sup> Here we see a rebel that, rather than being crushed or demoralized by the punishments is in fact made all the more defiant. In his memoirs Frederick Roberts made a similar observation about the effects of drastic punitive measures. Shortly after the first instance of revolt in Meerut in May 1857, British forces at Lahore attempted to kill the roots of rebellion in that locale with an impressive display of public punishment. A small party of soldiers suspected of plotting against the Raj were tried, convicted, and sentenced to the awful fate of being fired from guns. In the presence of the rest of the Indian soldiers, the mutineers were strapped to the mouths of heavy artillery pieces and then literally blown to bits. Roberts witnessed this appalling action and noted the effect it had on the other Indians: "They were evidently startled at the swift retribution which had overtaken their guilty comrades, but looked more crest-fallen than shocked or horrified, and we soon learnt that their determination to mutiny...was in nowise changed by the scene they had witnessed".<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the sadistic penalties imposed by the British only served to harden the rebels' determination and motivate them to continue the fight, rather than discourage or frighten them, as had been the intention.

In addition to the defenses of British policy, some of the "historical" information from the Mutiny itself can be countered. The elevated position given to certain heroes of the Mutiny, most notably Havelock, can be challenged. Although his personal piety seems to be beyond question, Havelock's faith could be viewed in a negative light as well. Modern historians have questioned some of the Victorian assumptions about Havelock. As regards his supposedly pristine piety John Pemble writes: "Havelock's God was the jealous God of the Israelites, of

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<sup>59</sup> Hibbert, 211.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts, Frederick. Forty-One Years in India (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1901) 69.

terrible requital...Havelock went grimly forward, driving his men to and even beyond the limits of human endurance, terrorizing the native population".<sup>61</sup> John MacKenzie adds that Havelock had the "fearlessness of the true fanatic".<sup>62</sup> Here we see quite a different image of Havelock than the one given by Bouchier, Kaye, and Holmes. It is an interesting example of how history tends to favor the side that recounts the events. To the British, those rebels who were motivated in the perceived defense of Islam or Hinduism were considered "fanatics". But the self-righteous Havelock, who preached to his men, and led an army of "saints" could well be open to the same charges of "fanaticism". Pemble goes on to mention how despite his faith, Havelock, like Neill, didn't shrink from conducting a harsh campaign: "His [Neill's] name had become a byword for terror...But the pious Havelock was as ruthless, and sadistic besides. It was Havelock who told his artillery officer: 'My dear Maude, I give you leave to hang as many men as you like'".<sup>63</sup>

These alternative views of Havelock show the inherently problematic side of the "Christian" soldier. Havelock had the mixture of physical and spiritual attributes that made him an ideal model of muscular Christianity. But at the same time, the image is not totally convincing. The debasing nature of the war that the British were fighting in India, made moral confusion inevitable. Men such as Havelock, who seemed so sure of themselves, and their actions naturally provoke suspicion in modern historians.

The ferocity of the Mutiny brought out the worst on both sides. For every Nana Sahib, there was a General Neill. Although the Cawnpore Massacres serve as a focal point in studying the question of atrocities, there were certainly numerous other incidences before and afterwards which could equally illustrate the brutality and downright barbarism to which both sides descended. The manic thirst for revenge that gripped many soldiers had serious consequences for

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<sup>61</sup> Pemble, 177.

<sup>62</sup> MacKenzie, 120.

<sup>63</sup> Pemble, 180.

the British concerning the manner in which they conducted the war. Though some individuals such as Sir Colin Campbell, the Magistrate Joseph Hume, and Lord Canning stood out for their determination to exercise restraint and good judgment, there were far too many who neither felt a need for mercy nor found their actions problematic from a Christian standpoint. Events at Cawnpore gave such persons a pretext to carry out their agenda with minimal criticism from the authorities and with the full support of an enraged public, including the Church, back in England. Men like Neill took full advantage of this and satiated their almost sadistic desires for punishment upon any “rebels” unfortunate enough to cross their path. Ironically enough, it is probable that the extreme nature of these punishments hardened the determination of many mutineers and perhaps made them more willing to stoop to cruelty and hatred themselves. The violence of the British then was often visited back on their own heads in an endless cycle of revenge and retaliation.

