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‘Greater love ...’: Methodist missionaries, self-sacrifice and relational personhood

In recent years, the relationship between conversion, culture and personhood has been a key issue in anthropological approaches to Christianity. From one perspective, the force of Christian ideation stimulates reflection on existential and ontological truths. Working with recently converted Urapmin people, Joel Robbins (2002; 2004) argues that conversion prompts or compels a shift to more individualist understandings of the person and erodes relational values because of Christianity’s premise that individual souls have discrete fates. For Robbins (2007), with whom the individualising argument is most famously associated, anthropologists have been prone to ‘continuity thinking’ in depicting conversion in terms of cultural resilience and disregarding the very real impetus for change represented by Christian ideas. For others, such claims risk overplaying the efficacy of exogenous ideologies, underplaying the hermeneutic possibilities of Christian texts, discourses and principles, side-lining social forces and contexts and ignoring the extent of cultural interplay in conversion and later contexts.

Discussion of the issue is often constrained by overdrawn contrasts between Western and non-Western personhood, vague deployments of ‘dividual’ and ‘individual’ and limited historical and denominational contextualisation. Anthropological discussions of personhood also articulate with, but pay limited attention to, longstanding questions about Christianity’s relationship to personhood in the Western heartlands whence emanated the great proselytisation projects between the 18th–20th centuries.

I turn the lens back towards one group of European missionaries (see also Lindstrom 2013), analysing published and unpublished materials associated with the late 19th–early 20th century Australasian Methodist Missionary Society (AMMS), based in Sydney, Australia, which oversaw Methodist missions in the

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1 Relationships between the concepts individual, individuality and individualism is often obscure. For my purposes, the individual is the particular person, who can be thought of independently of others and, in Christian cosmology, as having a unique soul. They reveal themselves in their individuality, that is their persona and particular characteristics, an understanding that Mauss suggests is universal.

Individualism and individualist, by contrast, suggest an elevation of the individual as cultural value, as in libertarian political histories, sociobiological reductionism, or ideological celebrations of self-interest.
Pacific and, to a lesser extent, more widely. To the textual impetus stressed by some and the cultural and political contexts adduced by others, I ask about models of personhood among some of those who tried to convey Christian messages. I touch on relationships between missionary and indigenous outlooks on Simbo, Western Solomon Islands, at the end of my chapter, but my primary focus is on European Methodist missionaries’ understanding of moral personhood. I suggest that late 19th–early 20th century Methodist values of self-sacrifice, and their markedly corporeal religiosity, evince aspects of individualist personhood, despite the denomination’s close association with individualism, and challenge simplistic associations of Christianity with a single form of personhood.

I particularly focus on two key figures associated with the mission in the Western Solomons, Rev. Dr George Brown (1835–1917) and Rev. John Francis Goldie (1870–1955). Brown, with long missionary experience in Samoa, New Britain and New Guinea, had served as President of the NSW Conference before becoming General Secretary of the AMMS Board of Missions. He had long advocated a mission in the Solomons and, in 1902, led the inaugural mission there before leaving Goldie as Chair, a position the latter then occupied for 48 years.

The two men, who fell out bitterly within a few years, were radically different. Brown was a gregarious hail-fellow-well-met character, making friends with natives, traders, government officials and journalists alike, and generally managing convivial relationships with missionaries of diverse persuasions. Goldie, almost his diametrical opposite, was infamously problematic – egocentric, ungenerous in interpreting others’ actions, power hungry, self-interested, unrelentingly hostile to other missions and at odds with colonial officials and other

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2 Until 1922, when the New Zealand church separated, the AMMS operated on behalf of Australia and New Zealand. Missionaries of European origin came from both countries, and, in German colonial fields, Germany. In the Society’s earliest days, most missionaries of European heritage were British, but by the period covered here, most were born in Australia or New Zealand or had immigrated while very young. Of the two I consider, Brown arrived in New Zealand as a young man and married into a prominent missionary family there following his conversion. Goldie, 35 years younger, grew up in Tasmania.

