The Legacy of John Philip

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In 1819 the Reverend Doctor John Philip, a tall, dark, strongly built Scots Congregationalist minister, began a career as resident director of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in South Africa. It was a career that would make him the missionary, in addition to David Livingstone, that any South African, white or black, could name. Indeed Philip has become so much part of the South African historical memory that Prime Minister Johannes Strydom could use his name as an immediately recognizable symbol. When, in 1955, he warned missionaries and other clergy not to imitate Fr. Trevor Huddleston, he told them not to “do a Philip.”

The Scottish Years

John Philip was born in Kirkaldy, Scotland, on April 14, 1775, the son of a handloom weaver. At that time Scotland was going through a period of far-reaching economic and social change. Having survived for centuries as a poor agrarian society with a small urban periphery, after 1760 it was rapidly transformed into a comparatively wealthy society with a developing urban sector. Like the vast majority of the handloom weavers of the time, John’s father was both literate and able to sustain his family comfortably above the poverty line.

Although his parents were members of the Church of Scotland, when John was converted as a young man, he became a member of an Independent chapel. He was converted during the evangelistic campaigns of the brothers Robert and James Haldane, whose efforts created many Independent chapels, some of which went on to form the Congregational Union and others to swell the ranks of the Scottish Baptists.

John became first a clerk in, and then the manager of, a new spinning mill in Dundee, but this transition from artisan to middle-class status soon ended when he resigned in a dispute with the owners over child labor and inadequate wage rates. He was not back as a weaver for long when, in 1799, he went off to Hoxton, the Congregationalist academy of England, to train for the ministry. At the end of his three-year course at Hoxton, Philip went as the assistant minister of the congregation at Newbury, Berkshire. He was there for barely two years when he received a call from Belmont Church of Aberdeen. This was one of the oldest of the congregations that later formed the Congregational Union of Scotland.

Philip very quickly established himself as the leading evangelical preacher in the northeast of Scotland. He was in great demand in Church of Scotland kirks that were ministered to by members of the “popular party” as well as in Seceder kirks and Independent chapels. He was particularly effective in reaching young people, and in the university town of Aberdeen he always had round him a strong body of young women and men. He

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made his manse a meeting place for these young people and organized a series of Bible studies for them each year. These were conducted in a manner very different from what was usual at that time. In the first place, young women were encouraged to attend. Equally striking was his encouragement of the members to initiate topics themselves and to propound their own ideas. “It was customary for members of the class to propound questions,
or to state difficulties arising in the course of Bible study. After hearing various opinions expressed by members it was no uncommon thing for Dr. Philip to turn to Miss Paul, before solving the crux himself and ask, 'Well, Margaret, what have you to say to this?'  This was in a day when preacher and professor alike were used to being solo performers from pulpit or rostrum, from whence they pronounced on all matters with unchallenged magisterial authority.

In 1809 Philip married Jane Ross, who not only became a loving mother and powerful influence on the three daughters and four sons she bore him but also was his secretary and personal assistant throughout their life together in South Africa. Without any of the opposition that would certainly have occurred in the later nineteenth century, Jane simply took over the LMS office when John was away on one of the many long and arduous tours he undertook in South Africa. In addition, from 1830 until her death in 1847, she was, in her own right, the official agent of the Paris Evangelical Mission in South Africa.

The attitude toward women was typical, in the first half of the century, of the tradition of evangelicalism to which he belonged. It was that of Finneyite revivalism in America, which made Oberlin a coeducational institution where the first women were trained for the ministry in mainstream Protestantism. Again Philip's evangelicalism was like that of the Finneyite movement in his lack of concern for the classic differences between the denominations. In Scotland Philip was one of the main propagandists for the LMS, with its message aimed at bringing about in the individual a warm personal faith in Jesus as Savior and a commitment to spreading this good news about redemption from the power of sin and death to all humankind, scorning denominational difference as a hindrance to the task.

Our design is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of Church Order and Government about which there may be differences of opinion among serious Persons, but the Glorious Gospel of the blessed God to the Heathen: and that it should be left (as it ever ought to be left) to the minds of the Persons whom God may call into the fellowship of His Son from among them to assume for themselves such form of Church Government as to them shall appear most agreeable to the Word of God.2

**Called to South Africa**

Although an ardent supporter of the LMS, Philip had not seen his ministry as lying with them. However, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the work of the LMS in South Africa, within the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope and among the tribes beyond its frontiers, was in disarray. The solution to these problems, the board of directors decided, was to send two of their number to review the work and recommend reforms, and for one to remain as resident director to ensure that the reforms were carried out. Two Scots were chosen to perform this task, John Campbell and John Philip, with Philip designated to become the resident director. Philip's congregation in Aberdeen was very loath to let him go. It took a great deal of persuasion and diplomacy on the part of the LMS board before they released him at last, albeit grudgingly.