In examining memoirs and accounts from the men who participated in these events, it is not surprising that a wide variety of explanations, defenses, and justifications were given to come to terms with British behavior. The various justifications became “defense mechanisms” whereby individual soldiers could in some way expiate their inevitable feelings of shame or guilt. The moral confusion engendered by the harsh British treatment of the rebels is shown as well by those accounts that seemed to both condone and condemn British actions. Frederick Roberts wrote to his sister claiming to be sick of violence, yet a few lines later he was boasting of his willingness to promptly execute any suspected rebels and talking of the importance of crushing the rebellion with firmness. Forbes-Mitchell admitted that neither side was willing to be merciful in a war of “no quarter”, yet later he praised the “moderation” of the British troops.

There existed a tension in the men between wanting to convey some sense of outrage and dissatisfaction at the horrors they witnessed, but at the same remaining by and large supportive of the British Army and its campaign to defeat the Mutiny. An underlying moral uneasiness emerged that threatened the bond between Christianity and empire. The tensions begged the question of how a supposedly Christian army could really be engaged in brutal imperial warfare at all. In the muddle of defenses, accusations, confessions, and equivocations, perhaps the only clear point was that there was no easy way for the soldier involved in an inhumane and terrifying conflict to deal with the implications of his actions and the dictates of his conscience.

## VI. Conclusions

The aftermath of the Indian Mutiny demonstrated the limits of the bond between Church and empire. After finally crushing the revolt, the British decided that their religious policy in India should be permanently altered. The issuance of the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 entailed a government guarantee of religious tolerance, and a promise to Indian subjects that Britain would never again try to tamper with their religious practices.

Despite the move towards tolerance, some of the more aggressive evangelicals tried to push for continued government interference in religious affairs. Their position was strongly supported by individuals like Herbert Edwardes, who served as Commissioner of Peshawar. Like many of the clergy of the day, Edwardes held fast to the belief that the Mutiny had been a "national chastisement" from God, and that Britain, in gratitude for having been delivered, should redouble their efforts to Christianize the subcontinent. Edwardes stated: "Let us take warning from the past...A Christian policy is the only policy of hope".<sup>1</sup> It is ironic that Edwardes should mention the past, for it was truly with the "warning" of the Mutiny on their minds that the majority of British government personnel agreed to a drastic change in their outlook on India. Whereas once the evangelicals had possessed a great deal of popular support, now their influence was beginning to wane, at least among those in power. Lord Canning famously remarked of Edwardes: "[He] is exactly what Mohammed would have been if born at Clapham instead of Mecca".<sup>2</sup> This is a very telling remark, showing that Canning viewed Edwardes as a hopeless fanatic for still pursuing the dream of a Christianized India.

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<sup>1</sup> Metcalf, The Aftermath of Revolt 102.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 105.

The fact is that the majority of the British government had given up on this objective. Lord Derby spoke for many when he alluded to “what I own seems to be the somewhat hopeless task of Christianizing India”.<sup>3</sup> The great reform era, initiated by Bentinck back in the 1830s was finally drawing to a close. The British had learned the futility of trying to reshape India in their own image, and this fact had been highlighted by the bloody struggles of the Mutiny. From now on, they would be much more interested in simply maintaining their governing authority than in attempting to change Indian beliefs and customs. The great age of missions had been a time of idealism. Britons had believed that India might truly become a Westernized state, with modern laws, education, and technology, and most of all the Christian faith. This dream was now abandoned, and the Mutiny ushered in an age of uncertainty that replaced the high noon of the Victorian Age of Faith.

This is not to say that the connections between Church and empire were irrevocably shattered. Christian missionaries continued to preach the Gospel throughout the reaches of the empire, and in Africa especially they enjoyed ever-increasing success. Christianity remained a primary support and justification for imperial endeavor, just as it proved in chapter Four. And so even as late as 1917, while World War I raged, AG Hill could write: “this Empire of ours...must be seen as an instrument in God’s hands, an agent for the fulfillment of His will”.<sup>4</sup> Hill’s words showed how persistent the Christian-imperial bond could be, but when taken into context there is another meaning. The British Empire was under grave threat in 1917, just as in 1857. And so it was no doubt comforting at that time to revive the notion of a Divinely favored Empire. By 1917, this idea needed a great deal of reinforcing however, because in some ways it had been continually challenged since the end of the Mutiny. The ever-perceptive WH Russell had

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>4</sup> Hill, AG. Christian Imperialism. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917) 7-8.



foreseen those changes coming way back in 1858, even as the Mutiny was still being suppressed. In response to a sermon he had just heard, which confidently asserted that because of its strong Christian adherence, the British Empire was destined not to share in the fate of other history's other great empires, Russell remarked: "The Christianity of a Roman Emperor could not save his empire...our Christian character will not atone for usurpation and annexation in Hindostan, or for violence and fraud in the Upper Provinces of India".<sup>5</sup> Russell realized that the British could not ultimately maintain a supposedly Christian Empire solely on the basis of brute force.