My focus is solely on missionaries of European origin, who are overwhelmingly privileged in the archive, almost silencing the voices of Islander missionaries. Throughout AMMS history, Polynesians, mainly from Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, constituted by far the majority of missionaries, although they were rarely granted that title. Once missions were well established in Melanesian regions, missionaries from those areas also moved to newer fields. My sense is that an account of their understanding of Methodist personhood would reveal an even stronger stress on relationality, porosity and self-sacrifice.
colonial actors (e.g., Carter 1985; Garrett 1982). Yet, different as they were, they shared an understanding of self-sacrifice as key element of Christian personhood and missionary practice.

1 Dividual and individual persons and anthropologists

As Marcel Mauss (1985 [1938], 14) phrased it, those societies that ‘have made of the human person a complete entity, independent of all others save God, are rare’. His essay on the person and self, published in English in 1985, sketched a historical account of how the self became, not just ‘rational substance, indivisible and individual’, but, eventually, ‘a consciousness and a category [...] identified with self-knowledge and the [sic] psychological consciousness’ (ibid., 20). For Mauss, this individual self was exclusively Western: ‘It is formed only for us, among us’ (ibid., 22). Marilyn Strathern’s *The Gender of the Gift* (1988) apparently demonstrated this point.

Strathern posed a heuristic contrast between Western and Melanesian notions of the person, opposing a Western conceit of the individual as bounded, complete and possessing their own selfhood to hypothetical Melanesian models of the person as dividual, constituted as a composite being out of the totality of their relationships with others and made so through partibility. For Melanesians, she posited, the person was made as corporeal and social being through exchanges of parts of selves.

Strathern adapts McKim Marriott’s (e.g., 1976) concept of the Hindu ‘dividual’ to carry her critique of anthropological approaches to gender relations in Melanesia, which she saw as constrained by problematic grounding in Western individualist presumptions. In particular, she argues, feminist analyses of Melanesian persons are unreflectively informed by the proprietary expectations of

3 Strathern describes her focus as Melanesian gender relations but the book is largely directed against interpretations of those Papua New Guinea (PNG) Highlands societies said to be characterised by gender antagonism and female exploitation. It is with this in mind that she repeatedly asserts that she is not claiming that Melanesians see things as she outlines them, so much as developing an imaginative heuristic opposition between ‘Melanesia’ and the ‘West’ in order to challenge the ways ‘we’, her ubiquitous construct, conceive of relationships in Melanesia. As such, it is, as much as anything, an exercise in adamant relativism.

The book develops her earlier concerns with the tension between anthropology’s disciplinary cultural relativism and the political commitments of feminism (e.g., 1981; 1985). For a severe critique, see Kirby 1989.
Western personhood in which persons own or control their own activities, identities, bodies, etc. She also criticises ‘society’ as a flawed abstraction because scholars conceive of it as composed of relationships between (ideally) autonomous individuals. These understandings, she asserts, lead scholars to depict situations in which individual persons clearly do not possess themselves as forms of inequality and exploitation, interpretations which she sees as inapplicable to individually-oriented Melanesia.

For Strathern, the dividual, as a composite person, is constituted out of parts of others, corporeally made through directly or indirectly ingesting their substances, for example, when women transmit their husband’s seminally-conveyed patrilineal substance through their breastmilk or when the food that they produce is gifted to, and consumed by, others. Here, elements of the self are detachable and passable to others, constituting transformations of land, substance and labour, just as the self is made through others’ detached and conveyed parts in the kin, affinal and wider social exchanges of quotidian and ritual life.