Together with his wife, Jane, and their four children, Mary, Elizabeth, William, and John, the new resident director of the society arrived in Cape Town in 1819. A further three children, Durrant, Margaret, and Wilberforce, were born in South Africa. William and Durrant went on to become ministers of Coloured congregations in South Africa,1 while Elizabeth married John Fairbairn, her father's friend and ally, the editor of South Africa's first newspaper, the *Cape Commercial Advertiser*.

Fairbairn's paper was the vehicle for liberal political opinion in South Africa for all his long tenure of the editorship, and he, together with his father-in-law and Andries Stockenstrom, can be seen as the founding fathers of South African liberalism. Without them there would not have been the non-racial franchise for the Cape Parliament, which lasted from 1852 until 1910, when it disappeared with the creation of the Union of South Africa.

**South Africa: The First Phase**

The South Africa to which Philip came was divided into two. First there was the colony. It had been ruled by the Netherlands East India Company until the Napoleonic Wars, then by the Batavian Republic, and in 1815, by the British, whose authority was made permanent by the Treaty of Vienna. Ninety percent of the white inhabitants were what the British have traditionally referred to as the Dutch or the Boers, people who prefer to be called Afrikaners.4 The first sizable influx of British settlers arrived in a mass emigration scheme in 1820, which brought the white population to about forty thousand persons.

The indigenous population of the colony were the Khoi, referred to by Afrikaner and Briton as Hottentots and some as Bastaards, since many were of mixed Khoi-white ancestry. The colony also contained slaves, whose number, at about twenty-four thousand, was roughly equal to that of the Khoi. They were mainly from Madagascar, Angola, and Mozambique, though there was a distinct group from Indonesia known locally as Malays.

The other division of South Africa was the area to the north and east of the colonial frontiers. To the east were the Xhosa people, who, by 1819, had effectively halted what once had appeared to be the inexorable advance of the Afrikaner cattle herders. To the north were many Tswana and Sotho groupings, with a major center of power at the court of Moshweshwe of the Sotho. There was also a small Griqua state that, by 1819, was already on the way to becoming a “Christian” state. The Griqua were people drawn from many tribes, including runaway slaves and white Dutch army deserters, who had come to accept the leadership of two Christian Bastaard families. They had been welded into one community, with the church and school as its center.

Upon his arrival in the Cape, Philip immediately started to get the affairs of the LMS in order and build better relations with the English governor and his staff. So successful was he that the governor appointed him to head the relief committee set up to aid the 1820 British settlers who were in grave distress after two successive bad harvests. These good relations soon ended, however, when Philip stood by his fellow Scots, John Fairbairn and Thomas Pringle,5 in their struggle for the freedom of the press in South Africa. Worse was to follow. At least in the matter of the press, British settlers and some Afrikaners were on his side. But
this was not to be so when he began to take up the issue of the status of the Khoi and other “free persons of colour.” Philip was content to leave the issue of slavery to Buxton and the Anti-Slavery Society in London, where alone abolition could be achieved. However, he had come soon to see that abolition was of little use if the slaves were to be freed only to join the Coloureds in their de facto slavery. In 1811 and 1812 the British had passed laws that gave the Khoi and other “free persons of colour” legal recognition as people. (They had had absolutely no existence in law under the Netherlands East India Company.) However, the British laws in effect placed upon every “free person of colour” the need to be the servant or dependent of some white. Of these laws Philip wrote “There is no tyranny so cruel (says Montesquieu)

Coloureds were subjected to impositions created to provide cheap labor for white farmers and traders.

as that which is exercised under the pretext of law, and under the colour of justice; when wretches are, so to speak, drowned on the very plank to which they clung for safety.” The Coloureds were subject to many impositions that did not apply to whites, impositions that, as Philip came to believe, were deliberately created to provide a cheap labor pool for white farmers and traders. Such an imposition was the corvee. Philip complained of its effects in checking the attempts of some of the Christians at the mission stations to improve themselves. “If a Hottentot, possessing one wagon by which he is able to earn 76 dollars by one journey to Grahamstown, is liable to be dragged from his employment to serve for 4/- a day, the people liable to such exactions, labour under oppression.” Having campaigned vigorously but unsuccessfully for change, in 1826 he returned to the United Kingdom determined to enlist evangelical political groups in his cause—in particular, the Anti-Slavery Society.

