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# Liberated by Christ: Evangelical Missionaries and Slavery in Nineteenth Century South India.

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In 1830, the Basel *Evangelischer Heidenbote* and the *Church Missionary Record* reported the same case of atrocious behaviour by a slaveholder, told by the Basel missionaries Jakob Friedrich Sessing and Georg Adam Kissling who worked in Monrovia, Liberia from 1828 (Schlatter 1916: 9-16). The slaveholder had built a fortified house in order to fight against armed colonists who attacked him, covertly sent by the governor. He had given himself the name Don Magill, 'Lord of the Sun, Moon, Stars, and 10,000 Dollars'. Sessing wrote in the *Church Missionary Record*:

> I believe, a more tyrannical man was never seen on this coast. In order to awe his slaves, he cut some almost to pieces; one he tied to the mouth of a gun and had it fired, three others he had hanged up in a wooden country-house, and set it on fire […]. These are facts that would not be believed, perhaps, in England, or Europe, or America, at present; but they are true. (Church Missionary Record 1830: 153)

Kissling, who was on a mission tour, accidentally used the same boat as the aforementioned colonists and thus witnessed their shooting of the slaveholder. The *Heidenbote* quoted Kissling with the exclamation:

> I wonder what the Lord has decided about West Africa in his inscrutable counsel: Why does he allow these poor creatures to be mistreated in such an abominable way? […] No human heart can

> imagine the satanic way in which European slave-traders who call themselves Christians comport themselves on the downtrodden shores of unfortunate Africa. (Heidenbote 1830: 65)

Kissling described scenes he had witnessed in the slave quarters of Don Magill that were capable of making the readers sick. The editor commented on Kissling's report:

> When the servants of vice in view of death do their utmost in order to satisfy their infamous avarice with the blood of the poor negroes, what can the friends of Christ do in order to end, with the almighty help of their God and saviour, this atrocity of destruction by the Gospel of peace? This is the highly important question that is before our souls more earnestly and loudly with every day. (ibid.: 67)

The engagement of many missionary societies in the abolitionist movement is well known. Again and again, the missionary periodicals published reports on scenes like this; even more often, they agitated against slavery in general and the slave trade in Africa in particular. Indeed, a predominant argument for their missions in Africa was the history of European—or Christian—slave trading. Therefore, the rhetoric of slavery, liberation and freedom played an important role in their publications. This was even more important because of the societies' emphasis on their Protestant character. They connected physical to spiritual slavery and physical to spiritual liberation when emphasising the doctrine of justification. In this theological context as well as in the political context they used the vocabulary of bondage, liberation and freedom.[1]



This article asks how the discourse on slavery, bondage and freedom and the practice against slavery were transferred to the Indian context and which influence this context—life in the Indian contact zone—had on the attitudes of the missionaries when they encountered a very different kind of bondage and slavery to the one they knew from reports on Africa and the Caribbean and with a very different kind of religiosity than they had experienced before. It investigates how their notions of slavery changed due to their contact with Indians. The article demonstrates the significance of religious and political conceptions of bondage for the missions' interpretation of their experiences in India and with Indian tradition and culture. The analysis of manuscript sources shows the missionaries' attitudes towards slavery in India and modifications therein that were due to their experiences in the contact zone.

The paper is based on an analysis of the periodical *Der evangelische Heidenbote* from its beginning in 1828 through the end of the 1850s, when the first generation of missionaries returned to Europe from India

and when political and intellectual attitudes towards mission and colonialism changed considerably, in Europe as well as in India.[2] In addition, it examines the manuscript letters and reports from some Basel missionaries to the inspector and the leading committee. The Basel missionaries are central to our question because they actually worked with slave castes and among enslaved workers in India. The *Church Missionary Record* is consulted at certain points because of the close interaction between the two societies. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) as well as the Basel Mission—societies that belonged to the evangelical and awakening movement—maintained several stations in southern India. They cooperated in Europe as well as in India and West Africa: Some missionaries transferred from one society to the other (mostly Basel to CMS); other Basel missionaries were unofficially supported by local CMS committees. The example of Sessing's and Kissling's report on the slaveholder demonstrates the interaction of the societies in their publications.

This article analyses evangelical missionaries' religious discourses and their practices. Political or economic motives of abolitionism that have been analysed over the last decades are only casually touched upon.[3] Following the missionaries' understanding and in view of the Indian situation, the article defines slavery in a broad way. The category includes both people who were owned by others and were bonded labourers as well as members of those castes that were considered invisible, polluting and who had, because of their birth and social connections, to do degrading and "polluting" work such as handling dead bodies.[4] By using the same word for both kinds of slavery, the missionaries linked them, and what was demanded for one could be applied to the other.



This article first delineates the Basel and CMS attitudes towards slavery and their religious discourse on bondage and liberation, as published in their periodicals. The focus of this section will be on Africa and the Caribbean. The second part analyses the religious concepts of bondage, liberation and freedom with regard to Indian tradition and culture. The third part deals with Basel missionaries' attitudes and practice regarding slavery in India. The second and third parts will demonstrate the impact of life in the contact zone on the missions' concepts of slavery and their behaviour towards slaves.

## Basel and Church Missionary Society on slavery

The evangelical Church Missionary Society was founded in 1799 as the 'Society for Missions to Africa and the East'. An obligation to make good for the 'wrongs' of slavery that Christians had inflicted on Africans was one of the stated motives for its foundation (Church Missionary Record 1830 [1st vol.]: 1; Heidenbote 1828 [1st vol.]: 2). In 1804, it sent its

first missionaries to West Africa. In 1813, the first CMS missionaries went to India. In both instances, Germans were the first to be sent out by the CMS, due to a lack of English candidates. Many of its leaders were central to the abolitionist movement, too, foremost among them William Wilberforce.