Like Marriott, Strathern’s analysis was definitively regionally focused. However, while her gender analysis was criticised (e.g., Biersack 1991; Jolly 1992; Josephides 1992), the idea of the dividual was widely taken up as anthropologists noted its utility in diverse contexts and the value of its challenge to Eurocentric perceptions that the individual is universally taken to be the fundamental human agent. This dissemination has depended on significant conceptual slippage (see also Robbins 20015, 178 n. 4). In particular, it is often stripped of key elements. For Strathern, relational values – a stress on persons as properly enmeshed in relationships with others, rather than individually autonomous – are a necessary premise to ideas of giving and taking substance, but insufficient in themselves to constitute dividualism. Her dividual is not only relational, but definitively composite and partible.

In much literature deriving from Strathern, though, ‘dividual’ refers more generically to properly relational persons. The dividual is variably painted as permeable, open to other forces or the forcefulness of others, corporeally open through the senses, emotions, etc., morally judged according to their participation in sociality. This synonymising sometimes risks bleeding out the conceptual traction of the ‘dividual’ ideal type, suggesting the need for careful conceptual delineation (Weber 1977 [1904]; Gerring 1999).4

4 A further consequence of the concept’s wide application is that Strathern’s West–Melanesia distinction is transformed into a West–Rest binary: the individual distinctively Western, others dividualist. In fact, her ‘Melanesia’ was unduly generalised and conceptually problematic (Keessing 1992), largely drawing upon a limited range of societies in inland PNG New Guinea. While she addresses other Melanesian ethnographic data, she consistently returns to those inland and
Still, the concept’s diffusion opens up productive questions about relationships between personhood, culture and social and cultural change. In many ways, the disciplinary debate about Christian in/dividualism is now void. Many scholars have noted that the dividual–individual distinction is overdrawn and observed the frequency of relational forms of personhood in the heartlands of individualist ideologies. And the point that both individualist and relational modes of personhood can be found in any given cultural world has been widely taken up (e.g., Conklin, Morgan 1996; LiPuma 1998; Kusserow 1999). Most would now agree that forms of individualism and dividualism are best treated as ‘dynamics that mutually implicate each other’ and are variably present and available to individuals in different contexts (Bialecki, Daswani 2015, 272).

As Bialecki and Daswani (2015, 285) note, the challenge now is to problematise the dividual–individual binary while avoiding the banal ‘milk-and-water claim that all humans are admixtures of both’. Even Robbins, who, in a sense launched the debate, has moderated his early depiction of Christianity as ‘unrelentingly individualist’ (2004, 293) to more recently (e.g. 2015) stressing the tension between collective and individual personhoods in some forms of Christianity. The continuing salience of the distinction, then, lies in the ways in which it enables us to more fully map the scope and variability of personhood and, within Christianity, the social and historical dynamics of relationships between dividualism and individualism as they manifest in different times and places. It is in this context that I consider one of the reputed heartland religions in the development of individualism. I characterise Methodist missionaries as both individual and quasi-dividual, suggesting that their efforts to enact the ideal of Christianity as a global community of fellow believers, each possessing unique souls, reflect both understandings.

2 Methodist in/dividuals: ‘heart, soul, and mind’

Scholars have long noted affinities between Christianity, the emergence of individualist understandings of the person and the contraction of collective forms of sociality in Euro-American societies (e.g., Weber 2001 [1905]; Mauss 1985 [1938]; Dumont 1985). Mauss links the long unfolding of cultural emphases on individual highlands societies for the drivers of her argument. Elsewhere in the region, such as the Western Solomons, some of the characteristics she attributes to the dividual are arguably discernible but, as Robbins (2015, 178 n. 4) notes of Urapmin, the concept is inapplicable ‘in its canonical Melanesians sense’.
being to early Christianity and sees Protestantism as particularly contributing to its consolidation. Max Weber famously developed a complex account of the relationship, rejecting the idea that Protestantism *tout court* seeded modern individualist orientations. Surveying a range of denominations and historical periods, he insisted that the particular implications of particular theologies at particular historical moments (Calvinism in 16th-century Europe and Methodism in 19th-century North America) were crucial elements in the web of capitalism, modernity and individualist personhood. E. P. Thompson (1963), singles out English Methodism as playing a distinctive part in taming worker intransigence, undermining communal life and nurturing capitalist worldviews and a worker persona compatible with the needs of emerging capitalism, depicting the two as co-emergent. These formulations contain little sign of Christianity as a monolithic thing that, in and of itself, generates a single mode of personhood, albeit Mauss’ brief account threatens it. Even Thompson, with his sometimes simplistic treatment of religion as a justifying ideology, insists on the significance of particular Christian forms.