He and Thomas Fowell Buxton became close friends, and Buxton encouraged him to write a book about the situation. This was published in 1828, the passionately Christian and radically egalitarian Researches in South Africa. In the campaign they waged together, Buxton and Philip gained a tremendous victory in Parliament. In a series of complicated maneuvers in Parliament and at the Cape, it became mandatory in the colony for all His Majesty’s subjects to share the same civil rights. This, in effect, meant that Coloureds (as well as Xhosa and Tswana people when some were incorporated into the colony later) could buy land anywhere, buy a house in any part of town, and, when the vote came (in 1852), qualify for it in exactly the same way as whites. It meant equal pay for equal work, at least some integrated schools, and many other things peculiar to the colony, all of which began to disappear once the Union of South Africa of 1910 was consummated.

The Tribes Beyond the Frontier

On his return to the Cape, Philip became the focus of much bitter feeling on the part of Afrikaners and British settlers. This was made worse when he went again to the United Kingdom, taking with him several Coloured and Xhosa Christians to give evidence before the Aborigines Committee. Undeterred, he continued, on his return to the Cape, to supervise the missions of the society, traveling thousands of miles by oxcart, touching the whole colony and also visiting the Xhosa, Sotho, and Griqua beyond the frontier.

In the case of the peoples beyond the frontier, his approach was radically different from that which he adopted toward people within the colony. His constant plea was for more and more missionaries and honest traders to go and live among them, but equally for the government to prevent any encroachment by whites who sought permanent possession of the land. This policy has led some modern writers to insist that he was a forerunner of the doctrine of apartheid. In fact he had a two-pronged policy. On one hand, he sought integration within the area where whites owned most of the land and the European economy had taken over. On the other hand, where this had not taken place, he wished African societies to be left autonomous. Working within those African societies, missionaries and traders (what Livingstone called Christianity and commerce) would, he believed, help trigger spontaneous change and development of societies both Christian and African. He believed that this had happened already among the Griqua and was about to happen among the Basotho. After visiting the court of Moshweshwe, he wrote to Buxton,

Moshesh the king of the Basutos, of whom James Backhouse and George Washington Walker give some account, is one of the most extraordinary men I ever met with, and I had almost said a miracle of a man, when his circumstances in Africa are taken into consideration, and the French mission among his people, present one of the loveliest pictures under heaven. Have I been permitted to visit that country, and to see the heavenly vision I have seen, merely to witness it and then be obliged to say it has fled forever!!

Why he feared that it had fled was that the Basotho, and all other peoples beyond the frontier of the colony, were threatened by the massive exodus of the Boers from the colony known as the Great Trek. Philip fought hard to persuade the British government not to allow this kind of settler expansion, but he failed completely, as the creation of Natal and the independent states of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal made only too clear.

Was John Philip primarily a social reformer? He would have been bewildered by the accusation. Everything he did was part of his service of the gospel message. His political work, which annoyed so many of the powerful, stole the headlines. Yet it was no more important than any other aspect of what he saw as his one task.

Every bit as important as his attempts to make the British government of South Africa the “regular and good government” that God demands was his persistent advocacy of what he called “native agency” as the key to the evangelization of Africa and his equally insistent attempts to persuade more and more missionary societies to come to southern Africa.

Just as the all-pervasive influence of new race theories affected British colonial policy increasingly after 1840, so, at first gradually, then with increasing pace after the coming of full-blown social Darwinism, the policy of missionary societies was affected also. (The most glaring illustration is seen in the tragic story of Bishop Adaj Closether, not to be succeeded by another African bishop in the Anglican Communion till the mid-twentieth century.)

Before this philosophy created the crippling perception of the African evangelist as inevitably the missionary’s assistant, Philip insisted that only Africans could convert Africa and that an African ministry for an autonomous church must be created as rapidly as possible.

His attempt to bring more societies to come to work in South
Africa achieved greater success. The Glasgow Missionary Society (an associate society of the LMS) came and created Lovedale, the most important single educational foundation open to Africans in southern Africa until it was destroyed by the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Philip went to France and persuaded the Paris Evangelical Mission to send missionaries to work with Moshweshwe and his Sotho people, with extraordinary results. The Rheineschen Missiongesellschaft and the American Board were two other organizations brought to South Africa by Philip.

John Philip's last years were darkened by a great deal of sadness in his private life and by a sense of defeat over issues central to his life's work. In July 1845, his son William, pastor of the Coloured congregation at Hankey in the eastern Cape, was drowned along with Philip's grandson, Johnny Fairbairn. Then in October 1847, his beloved wife and comrade, Jane, died; his misery was added to when, a few weeks later, one of his granddaughters was killed in an accident. At the same time he felt, correctly, that the directors of the LMS in London no longer trusted his judgment or saw the problems of South Africa as he did. In addition he felt that so many missionaries of the LMS and of other societies no longer had a commitment to human equality.

In 1850 Philip retired from active service and went to live in the Coloured community of Hankey, where another of his sons was a pastor. He died there on August 27, 1851, and was buried by his beloved Coloured people in what was, until the abolition of the apartheid laws in 1991, a Coloured graveyard.