In 1815, the Basel Mission founded a seminary that was meant to educate missionaries who were to be sent out by other European mission societies. It turned out that needs of the CMS and supply from the Basel Mission complemented each other, and several decades of fruitful cooperation (several disagreements notwithstanding) ensued. In the 1820s, Basel changed its policy and sent missionaries abroad, first to the Caucasus and then to West Africa. In 1833, the new charter of the East India Company allowed foreign mission societies to work in India, and in the spring of 1834, Basel sent the first missionaries there, with the (first reluctant) help of CMS officials and the (reportedly never reluctant) help of the CMS missionaries in India. Following consultations with their colleagues from other missionary societies, they founded a first mission station in Mangalore. Contrary to the English Evangelicals, the German and Swiss awakened Christians mostly did not involve themselves in political actions at this time.



Two principal assumptions guided the CMS and even more so the Basel Mission in their approach to the world: In accordance with many evangelical and awakened Christians of the early nineteenth century, they interpreted everything from a religious perspective, and they held a fundamentally dualistic worldview. Because of the latter, they contrasted the atrocities of slavery with stories about the equality of all human beings.[5]

In the mission periodicals, there were more instances when the trade in and the ownership of slaves were repudiated in general terms than there were actual reports like the one quoted above (Heidenbote 1828: 17). This was at least partly due to the aims the missions pursued in their publications: Their main objective was not to demonstrate the atrocities of slavery but to emphasise the duties of "true" Christians and to underline the unity of humankind. Reports that describe the abilities of (former) slaves as being equal or even superior to those of Europeans were more numerous than those on the cruelty of slaveholders. Moreover, the missionaries worked mostly among former slaves and only seldom with those who were still enslaved—mainly because they simply had no access to slaves. And those slaveholders who allowed them to teach the slaves Christianity they were usually not those who mistreated their slaves and therefore they did not provide an example for cruelty.

Physical slavery was often paralleled with spiritual slavery: 'Many

English missionaries […] show the abandoned slaves […] the means to get from slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God' (Heidenbote 1830: 3). The Basel and CMS missionaries wanted to free the slaves from both. They would not accept mere physical freedom as "real" freedom, and they held that spiritual freedom should also find expression in life in the world. That is why, for the most part, they opposed slavery.

The Basel mission candidates were trained to view slavery both as a religious problem in light of the doctrine of justification and as a humanitarian problem. In his class on mission in the Basel seminary, Joseph Josenhans, director of the Basel mission from 1849 to 1879, counted slavery among the practices that had formerly been accommodated by missions but were then refuted (Josenhans 1874: 16v.; cf. on the accommodation e.g. Glasson 2012). Christian Gottlieb Blumhardt, the first Basel mission director, in his class on dogmatics from 1835-37 elaborated on bondage by sin. Nearly all of the Basel Indian missionaries during the first decades studied with Blumhardt. On several occasions, he stressed the equality of all human beings before God. He also stated that God wanted all people to be helped (Blumhardt I 1835/37: § 136). All humans, according to Blumhardt, had the same origin and the same goal, the *imago Dei* (Blumhardt II 1835/37: §§ 11-20).



Although they thought of themselves as strict Lutherans, these awakened Christians of the early nineteenth century modified Lutheran theology in one important point: They held the opinion that people could decide whether they wanted to serve God or the Devil. Blumhardt said that evil spirits could only get hold of those who 'served sin voluntarily and by their own choice' (Blumhardt I 1835/37: § 150).[6] He thus taught bondage by sin and free will simultaneously (Blumhardt II 1835/37: §§ 66, 69). There was a threefold goal to the life and death of Christ, according to Blumhardt: redemption, liberation and salvation (ibid.: § 141).[7] All people were, according to this theology, bound by a 'tyranny of evil lusts and passions', and Blumhardt called this 'the works of the Devil' (ibid.: § 146).[8] Christ was seen as the saviour and liberator. Blessedness was offered to all people because Christ had died for all (ibid.: §§ 184, 179). The freedom of will was defined by Christ himself, Blumhardt said, who had gone to death voluntarily and submitted to the wishes of the Father without considering his own will (ibid.: § 151). Everybody, according to Blumhardt, was free to respond to the offer of salvation. This was, aside from the emphasis on personal choice, pretty much traditional Lutheran theology with its emphasis on liberation and justification.

This theology was transferred and adapted to mission situations by the societies and their missionaries.[9] Slavery was seen as an evil because it prevented the slaves from getting to know Christianity and from

learning about the way to spiritual freedom. This argument reflected the experience of the missions in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Yet slavery also was seen as evil because of a more spiritual argument: If all men are equal and God's will for all is freedom, then they must not oppress each other.

Still, the missionaries faced a dilemma: on the one hand, they opposed slavery on principle; on the other hand, they sought to obey New Testament commandments that every person should accept his or her place in the world.[10] Therefore, as well as for political and strategic reasons, they simultaneously aimed at abolition and preached against social uproar. When slaveholders cared for their slaves, looked after their spiritual and physical well-being and allowed Christian instruction, Basel and CMS missionaries did not oppose them personally. With reference to the New Testament epistle to Philemon and other passages from the Bible, they did not condemn slavery. In the rare cases of "good" slaveholders, they thought that spiritual freedom could also be experienced in a situation when the body was bound. Indeed, they preferred this to a life of, as they called it, depravity among liberated slaves who had no work and no-one to look after and care for them. Clearly, spiritual freedom was more important to the missionaries than physical freedom. However, the ideal was the unity of both.