Methodism, itself, was incredibly diverse in its forms and emphases. It was characterised by what David Hempton (2005, 7) portrays as a fruitful ‘dialectical friction’. Among the several apparent contradictions that Hempton notes, two are particularly germane to my argument. It was, he says, ‘a movement of discipline and sobriety, but also of ecstasy and enthusiasm […] [and] a voluntary association of free people, but also specialized in rules, regulations, and books of discipline’ (ibid.). Theologically, too, it drew on only partially compatible influences: Lutheran authoritarianism, Calvinist guilt, disciplined asceticism and ‘obsession with personal salvation’, and Arminian insistence on universal salvation, among others (van Noppen 1995).

Members juggled the dangers of backsliding with the hopefulness of salvation, a tension partially resolved by its stress on self-improvement (ibid., 701). Although this was ideally directed at the inner life, many Methodists interpreted social success as indices of spiritual standing. But the idealisation of self-improvement also informed the sense of ethical imperative to engage in good works for many Methodists, such as the AMMS missionaries, in a religion with a longstanding missionary orientation. These multiple simultaneous dialectics go some way to explaining the religion’s many schisms as well as its capacity to adapt to diverse circumstances (cf. Hempton 2005). And they gave shape to the ways in which Methodist personhood could partake of both individualism and

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5 Weber’s and Thompson’s accounts are as infamous as famous. Both are widely criticised for empirical inaccuracy and Thompson for his hostile attitude to the Methodism in which he was raised. Yet, they remain crucial contributions to understanding the historical/cultural location of personhood.
dividualism. As Hempton (2005, 34) notes, it ‘tempered enthusiasm with discipline and rugged individualism with communal accountability’.

Methodism was famously individualist. Each member was understood to have been personally saved and converted. Testimonials, presented in collective contexts and showing archetypal features, were taken to be personal accounts of direct relationship with God, a relationship furthered through personal bible reading and private prayer in order to ‘[work] at their own salvation’, as one of Brown’s and Goldie’s contemporaries, Joseph F. Anderson (1920, 69) phrased it. Further, the expectation that Methodists strive for self-improvement as a manifestation of their salvation, a self-growth that spilled over to worldly life, was frequently articulated in terms of individual responsibility and achievement.

Missionaries reflected this orientation. Applicants were understood to have been individually called and expected to give an account of their personal conversion and to teach personal responsibility and industriousness in the field (Dureau undated [a]). The hagiographies, biographies, autobiographies and biographical snippets in Methodist media highlight individual as much as collective achievement. Brown’s autobiography, for example, is very much an account of a famous individual, clearly intended to vindicate his own actions and stances and sustain his reputation (e.g., 1908, 250–87). And self-sacrifice, as the term suggests, was understood as autonomous, personal endurance of the hardships of their calling. But, in understandings of the ideal Christian, notions of an individual soul and self-owned body were imbricated in relational, open forms of personhood, self-sacrifice being one instance of this only partially-bounded individual.

Methodism was assertively a religion of experience, drawing on Wesley’s perception that ‘experience leads and theological reflection follows’ (Skuce 2012, 17; cf. Rall 1920). Ritual practices like united prayer, revival, exhortation and testimony, passionate hymnody and love feasts, generated a ‘feeling, penetrable self’ in the communitas of collective effervescence (Anderson 2012, 8; Turner 1969; Turner 1971/72). ‘Such were the places, par excellence, where the Methodist message moved from print to voice, from individualism to community, from cognition to emotion, and from private to public’ (Hempton 2005, 79).

