Emily J. Manktelow

`Missionary Families: Race, Gender and Generation on the Spiritual Frontier.`


`Missionary Families` is an exploration of how the private, emotional and intimate experiences of the missionary family shaped the evolution of London Missionary Society (LMS) official policy during the nineteenth century, as it defined the nature of its responsibility for the welfare of missionary families, spouses, widows and children. Challenging the separation of the ‘personal’ from the ‘official’ in mission history, Emily Manktelow argues that an examination of the influence of missionary families is essential for creating a thorough and nuanced understanding of mission history and the development of mission theory in relation to the role of matrimony and exemplary domesticity in mission work. To test her argument, Manktelow concentrates on one missionary ‘dynasty’ within the LMS; the Moffat family and their ‘offshoots’, the Livingstones and the Prices, who all worked in various locations in southern Africa. She also examines the family of William and Hannah Cook, who raised their large family of eight daughters and one son in the South Seas mission.

Manktelow charts the changing and sometimes tense relationship between the LMS and its missionary families in six chapters. Chapter one introduces her topic and emphasizes how she finds the family an under-explored element of mission history. Chapter two examines the circumstances that led to the inclusion of the missionary wife in mission policy when originally the LMS had intended for missionary men to marry native converts. Chapter three is a consideration of missionary marriage through a close analysis of the marriage of David and Mary Livingstone. The life of Scottish missionary and adventurer David Livingstone has been well explored by historians, but Manktelow adds a new dimension to scholarly knowledge in her analysis of how concern for the mission permeated every aspect of the Livingstone marriage. Manktelow argues that this is an example of how, for missionary couples, personal lives and professional concerns were irrevocably intertwined. The fourth chapter examines the missionary family. Manktelow explores negotiations between missionaries and LMS directors as missionaries sought to secure financial provision for their children’s education and repatriation. Chapter five considers the challenges of missionary parenthood on the spiritual frontier, arguing that a broadly gendered understanding of parental roles is evident in missionary writing. While mothers concentrated on practicalities and the trials of daily life, fathers worried about the spiritual health and future welfare of their children in the non-missionary world. Chapter six examines the dual identity of mission-
ary children who were products of two cultures but often accepted by neither. It also explores how the behavior of missionary children shaped the mission experience for parents as parenting skills became a site of moral scrutiny and interference from the mission directors in London.

Manktelow’s sources range from the institutional records of the LMS to the private diaries, journals and correspondence of the families she is examining. The fusion of these very different types of sources is essential to her argument and has been effectively carried out. This method allows exploration of the slippage between the requirements of LMS directors in London and the experiences of missionaries on the field, as well as of the formal interactions of missionary parents with mission directors when negotiating the terms of family life in the context of missionary activity. Manktelow’s focus situates her work within current scholarly debate about the gendered experiences of missionaries. In particular, her consideration of the fracturing of public and private life for missionary fathers addresses an area of male missionary experience that has not yet received extensive consideration.

The chapters are essentially divided into two themes. In the first, Manktelow examines missionary marriage and the LMS’s attempt to regulate and control it. While many historians have previously debated the complex identity of the missionary wife, Manktelow’s section on the role of missionary husbands is novel and noteworthy. Her examination of how missionary men constructed their husbandly role is particularly interesting and would have been further enhanced by a lengthier analysis. In the second theme, Manktelow moves to investigating the missionary nuclear family. She argues that historians will miss the profound influence family held in individual experience and the resulting evolution of mission policy if they neglect in-depth examination of ‘private’ missionary life in favour of the more ‘public’ aspects of mission history. Her analysis of missionary parenthood in chapters four to six finds that missionary parenthood and vocational concerns were “inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing.” She explores expressions of concern in correspondence between parents and LMS directors concerning provision for children, showing that missionary parents feared their vocation would have a detrimental effect on their children’s’ future. In response to this fear, missionaries were willing to risk souring their relationship with LMS Directors in order to achieve the best possible conditions for their children. Manktelow argues that parental responses to children’s circumstances shaped their responses to foreign cultures as a whole. Concern for children’s welfare contributed to the radicalization of missionary discourse away from appreciation of foreign cultures and towards fear of the potential damage that could be caused to innocent missionary children by prolonged contact with ‘uncivilised’ peoples.