After some years of work with slaves and former slaves and in light of their experiences in these contact zones, the opinion of the mission societies and that of some of the missionaries working in Africa, the Caribbean or the Mediterranean area began to change. They clearly grew disappointed, and while they still favoured abolitionism and argued for the liberation of the slave, the enthusiasm of their former statements on the equality of all humans or even, as they had said in the early years, of the superiority of Africans over Europeans—or 'blacks' over 'whites'—decreased (cf. with reference to Africa, Price 2008). The black Africans and former slaves had not converted to Christianity as quickly or as wholeheartedly as expected. They did not all want to embrace the supposed spiritual freedom in addition to their physical freedom. They did not become the model Christians many of the missionaries had expected them to be. In the missions' dualistic framework, the opposite of slavery was no longer necessarily equality. Instead, the idea of vice came to the fore again. And vice could be committed, as they had learnt, by free Europeans as well as by African or American or Indian slaves. Thus, the traditional opposition between bondage by vice and freedom by Christ that Blumhardt had taught again became the dominant scheme of interpretation.

The strong connection between physical and spiritual freedom was

less often made and the call for abolitionism became increasingly based on other arguments. In the 1830s, this process was particularly apparent with individual missionaries.[11] In 1832, Georg Adam Kissling related how Africans sold their own children to slavery and deplored 'how deep Africa has sunk, how it is spiritually entirely destroyed' (Heidenbote 1832: 62). The negative opinion was less widespread among the missionary societies who at this time still maintained their conviction not only of the need for liberation but also of the equality of all human beings. The changes in the officials' opinions came later than those of the missionaries in the field.

Yet the mission societies and even most of the disappointed missionaries maintained their view of the connectedness between spiritual and physical freedom and the insistence on liberation from all kinds of bondage (except, of course, voluntary submission to God's will and thus bondage to God). One argument did not supplant the other but was added to it and gradually became more prominent.

### The Religious Discourse on Bondage and Freedom in India

The discourse of bondage and freedom was also applied to India, its culture, traditions and the life of Indians. In India, about twenty percent of the population lived as bonded labourers and were considered slaves (Frykenberg 2008: 47-8). The missionaries spoke of them as the 'slave caste' and did not differentiate between European, Hindu and Muslim slavery. The members of the slave castes were deemed 'invisible'; they counted among them those who would today be called 'Dalits'. Still, most of the Basel converts had not been slaves but were from the toddy drawer and fisher castes, and these were the missionaries' main addressees. Again, the missionaries interpreted all they saw and experienced in a religious framework. The adaptation to the Indian contact zone and the formation of a contact religiosity took place in several steps.



The first reports from India echoed Blumhardt's argumentation. The missionaries found a 'people that', in their eyes, 'lies in the bondage of raw idolatry and a tyrannical priesthood and that seems to languish under the curse of sin' (Heidenbote 1835: 28). They interpreted their first impressions of India as they had learnt to do in Europe. A point that certainly strengthened their shock at and rejection of Indian culture was the fact that at least some of the first three Basel missionaries had not wanted to go to India but were sent there against their will.[12] Furthermore, they had studied with Blumhardt during the last years and were now undergoing their first work experience as missionaries. They discovered bondage by sin and 'idolatry' everywhere and found 'the strongholds of Satan' to be particularly powerful in India. (ibid.: 92) They

interpreted the highly developed system of caste, of religion, of social ties and of long-standing and sophisticated traditions in light of their own religious concepts as illustrative of how far the Indians had gone in the wrong direction. And their dualistic view knew only of God and the Devil, much of India could only be ruled by the Devil.

When they had learnt the first languages, met the people and started preaching—the supposed core of mission work—they began to make different kinds of statements. A second period began. At first, they expressed hope. They described conversations with Indians and the contents of their sermons, they depicted how they tried to translate the doctrine of justification to the Indians. In their conversations, they encountered a certain openness to their teaching that reminded them of the doctrine of natural theology, according to which God had written his law and his Gospel into the heart of everyone and hence everyone could recognise God if he or she wanted to. They found traces of this natural law in their interlocutors and hoped for their eventual conversion (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1838: 8). At this stage, the reports became more sanguine and at the same time more centred on the missionaries' message than on the Indians.[13]



The missionaries recounted their teaching on freedom and liberation and on the unity of all human beings and reminded their European audience of their historical duty to bring freedom to this people and of the freedom they enjoyed themselves (ibid.: 25-7; Mögling to an English audience). Freedom was, according to their reports, mainly preached in a traditional Protestant way as freedom from sin, but also as freedom from supposedly powerless 'idols' and from traditions and social ties that were perceived as wrong. The idea of the unity of all human beings that had inspired the abolitionist cause (in terms of equality between blacks and whites) acquired a specific significance in India as equality between members of different castes. Indian society was hierarchically structured along castes or communities which could not be left without the risk of social death. When Georg Friedrich Sutter was asked if he belonged to the Christian caste, he responded that all people belonged 'to the caste of humans' and then elaborated that 'there are two castes among humans—the god and the bad [...]. But it was true that by nature we all belong to the caste of the bad' (Heidenbote 1841: 29). The struggle against the observance of caste distinctions in churches also entered the missionary discourse on justification. Moreover, it transferred their argumentation against slavery to the Indian context when members of 'slave castes' and Brahmins were meant to form a single community.