Methodist hymnody and love feasts exemplify this intersection of ideation and embodiment. Hymnody was how ‘the followers of the Wesleys learned their theology’, ‘an expression of individual and corporate affirmation, an aid to memory, a trigger of religious emotion, and a creator of spiritual identity’ (Chilcote 2014, 157; 6 Anderson described the love feast as a ‘simple meal, or feast of love [...] kept by the early Christians, which, [...] was revived by Mr. Wesley, and is observed now by the Church [...]’, largely as a preparation for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper’ (1909, 58; see also Bucke 1963; on longstanding criticisms of love-feasts for reputed licentiousness, see Hempton 2005).
Hempton 2005, 100; see also van Noppen 1995; Wallace 2009). And well into the 20th century, an American Methodist, Emory Stevens Bucke (1963, 11), described the love feast as ‘a place of joyous witness for Christ’ which ‘affects some hearts more deeply than any formal sermon’.

While revivals and love feasts were occasional, even the less intense weekly services, with their hymns, preachers’ rhetorical skills and build-up to the sermon as the highpoint of the service (Wood 2015), reinforced a spirituality marked by both intellect and passion. Such experiences, explicitly intended to provoke emotional and spiritual intensity, a passionate embodied sense of oneness of community and spirit, and leaving individuals with a sense of openness to their fellows and penetration by the Holy Spirit, challenged the self-possessed individual.\(^7\) In significant part, then, Methodist personhood was properly entangled with others and experienced as porous. As the American Episcopalian Methodist, Harris Franklin Rall (1920, 486), put it, ‘its [early] constant stress on the indwelling and enabling Spirit of God was a real preparation for the God of our present faith, working not as irresistible power exercised from without, but in the immanence of a moral and personal presence’.

In an address to novice missionaries in 1901, Brown reflected this porosity, admonishing them to be open to spiritual forces:

[...]

\(\text{AMMR} \ 1901, \ 5, \ \text{my emph.}\)

\(^7\) The extent to which Methodists embraced emotive rituals varied historically, denominationally and geographically. Turner (1971/72, 197; see also van Noppen 1995; Hempton 2005) points to processes of gradual routinisation as it became a more middle-class religion, entailing a progressive ‘[inhibition] of the expression of emotion and enthusiasm [...]. A propensity to sing hymns loudly is probably the only survival of past emotions’. My sense is that he overstates the totality of the decline. At least as late as the 1960s, for example, the then-chair of the Methodist Mission in the Solomons, Rev. George Carter, instigated a revival there. In the early 20th century Australasian Methodism, with which I am concerned, styles and expectations of ritual performance and experience varied according to denomination – Wesleyan, Methodist, Primitive Methodists, etc. – and were patterned by state, class and local histories (O’Brien, Carey 2015).

The mission’s historical remainders distort the mix of emotion and sobriety in favour of the latter. Archived materials reflect administrative requirements and legalistic regulation. Publications, more inclusive of subjective material, are phrased in more reasoned terms than events were experienced or they deploy symbolic shorthand, such as referring to opening a meeting with ‘a hymn’ or to preaching from a particular text. Such materials drew upon the semantic–emotional domain of their community but are opaque to later readers (see also Hempton 2005, 7, 56).
While such accounts of openness are easily read metaphorically, there is literalness to Methodists’ innumerable evocations of spiritual penetrability (cf. Turner 1971/72). All of this suggests that the person was understood as tripartite. Anderson (1909, 60), citing Wesley, asserted that a Methodist ‘is one who [...] loves the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, and mind, and strength’, a phrase he used repeatedly. In this understanding, Methodists must be filled with God’s love and driven by it; they must think on things religious and improve their knowledge through education and cultivating rational thought; they must be open to the Holy Spirit. And their good works must be informed by all three. As Brown (AMMR 1901, 3) put it in his address to new missionaries, ‘You must serve him with all your powers bodily, intellectual, spiritual, and to do this effectively you must take care that all are in the highest possible state of healthy efficiency’.