Troublemaker or Prophet?

Among twentieth-century writers in Britain and South Africa, John Philip has provoked as sharp hostility as he did in his lifetime among British settlers and the Afrikaner herders. Even the entry in the modern evangelical *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* says of him, "His aggressive and intolerant manner did harm, as did his unwillingness to admit mistakes and his unsympathetic attitude towards colonists." Wealth, land, and the support of the British authorities were on the side of the colonists who had stolen the people's land; what was Philip supposed to do? The Coloured people inside the colony, and the Griqua, Sotho, and Xhosa beyond, had a very different view of him, symbolically proclaimed by his grave, which is in what was, under apartheid laws, a Coloured graveyard.

Another picture of him in contrast with the negative was given by the young Eugene Casalis of the Paris Mission. He wrote about his arrival in South Africa:

Dr. Philip received us with a kindness truly paternal. He was entertaining at this time several missionaries, coming, one from the interior of Africa, others from India and Madagascar.

We were struck from the first hour with the heartiness and good humour which reigned at his table. I had rarely heard men laugh so heartily. This shocked us a little at first, being still full of the emotions of a first arrival. Young recruits, we were entering the camp with a solemnity perhaps a little exaggerated.13

John Philip has been honored by some in South Africa as the founding father of South African liberalism. This he was to a degree, but it was an incidental product of his devout evangelical claim of the sovereignty of God over all life. Today urgent debates go on about the priority of personal evangelism versus the seeking of justice for the oppressed. Philip saw no conflict between those two, which for him, were but two faces of the same coin.

He saw that the African church had to be African. Fully 150 years before the "Apartheid is a heresy" decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, he saw with utter clarity that discrimination was contrary to the Word of God.

Notes

2. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, May 9, 1796, LMS Archives.
3. The Cape Coloureds are the descendants of Khoi, slaves, and many offspring produced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when concubinage was common and interracial marriage not unknown. By the late 1840s they were one community whose language was what is now Afrikaans.
4. Afrikaners are the descendants of the farmers who settled in the Cape, some were Dutch, others were indentured German soldiers of the Netherlands East India Company, and still others were Huguenot refugees (hence names such as Malan, Retief, and deKlerk).
5. Thomas Pringle was a Scottish settler who came in 1820 and the first South African poet. He later became secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society.
10. The Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements).
11. Philip to Buxton, November 22, 1842, SA Odds, box 3, folder 5, LMS Archives.
12. Between 1836 and 1840 about one-third of the Afrikaner people left the colony in an organized emigration, a form of "rebellion by removal" against British rule.

Bibliography

**Writings of John Philip**


**Works About John Philip**


John Philip Sousa, bandleader and composer, is Among America’s greatest treasures is the legacy of John Philip Sousa, “The March King.” The music of this beloved bandleader and composer, whose most prolific period straddled the turn of the 20th century, continues to fill hearts with a wave of national pride and patriotism. Sousa’s "The Stars and Stripes Forever" is, in fact, the national march, and his creative medium, the marching band, has become an American institution.

John Philip Sousa was the child of European parents. Personal Life & Legacy. John Philip Sousa married Jane van Middlesworth Bellis on December 30, 1879; the couple had three children; John Philip, Jane Priscilla, and Helen. On March 6, 1932, at the age of 77, John Philip Sousa died of heart failure in Reading, Pennsylvania. Just the day before, he had led the "Ringgold Band" in a rehearsal of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." The Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge across the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. was dedicated to the memory of John Philip Sousa on December 9, 1939. The John Philip Sousa House in Hicks Lane, Sands Point, New York, also known as "Wild Bank," was declared a "National Historic Landmark" in 1966 though it remains a private residence and is not open to the public. The changes at the John Paul II Institute are part of a larger bid to force change in the Church. The matter at hand— which keeps popping up in different forms—is whether Pope Francis can eradicate the teaching legacy of Pope John Paul II, particularly on questions of human sexuality. Oddly enough, this summer’s dispute involves a Vatican body named after the canonized former pontiff: the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences. Since its inception, the Institute (which was originally known by the slightly simpler name, the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family) had been an academic greenhouse nourishing the thought that St. John Paul had promoted: And John became the first martyr for Christ, the first of many through the centuries since who have suffered and died for the gospel, and done so at the hands of those who hate the gospel and love their sins. So by divine standards, John is noble, to put it mildly. As I said, the greatest man who ever lived up until his time, a man who did exactly what God wanted him to do and did it completely, a man who had the wonderful, wonderful privilege of becoming the first martyr for Christ. His life was monumental, his accomplishments unequalled because of the uniqueness of his responsibility. The st