The hope for more conversions was not quickly fulfilled. Instead, the missionaries learnt more about Indian culture and customs the longer

they lived in this contact zone. This brought them back to the notion of bondage—the third period—, but this time it was not a purely religious interpretation from an outsiders' perspective but resulted from long experience in the contact zone and from interviews with Indian converts and those who wanted or did not want to become Christians. The missionaries found that strong social ties held back possible converts. They experienced what it meant for Indians to leave their families and their whole communities and to be considered 'dead' as a result (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1840: 92). When they now spoke of 'ties', they did so mostly from experience and less burdened with religious interpretation. Indeed, the religious part of the story could now be the praise of God and the new convert: that they had converted in spite of the ties binding them to their community.

In addition, they learnt more about Indian religiosity. And here again, they perceived bondage. This time, their notion of bondage in India was very concrete. It was founded in certain customs, objects and practices. One of the things that seemed to the missionaries to be most powerful in binding the Hindus was the lock of hair on top of the head. Hermann Gundert was quoted twice in the *Heidenbote* with long explanations about a Brahmin convert, Paul, who had made him realise the meaning of the lock of hair in terms of bondage (or had made him conscious in a way that Gundert couched his perception and sent the report to Basel). He related how he had waited for Paul to cut off his lock of hair of his own accord after his baptism, that Paul did not and Gundert therefore asked him to do so. Paul said, according to Gundert, that 'it is something grand about this piece of hair, because of this wretched thing country and people become strangers to him; yet, it is only now that he is entirely free' (Heidenbote 1845: 38; cf. also Heidenbote 1846: 26).



The social analysis was certainly true. Although in most strands of Hinduism there was no concept of conversion that was comparable to the Christian concept and although, from a Hindu perspective, one could worship the Christian god in addition to Hindu gods, Indian society in the nineteenth century had a very clear notion of what practices meant that a person had left the community. As a result, the individuals concerned were excluded from the community. There was usually no way back. In this respect, the cutting of the hair had indeed meant that Paul was now considered a stranger by his native community. It was the last and final step, not in becoming a Christian, but in leaving Hinduism. The notion of freedom must be understood in this context. Paul no longer had any responsibilities, neither to his family and friends nor to Hindu gods and the practice of religion in general.

But there was more to it. Drawing conclusions from their experiences

with conversions from Hinduism, the missionaries ascribed to the lock of hair a certain vitality, as they did with many other objects or practices in Hinduism. Gundert continued his report with:

> The locks of hair, particularly of the boys, are a really nice decoration; but only after some years staying here did I notice how much life there is in this decoration, it is as if the whole Hinduism hides in them. (Heidenbote 1845: 38)

When cutting the lock of hair, the former Hindu also cut off all connections to Hinduism that he would otherwise have continued to carry on his body. Gundert believed (or he believed that the Hindus believed) that this lock of hair could actually influence the convert and tie him to his past and to the Hindu gods. That is why cutting the lock of hair was so important to him, and why he spoke of freedom, of becoming 'truly free' by this practice.

After the missionaries had lived in India for some years, and after the first conversions had taken place and the Europeans had become more thoroughly acquainted with the country, its customs and its people, they interpreted bondage and freedom in a new way. The religious interpretation persisted, as did the perception of everything Hindu as binding, but the binding objects had changed; they had become more concrete. Furthermore, and this may be even more important, the description had become more nuanced and differentiated. The lock of hair could be at the same time a pretty decoration and a Hindu object binding the individual. The religious interpretation was reformulated and related to India as the missionaries had experienced it.



The principle that spiritual freedom should also have a physical dimension was applied to India, too. However, because of the dominance of converts from lower (but not from 'slave') castes in the Basel Mission, liberation from bonded labour was not the foremost concern of most Basel missionaries. They used concept of freedom mainly in two other respects: 1) in the freedom of choice and the free commitment to Christianity and 2) in a 'free' behaviour and 'free outlook' (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1852: 13).[14] The freedoms of choice and commitment were not as banal as it might seem. In many instances, Indians willing to convert were reported to suffer persecution by their family and friends and subjected to psychological or physical pressure. In this context, the decision for conversion was not self-evident. The missionaries underlined the personal decision by qualifying it as 'free' (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1845: 90; 1854: 99). The free behaviour and free outlook pointed to a similar direction. Furthermore, the expressions underlined the inner freedom the converts had supposedly gained with their conversion. As Christians

they were meant to be and feel free and therefore, their outlook and behaviour had to be free, too.

The freedom of the new Christians was precisely defined. It was meant as freedom from hell, from the influence of the Devil. It was not meant as freedom with regard to the way of life. Indeed, the behaviour that was expected of the converts was closely defined. They had to learn Christian teachings, they had to observe religious rites, to behave in a certain manner that was perceived as orderly and decorous. Still, this life was seen as free because it was seen as free from sin and the Devil. The missionaries repeatedly referred to the 'freedom of the children of God' (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1850: 55). This was the highest kind of freedom one could, in their view, attain.