This conception of an enmeshed, open person of body, mind and soul was reflected in Methodism’s social and missionary orientation. As Anderson (1909, 62) phrased it, the ‘building up of the Church by leading men into its communion and fellowship’ was indissolubly tied to ‘the development of activity in all that relates to social, civic and industrial betterment’, an imperative expressed in the social gospel.8 Stressing Christian responsibilities in the world, the universal potential for salvation and Christ’s ministry of healing (Langmore 1989; Stanley 2009), social gospel advocates envisaged the truly Christian person as oriented towards both self-improvement and nurturance of the inner self (an individualist stress) and outwards, away from introspection, and towards the betterment of others (a relational stress).

In 1910, the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, with representatives of Protestant churches from Britain, Europe and North America, proclaimed the theme that had driven the enormous missionary effort of the previous 150 years, ‘The world for Christ!’, encapsulating a shared aspiration to see humanity encompassed in Christian community. But, as demonstrated by the intense pre-conference debates and negotiation about which denominations might be included and the conference wrangles and compromises, denominational (and other) differences generated as much disagreement as agreement about that envisaged Christian world (Stanley 2009). For Methodist missionaries, the Christian ecumene valorised by the Conference was a vision, not of individuals individually converted and committed, but of intimate oneness arising

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8 The Solomons mission was established as an industrial mission, the pre-eminent form of social gospel to those who were thought of as primitive or savage peoples, incapable of receiving the gospel directly (Dureau undated [a]; Stanley 2009).
from shared faith, understandings, sentiments and experiences in collective gatherings and the imagined emotional community (Rosenwein 2002) of their religion.

So, the individual was simultaneously individually saved and in individual relationship with God; they were penetrable, open to spiritual force and emotional fellowship; they were relationally entangled with others. And, impelled by Methodism’s missionary orientation and expectation that salvation be expressed in good works, missionaries sought to convey the Word to, and radically transform the social worlds of, others. With their often-intransigent insistence on radically remaking local moralities, aspirations and worldviews, the AMMS missionaries promoted individualism against indigenous forms of moral personhood, which they typically disdained as communistic (Dureau undated [a]). But what strikes me is the extent to which such concerns with promoting individualist native characters coexisted with ideals of bringing others into fellowship through self-denial.

3 Sacrificial suffering

Methodist missionary literature of the time is notable for the frequency with which the missionary life is represented as one of self-sacrifice. For Brown (1892, 9), speaking as retiring President of the New South Wales and Queensland Conference, ‘a daily manifestation of the spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice, which He [Christ] demands are essential to the possession and development of a true spiritual life’, a position that he sustained during his years abroad. In 1875, writing to a cousin about his decision to remain in the mission field instead of returning home to his wife and children, Brown expressed this understanding: ‘I feel it to be a great sacrifice and feel it still, but one who is not ready to deny himself has certainly not learned the lesson of self-sacrifice which the life of our Lord teaches us’ (quoted in Reeson 2014, 85). Within five years, he made a far more devastating sacrifice.

In 1880, Brown returned to his station in the Duke of York Islands in New Guinea after several months travel, looking forward to reuniting with his wife, Lydia, and the three young children he ’had left so well and strong’ (Brown 1908, 346). However, he found the station deserted, the house in disarray and two small new graves the only indication as to why. As became obvious, two of his children had died, and Lydia, shattered, had left with another missionary couple. Re-joining her, they united in their grief and accepted their children’s deaths as God’s will (ibid., 345–51).
In 1907, Goldie and his wife, Helena, suffered a similar loss: a dysentery epidemic had hit the area, leaving Helena and their daughter, Nellie, near death. And, although probably not due to dysentery, his 10-month old son, ‘just the bonniest little chap that ever lived – as strong and well as could be up to last Sunday week’ – had died (AMMR 1908, 2). Like the Browns and others, the Goldies submitted their grief to God who ‘never makes a mistake’ (ibid., 3) and remained in the field to continue evangelizing. Missionary publications are replete with accounts like Brown’s and Goldie’s, the theme of the suffering, and occasionally dying, evangelist suggesting their sense of the immensity and value of their task of evangelizing the world.