Even as the historical reality of a Christian India diminished, the connections between Church and empire in memoirs and accounts remained strong. And the passage of time seemingly did little to weaken these perceptions. Historians writing in the 1870s, and 1880s such as Kaye and Holmes continued to see the Mutiny from a Christian perspective. The persistence of the Christian-imperial bond is intriguing and has much to do with the vantage point of those who are writing the histories and the memoirs. Looking back at the Mutiny near the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, it seemed that the Raj had passed its greatest trial, and remained unshakeable. For Kaye, Holmes, and many of the soldiers, the strength of the empire in India was in part due to its Christian foundation. Inherent in supporting the close relationship of Church and empire was a conviction that God sided with Britain in the retaking of India, and restoring a benevolent Christian government over a benighted pagan land. The imperial mission and the Christian mission were connected, with faith essential to justifying the Mutiny's suppression. The rebels too, by their actions seemed to consider the Mutiny a war with definite religious overtones. Staring with the dispute over the greased cartridges, they came to identify Christianity as the religion of their enemy, as well as a threat to Hindu and Islamic traditions. The anger with which

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<sup>5</sup> Russell, (Vol. I) 356.

they persecuted native Christians, or desecrated Churches was a sign of how they connected Christianity with British authority and cultural imposition.

Chapter Five examined the British reaction to Cawnpore, and the complex and sometimes conflicting emotions that the unforgiving war of “no quarter” could inspire in participants and even historians as they wrestled with issues of ethics and culpability for wartime “atrocities”. After the massacres at Cawnpore, the rebels were held to be completely beyond the pale of humanity and civilization. Ironically, the British themselves then descended to the very depths of barbarism that they had condemned so vigorously in their rebel adversaries. Thus both sides contributed to turning the Mutiny into a war of atrocities. It is also interesting to note that there is plenty of evidence to support the view that the British followed a harsh policy towards the rebels from the beginning of the conflict. Certainly there were instances of British atrocities well before Cawnpore. In giving themselves a license to commit these horrifying reprisals, the British now had to walk a fine line between permitting those actions that, while regrettable, were necessary to uphold justice, and those which were done purely out of vengeance. While the atrocities of Cawnpore demanded that the perpetrators, insofar as they could be identified, be caught, men such as Neill went disregarding justice and sought to slake their thirst for revenge with cruel and unusual punishments. They made little effort to separate the guilty from the innocent and essentially condemned the rebels in masse for the work of a few. Individuals such as Neill often supported their actions with religion, which naturally raised questions about the limits to which faith could be used to justify the suppression of the Mutiny. Christianity could be used to support a quest for justice, but a quest for revenge? Revenge is decidedly un-Christian and this could cause a curious dichotomy in reactions between two individuals who were ostensibly of the same faith. Thus while Neill felt that God approved of his decision to make rebels lick up blood, Sir

Colin Campbell stepped in to stop that order in the name of Christianity. In another example, Lord Canning displayed the Christian sentiment of mercy with his famous “Clemency” proposal, yet faced widespread criticism from many in Britain, including clergy.

Of course this British descent towards barbarism did not go unchallenged. Tensions due to competing desires for justice and revenge also plagued the soldiers. Their tortured attempts to come to terms with British actions and assuage their own consciences are proof of this. In the various accounts there are often times when an individual soldier criticized British policy, but almost never was it fully consistent. The same soldier who condemned an officer for cruelty may have later endorsed similar actions by another individual. The soldiers’ sense of moral confusion showed how hard it could be to justify the darker side of imperial war, especially when that empire was strongly linked with Christianity. The “Christian soldier” found himself in a difficult position. None of the soldiers emerged fully satisfied with the conduct of the army during the Mutiny. All of the ethical dilemmas that arose returned to one simple fact. Christianity, and the nobler aspects of the British Army and the imperial mission could not well stoop to the level of craving revenge. The pursuit of revenge sullied the purity of the imperial cause, and ultimately threatened its linkage with the faith.

The Mutiny was a war to re-impose British government upon an unwilling segment of the Indian population. The British essentially went war to punish the Indians for revolting against the idea of imperialism. The rebels were punished and ultimately defeated. But from 1859 until 1947, the British were forced to deal with the problematic nature of the imperial system that the victory in the Mutiny was able to justify. Britain’s great attempt at a Christian Empire in India really died with the Mutiny. After all, how could a Christian Empire stand on the power of the sword alone?

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