We do not have many testimonies by Indian converts of the time. What we have, however, adds a new dimension to the discussion. The wealthy Brahmin convert Hermann Anandrao Kaundinya, one of the first converts in Mangalore, who later was trained in Basel as a missionary and afterwards worked in India as one of the regular Basel missionaries, shortly after his conversion wrote a letter to Basel in which he praised God,



> who had torn apart the golden chain of heathenism with which Satan had bound me. Yet, I am not free, I have been bought with the precious blood of Christ, my saviour, and am now a captive of him, who led captivity captive. I am glad to be one of the prisoners of Christ. (Heidenbote 1844: 90; cf. Eph 4,8; Philemon 1,9)

The Brahmin who had lost his wife, his family and—at least for several years—his property because of his conversion still said that he had been freed by Christ. Although he lost many of the things that ensured his liberty in India he called himself free. At the same time, Kaundinya insisted on not being free, on being, spiritually and in his way of life, a prisoner. With this emphasis, he not only repeated traditional (European) Protestant dogmas but heightened them (cf. e.g. Luther 1897: 12-38). The evangelical and awakened missionaries, too, wavered between accentuating the concept of free will and that of dedication and abandoning the own will. But the repeated use of the lexical field 'prisoner' enhanced the notion of bondage. To Kaundinya, bondage—understood as bondage by Christ—was a positive concept. Being a Brahmin, he interpreted it solely in a religious way. References to slavery and to his fellow Indian Christians were not (yet) on his mind.[15]

From the beginning of the 1850s, a significant new (fourth) period began. The Devil was mentioned with greater frequency in reports about

freedom and liberation. As mentioned before, he had played an important part as adversary of God and as being the one who binds people if they are not 'children of God' from the beginning of the mission. However, he assumed an even more important role after the Basel Mission had been in India for more than ten years. Statistically, the devil was mentioned more frequently. Moreover, he was mentioned more frequently in the same sentence in which bondage, liberation and freedom were also referred to. What had changed was the notion of the reality of the devil and of his agency in India. While this had been assumed from the beginning, it was at the time also a very general notion. By contrast, it was now perceived in specific practices.

One of the main reasons for this development was the experience with adherents of Bhutas (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1857: 54, 56). Some of the principal communities among which the Basel Mission found their converts worshiped Bhutas. The German and also the English-speaking missions usually referred to them as 'demons' but they were rather spirits, good or bad, that could be called upon. Some individuals were seen as mediums who, at festivals, brought themselves intro trance, whereupon the Bhuta spoke through them (Suzuki 2008; Brückner 1987). The missionaries called this 'possession'. They were convinced that it was the Devil who acted here. The more they understood the system of Bhuta-worship, the more important belief in the Devil became to them and the more powerful they found him. Therefore, their belief in bondage by the Devil and the necessity of liberation became even deeper, and they placed even more emphasis on liberation and freedom from the devil.



The ultimate reason for the relevance of freedom and for the strong belief in its possibility was the conviction that freedom was one of the properties of God. In the end, it was only God who was entirely free, according to this concept, and human freedom could only echo his freedom.

The adaptation of the missionaries’ concepts and practices of bondage and freedom to the Indian contact zone and the development of a contact religiosity happened in several steps. The better they knew India the more concretely they made their conceptions conform to Indian religion and culture. This also meant that their conceptions underwent a transformation. Some aspects of their religiosity became more important than they had been before, for example their understanding of the Devil. Others that had been firm religious convictions, but of a more theoretical kind, now became very practical, such as the notion of bondage and the understanding that conversion meant struggle with the community. The connection of these notions to slavery as experienced

in Africa and the Atlantic became weaker and weaker.

## Basel Missionaries in India and Slavery

However, there was "real" slavery in India, too. The Basel missionaries in India encountered it in two instances: in their work with those who belonged to a 'slave caste', and in their endeavours to build a prosperous church in the plantation Anjerkandy, where a European planter owned slaves. Both forms of slavery occurred in the Basel mission area.

The British government was reluctant in prohibiting slavery because it feared it would cause uproar among the leading castes. From many sides, missions were seen as dangerous to social peace. And indeed, when slavery was officially abolished in 1843, the missions were made to feel the consequences (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1844: 61; cf. also Neill 1985: 162).[16] They were considered to be the main agents in this respect, and maybe they were. Still, their comparative silence on slavery in India is conspicuous. Even the Basel Mission seldom referred to it and hardly ever repudiated it openly. In 1845, Hermann Gundert described country and people in Manantoddy near Tellicherry and mentioned slaves as one of three castes there: 'the Panier, their slaves, are a very deeply oppressed class of people' (Heidenbote 1845: 8).



This was very typical of the missionaries' dealing with slave castes in India. They did not oppose slavery aggressively. This may partly have been due to their political situation. They were dependent on the British government and on its goodwill, and the attitude of the British government in India differed considerably from what British governments demanded in Africa and the Caribbean (cf. e.g. Mann 2012). Moreover, the social situation of members of the slave caste in India, in most cases, differed significantly from that of slaves who were traded across the Atlantic. According to the evangelical and awakened missions, slavery was not to be tolerated because of the unity and equality of all humans, but at the same time all Christians were required to keep their stations in life, even slaves. The missionaries could find support in biblical passages such as the Epistle to Philemon for their comparative silence. That they did not actively favour this situation is clear from many scattered remarks. But it is just as clear that they did not usually intervene.

When slaves (those of 'slave castes' and those who were owned) converted to Christianity they were often depicted as model Christians, as in Africa or the Caribbean. Their present situation and behaviour was contrasted with their former state of slavery and thus became, in the view of the missions, even more admirable (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1852: 67). Only seldom were deficiencies mentioned, and usually ascribed to the people's (former) servitude (cf. e.g. Heidenbote 1841: 14).