As Maya Mayblin (2014) suggests, sacrifice is far from restricted to the ritual and destructive instances, like animal sacrifice, on which anthropologists have classically focused. Describing the unmarked, undramatic form of much self-sacrifice in the lives of the Brazilian Catholics with whom she worked, she calls on anthropologists to consider its frequent mundanity. John Dunnill (2003) makes a similar point about conflations of sacrifice with blood offerings, despite the extent to which biblical accounts are marked by ‘the ordinariness of most sacrifice from the perspective of those who practice it [...], a set of practices embedded in the commonplace business of life’ in order to integrate ‘life into a relation with divinity’ (2003, 81f., passim).

In the missionary literature, too, undramatic experiences, scattered through diaries, letters and published materials, are frequent. There are innumerable references to years of separation from older children repatriated for their education; of repeated ill health, death scares and complicated childbirth without medical help; of missionary wives’ arduous domestic work with limited resources in primitive conditions and loneliness far from kin and subject to their husbands’ prolonged absences; of the myriad discomforts of stations and travels and the frustrations of trying to communicate across linguistic and cultural differences. These accounts are often markedly corporeal, evoking bodily suffering – pain, tiredness, illness, etc. – as emblematic of self-sacrifice. AMMS missionaries saw themselves as giving their blood, sweat and tears and conceived of their lives as gifts of themselves. Goldie (MOM554 1920), for example, described ‘Mrs Goldie [...] [as having] slaved in school and college and hospital – gladly giving her strength for these people who claim such a big place in her heart’.

Such accounts, at least as much as the great dramatic accounts of dangerous voyages and grievous losses, suggest the missionary life conceived as one of self-sacrifice. They suggest that missionaries’ ideological individualism

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9 It might be argued that it was children who were often sacrificed, given that they died or experienced hardships because of their parents’ decisions to go to the field. Maurice Bloch (1992) ar-
depended on ideals of self-surrender in order to bring others into Christianity. True Christians accepted suffering, acknowledging the unrepayable debt established by the Crucifixion: just as Christ suffered and died for humanity, so missionaries must live in ‘a spirit of self-sacrifice and self-denying love’ (Brown 1908, 73, *passim*).

Indeed, self-sacrifice was taken to be a fundamental aspect of missionary work. In 1902, when Brown led the inaugural mission group to the Solomons, the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review (AMMR)* reported that

> a large number of people assembled [...] to say good-bye. [...] Those who were there saw ample evidence of the fact that the unity of faith and works may call for a great self-sacrifice. No one could witness the partings on the wharf without feeling certain that faith and love to God triumphed over the dearest ties. (AMMR 1902, 4)

Suffering was not to be sought. Brown (*AMMR* 1901), for example, stressed that missionaries were to care for themselves in order to best fulfil their task. But it would come. Going so far as to liken missionary effort to the Crucifixion, Goldie observed:

> Twelve years in pioneer mission work has taught us that the road to victory is via Calvary. [...] There is no power that will influence heathen people but the power of love, and love means [missionary] sacrifice. The hands of Christ’s servant must bear the print of the nails. (Goldie 1914, 571)

This unusually explicit and dramatic metaphor is echoed in the numerous evocations and accounts of hardship and missionaries’ willing suffering. Even when authors do not explicitly claim self-sacrifice, their accounts repeatedly conjure that theme, ubiquitously evoking missionary life as an elevated example of Christian self-sacrifice.