A place where the Basel missionaries worked almost exclusively with slaves was the plantation Anjerkandy near Tellicherry. It had been founded around 1890 as a pepper plantation by the Scot Murdock Brown who bought Indians from the slave caste as workers (Hesse 1894: 145; Mann 2012: 92ff.). His son Francis Brown came to own the plantation by the beginning of the 1830s. He wanted his slaves to become Christians because he expected their 'improvement' from this move. Therefore, he contacted Carl Rhenius, one of the most important (German) CMS missionaries in Tamil Nadu. The Tirunelveli catechist Michael offered to go to Anjerkandy and was stationed there from the spring of 1835. The slaves received Christian names, and Michael founded a school. In contrast to the expectations of Brown, he not only cared for the 'civilisation' of the slaves, but also worked for evangelical, 'real' conversions. This implied that he introduced the evangelical concept of sin to this congregation. Those who adopted this message found sin not only in their own life, but also in that of the planters.

Brown had three sons by three different women, two Indian and French. The latter son was called the 'European' and took over the plantation when Francis Brown returned to England. The sons led a life of idleness and dissipation. The newly converted slaves not only denounced this life, but also refused to act as sex partners to the planters. As a result, the time the planters had allocated for schooling became more and more reduced and the workload was increased. After Brown's return to England in 1837, the 'devil of fornication', as the missionaries called it, dominated life in Anjerkandy, and after Rhenius' death in 1838, the catechist lost all protection. He only remained in Anjerkandy because he saw himself called there by God and feared his wrath if he left. The Christian slaves were forbidden to visit the church in Kannur and Europeans were forbidden to visit Anjerkandy.



In this situation, the Basel missionary Hermann Gundert planned a first visit to Anjerkandy in 1839. He went on a mission tour to Tellicherry, close to Anjerkandy, and sent the brothers Brown a message that he would visit Anjerkandy and that, since he was accustomed to travel and to inconveniences, he would come unannounced and did not need the treatment of a guest. Yet he was told that he would not be allowed to visit Anjerkandy alone. John Brown, the eldest brother and one of the Anglo-Indian children, would accompany Gundert. In Anjerkandy, Gundert met the second Anglo-Indian Brown, George, and was greeted by some one hundred slaves.

The planters, the missionary, the catechist and maybe even the slaves had differing goals and agendas. The most important wish of the planters seems to have been to be left alone and to have no one interfere

with their slaves. It seems that Gundert was not allowed to speak to the slaves in private. In any case, he was not allowed to do so with the catechist and repeatedly sought situations in which he could talk to him without being overheard. When the planters tried to occupy all his time he went for a walk with them and posed some children a number of questions with the purpose of testing their knowledge of the Christian faith while walking. He was very pleased with what he heard and said that those children 'knew more about scriptural truths than some older Christians who had had an English education'.[17] This was directly aimed at the Browns.

Gundert hence tried to find out more about the situation in Anjerkandy and to strengthen the catechist's position while at the same time trying to evangelise planters and slaves alike. His second day in Anjerkandy was a Sunday and he first preached to an Indian congregation. This is one of the rare cases in which he recounted the contents of his sermon in his manuscript report to Basel and it is highly interesting: He used a well-known story about an Indian king who wanted to be reborn as a Brahmin and therefore slipped into a golden cow by its mouth. When he came out of its backside, however, the Brahmins would still not recognised the king as one of them. The cow had not been able to help. Jesus, however, said Gundert, would really convert the audience when they believed in him and he would also eat and keep company with them. Being slaves, they were called to become members of the kings' and priests' caste in communion with Jesus.[18]



This was a very radical message for members of a caste who always had to keep forty feet away from those of higher castes and whose very shadow was supposed to pollute other Indians. It is no wonder that neither those of higher castes nor the planters wished for Gundert to preach in this manner. Yet Gundert's message remained spiritual. He did not call for social upheaval. Still, he insisted, like the other Basel missionaries, that caste distinctions be abandoned as soon as a person converted to Christianity.

Gundert's report on Michael, the catechist, was extremely favourable. Not only did he praise the results of Michael's teaching and preaching but also his commitment. Whenever he sought Michael out, he found him missionising. The Browns continued trying to prevent his meeting Michael and the slaves. At the second day, they made their negative feelings so clear that Gundert had to leave.[19]

During the same year 1839, Gundert and his wife opened a new mission station in Tellicherry close to Anjerkandy, and from then on the plantation was regularly visited by Gundert and, after Hebich's relocation to Kannur in 1841, occasionally by Samuel Hebich. The relationship

with the planters remained difficult although the 'European' brother, Frank, appeared more open towards the mission.

Sometimes, as with African and Caribbean Christians, the congregation of slaves at Anjerkandy served as a model of exemplary Christianity or as living proof of the changes conversion to Christianity could bring. On occasion, individual Anjerkandy Christians were described, mostly (at least at first) as exemplary Christians. The predominant tone of reports on Anjerkandy, however, as familiarity with circumstances there increased, became one of grievance. In spring 1840, Gundert reported on 'lapses' by the part of Michael for the first time. In January 1841, Michael resigned because of an argument about his salary (which was paid by the planters).

At least partly due to his ecclesiology, Gundert, like other Basel missionaries, increasingly involved the congregation in the decision-making process. In 1841, he had baptised a man, Timotheus, who had remained singularly steadfast in the face of numerous quarrels within the congregation. Gundert felt that baptism was an appropriate response to this steadfastness. Shortly thereafter, however, Timotheus tried to commit adultery as a way of punishing another man. As a result of this, Brown gave him a beating. Gundert asked the congregation for their opinion. They complained about Timotheus, and Gundert found him, in fact, to be unrepentant. He therefore excluded him from the Lord's Supper.



Some weeks later, he readmitted him, giving as reasons Timotheus' repeated appeals and the changed opinion of the congregation. This is one of the examples that indicate how the Basel missionaries included the congregation in their decisions. It shows that their ecclesiology was focused on the community and was not entirely top-down (European missionary–Indian convert), not even during the first years of the mission. The case also demonstrates that Gundert held the congregation of slaves in just as great esteem as any other congregation. He doubted their value neither in terms of Christian equality nor in terms of equality of abilities.

However, neither in India nor later in Europe did he embrace the abolitionist position entirely (Gundert 1900: 63). In 1842, shortly before slavery was officially forbidden in India and the 'slave castes' were no longer considered slaves—at least officially—, Gundert commented 'carefully' on the notion that slavery was entirely a question of caste and that there was not much the government could do about it politically as long as they forbade that escaped slaves be returned.[20] Indeed, when the government abolished the slave castes and the English authorities in the district to which Anjerkandy belonged insisted on equality in practice and thus on the officials accompanying former slaves into town, the

officials followed this order to the last possible person. When the officials entered town with the former slaves, uproar ensued (Hesse 1894: 188).

Gundert's relationship to Anjerkandy shows the variety of Basel missionaries' approaches to slavery as well as the ways in which Gundert changed because of his experience with the slaves there. His first description was very positive; he depicted devoted Christians, progress and development, intelligence and knowledge, orderliness and commitment. These Christians could serve as models for Indians and Europeans. It may be that Gundert was influenced in his perception by what he had heard and read about former slaves in Africa and the Caribbean. In any case, his report resembled the reports of his colleagues from those areas. When he got to know the congregation better, disenchantment set in. He was still on the side of the slaves and he still found exemplary Christians among them, but they were not any longer held up as an example in their entirety.



In addition, Gundert had arrived at a differentiated view of slavery as a caste phenomenon. He did not think that it could (or maybe even should) be solved by means of laws. Rather, he voted for a cultural solution. If one day Christian values were upheld in India, then the barriers between castes would break down. In Christian churches, however, they had to be dissolved immediately. This was the most important Basel approach to slavery in India and elsewhere: Within the Christian community all had to be regarded as equally contributing to the community. This is how Gundert and his colleagues transferred their religious convictions, what Blumhardt among others had taught, to the Indian context and interpreted them in their contact zone. Distinctions on the basis of social status were not allowed. As Gundert had said in his sermon: even slaves were called to become kings and priests.

A contrasting story to Hermann Gundert's can be told by the example of Herrmann Mögling, his colleague and friend. Soon after his arrival in India in 1836, Mögling became responsible for the mission school in Mangalore. In 1847, he opened a seminary for catechists. He had always addressed educated and mostly upper-caste Indians. Without any doubt, his most important experience was the conversion of the Brahmin Anandrao Kaundinya in 1843, his first convert, who later became his closest friend. Slaves had never been on his agenda, probably partly because of his personality, partly because of his work tasks.

In 1853, Mögling quit the Basel Mission and opened a new mission in Coorg. In the beginning, he again turned to the leading castes and ignored the slaves who amounted to a considerable percentage of the population. But he then discovered that it was mainly peasants and slaves who listened to him (Frenz 2003: 209). Gradually, he turned to

them. Slavery had by then already been officially abolished for ten years. But this had not really changed the social and cultural landscape in Coorg (ibid.). Therefore, Mögling like other missionaries still spoke of the Selavas or Holeyas/Pulayars as slaves. In 1857, he accepted a larger group of them as catechumens (ibid.). From then on, he reported on their developments, their progress in knowledge of Christianity and towards conversion, and on their moral conduct, which increasingly converged with what an awakened Christian would expect. Like Gundert, he reported involving the whole congregation in decision-making, including the decision who should become an elder and who should be baptised first.

There were, therefore, many commonalities between Mögling's and Gundert's approach. The respective ecclesiologies of the two missionaries were very similar. Nonetheless, there was a great difference between them: While Gundert started from a very high estimation of converted slaves and then became disenchanted, Mögling went through the opposite process. He had not demonstrated interest in slaves until he had more or less been forced to. He then valued them highly. Only then did they become equals for him, not only theoretically but also practically. Life in a contact zone that was populated by slaves had changed—maybe not his opinion—but his perspective and his practice towards a truly inclusive vision.



**Conclusion**

The religious conception of justification, bondage, liberation and freedom, and the political argumentation on antislavery played an important role in the Basel and Church Missionary Societies from the beginning. Because of their import, these conceptions were transferred to new contexts like India where the notion of bondage and slavery was broadened. By way of this transfer and because of the experiences the missionaries underwent in the Indian contact zone, the conceptions were modified. One example of this was the adaptation of the concept of bondage and liberation. In India, certain practices and social conditions came to be seen as central for binding Indians. This could both refer to an item like the Hindu lock of hair and to family relations or traditional concepts. There was no direct social or political link of these customs to slavery but it was made by the missionaries in the way they spoke about them.

In the adaptation process, the missionaries' conceptions changed in two important ways: They became more concrete with regard to India and the hierarchies of values and conceptions within their concepts were modified. The Devil and demons became more and more important to them because they were convinced of having encountered them in

specific instances and they also encountered people who, in their opinion, worshipped him. The Devil was seen as the binding power.

There were parallels in the development of the missionaries' conceptions of slavery and liberation and of the hierarchy of peoples with regard to Africa, the Caribbean and India on one side and Europe or the West on the other: In Africa, they began with the assumption that liberated slaves were equal or even superior to Europeans. In India, they developed a similar opinion very early with regard to Indians in general and Indian slaves in particular. When the people did not convert as quickly and adopt European customs as unreservedly as expected, they grew disenchanted and gradually abandoned the notion of non-European superiority. This also meant that their perspective had changed. At first, it had (implicitly) been on the 'non-Christian' Europeans to whom the missionaries wanted to hold up a mirror by emphasising their expectations of the Indians. Later, the Indians themselves were in the focus.

Still, the missions insisted on the—at least religious—equality of all humans and therefore continued to oppose slavery and to work to build communities. Most importantly to them, they did not tolerate differentiation between members of different castes in India. With this practice they aimed to overcome every notion of physical slavery in the church. What remained was religious bondage with regard to God. With regard to the political, cultural and social structures in India, however, both missions worked silently, not aggressively against slavery and aimed at forming model communities of equality.



## Endnotes

[1] On the religious argumentation cf. e.g. Anstey (1981); Lotz (1929); Brown (2006: 333-450); Hilton (1988: esp. 203-11); Soderlund (1985); Davis (1966: 291-390). On the SPG cf. Glasson (2012). The SPG, however, did not represent all (missionary) Anglicanism. Cf. with regard to the perspectives of Africans: Ambrose (2010).

[2] In India this was particularly due to the rebellion of 1857, cf. Wagner (2010); Pati (2007).

[3] For an overview cf. Drescher (1990); Klein (1990); Temperley (1981); Peterson (2010: 129-49); Stauffer (2010). For an overview over the most important sources cf. e.g. Oldfield (2003). Cf. also Engerman (1981); Drescher (2009; 2010).

[4] Cf. for a discussion of this definition Zeuske (2013: esp. 99-108); Eltis/Engerman (2011); Ward (2011); Campbell (2012). Mann (2012: 10) votes for a narrower definition but also refers to slave castes. The boundaries between the two forms of slavery were fluid.

[5] Cf. e.g. Church Missionary Record (1830: 14) (on West Africa): 'I shall always be glad to collect such facts, from information and observation, respecting the inhabitants of Africa, as will prove the best refutation of the great errors of many Philosophers in Europe, who disdain the idea of acknowledging the black Africans as brethren belonging to the same family of which they are members. […] there is more fear of God, and less vices to be met with, among this people, than—it is awful to say—the majority of well-instructed Europeans exhibit in their conduct at home and abroad. It is remarkable, that the Africans of the interior extremely despised and abhor white people, on account of the truly-abominable slave trade. This is an unquestionable

evidence, that such Africans have higher and more just feelings than the advocates of slavery'' Cf. also Heidenbote (1840: 89).

[6] 'die freiwillig und aus eigener Wahl der Sünde dienen'.

[7] 'Errettung, Befreiung, Seligmachung (σώζω)'.

[8] 'Tyrannei böser Lüste und Leidenschaften […] Werke des Teufels'.

[9] Those Basel missionaries' wives who worked in the mission and whose letters and reports are extent expressed the same views.

[10] This twofold concept of slavery by evangelical missionaries was noted in several studies, depending on the point of view of the author with more emphasis on one side or on the other—or with the interpretation of duplicity, cf. e.g. Glasson (2012); Anstey (1981); Stark (2003). On official attitudes towards slavery in India cf. e.g. Mann (2012: 161-203).

[11] We would also have to differentiate between missionaries and slaves in the different countries. The argumentation in this section relies mainly on statements on Africa and the Caribbean. The disillusionment began earlier with regard to the Mediterranean area where expectations were on the one hand higher because the missions thought they could fall back on a common history of Christianity and they were lower, on the other hand, because they saw more 'depravity' and had fewer explanations such as the (previous) enslavement of large parts of the population.

[12] Basel Mission Archive, C-1.2 Mangalore 1841, No. 7, S. Hebich, 31 December 1834.

[13] This was partly due to the recipients of the reports: Both the mission committee and the readers of the *Heidenbote* were probably assumed to prefer this kind of report over ethnographic descriptions. Yet some of the missionaries, mostly those who had studied at universities, wrote ethnographic studies, too (e.g. Mögling 1855), created dictionaries and grammars (e.g. Kittel 1985 [1903]), and compiled traditional songs, myths and histories (Mögling 1848-52). This, however, seldom entered their correspondence with Basel and hardly ever periodicals like the *Heidenbote*.



[14] 'freier Blick'.

[15] Kaundinya later committed himself and his fortune to working with deprived people and former slaves in Coorg, cf. Binder (2007); Frenz (2003: 41-56).

[16] The importation of slaves had already been forbidden in 1811. Unofficially, slavery continued much longer. (Mann 2012: 199-202)

[17] Basel Mission Archive, C-1.7 Talatscheri 1839-40, No. 1, H. Gundert, 24 January-10 February 1839: 2r.

[18] This refers to the threefold office of Christ as king, priest and prophet as much as to the caste system. For the Hindu ritual cf. Bayly (1999: 77).

[19] Basel Mission Archive, C-1.7 Talatscheri 1839-40, No. 1, H. Gundert, 24 January-10 February 1839: 2v.

[20] Basel Mission Archive, C-1.7 Talatscheri 1842, No. 7, H. Gundert, 18 September 1842: 1v.

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