gues that the thing or person sacrificed serves as proxy for the sacrificer, establishing an identity between the two. From this perspective, child deaths were the most exquisitely awful of proxies, the child as proxy for the parent (see also Bloch 1992, 26f.). But, so far as child deaths were understood in terms of adult suffering, self-sacrifice obviates this proxy: the sacrificer explicitly is the sacrifice. In the several pages (345-53) of Brown’s autobiography dedicated to his children’s deaths (and Lydia’s and other missionaries’ near deaths during his absence), the missionaries’ anguish bleeds off the page and his details are overwhelmingly devoted to the adults’ suffering as they battled their own illness, strove to save the children and dealt with their deaths. Similarly, Goldie’s brief letter postulates that his son may have died of appendicitis and manifestly conveys his grief, but says nothing of the suffering his child must have experienced. What is conveyed in both accounts is the missionaries’ suffering – in losing their children they suffered, sacrificing themselves.
There is little doubt that accounts of suffering were intended to stimulate the home support and donations on which the missions depended (Thomas 1992; Samson 2013). They also contributed to the establishment and maintenance of the imagined emotional communities that linked Christians at home, missionaries abroad and convert populations (Haggis, Allen 2008). Scholars have also noted how Victorian and Edwardian women deployed the ideal of the self-sacrificing woman to justify their own missionary aspirations (e.g., Midgley 2006; Hill 2007).

But beyond such instrumentality, accounts of self-sacrifice convey something of the import that missionaries and their supporters ascribed to evangelization and of how Methodist missionaries imagined the moral person. For missionaries and others, being Christian entailed proffering oneself on behalf of others’ salvation, the ultimate expression of Christian love. In 1899, Brown (AMMR 1901) led a voyage of interested Christians to Melanesia, hoping to stimulate support for the society’s work, particularly for the envisaged Solomons mission. His account of the voyage, published in the AMMR, is immediately followed by an extract from the Philadelphia Methodist, characterising missionary work as the epitome of Christian being, grounded in transcendence of the self on behalf of others:

The missionary spirit is the truest sign of individual Christian and Church life. [...] Missionary enthusiasm [...] teaches sacrifice and service as its essential features, and reacts upon the soul with redoubled effect when keyed up to the highest pitch of sublime heroism in the battle for Christianity and humanity. (AMMR 1901, 7)

Sacrifice is an inherently social act, typically understood as governed by the logic of exchange and participation in relationships of reciprocity, a meaningful communication with noumenal beings like gods, spirits and ancestors publicly communicated in the material world (Hubert, Mauss 1964 [1898]; Mayblin 2014, 347). For Mauss, as part of ongoing exchanges between cosmic and earthly realms, it implies a gift ‘made to men in the sight of the gods’ (2002 [1925], 18, 20f.). As such, it is intentional, marked by future orientation, often understood as soliciting a desired outcome.

In Christian cosmology, though, sacrifice lies ‘beyond the bounds of normal, reciprocal exchange’ (Mayblin 2013, 345; Hubert, Mauss 1964 [1898], 100f.). For missionaries and their interlocutors, sacrificial instrumentality was ideally eliminated in favour of selfless concern for others. Good works should reflect their relationship to God rather than being means of acquiring grace, and they should be an aspect of Christian praxis, reflecting a constant awareness of Calvary as the gift of salvation. So far as self-sacrifice could be understood in terms of exchange or reciprocity, this was inevitably a case of permanent, irreversible debt: Christians forever indebted for the Crucifixion and their own offering of self at most
an obligatory, unworthy emulation, ‘destined, in some a priori sense, to be ontologically obsolete’ (Mayblin 2014, 352).

Missionary sacrifice, then, was a reflection of Christ’s work of salvation by bringing heathens into communion, Goldie’s likening of his life to Calvary only a somewhat extreme expression of the understanding.

4 In/Dividual missionaries and Christian persons

Does Christianity’s fundamental premise, that each individual has a unique, immortal soul that transcends corporeal mortality, make it an individualising religion? Alternatively, does belief in the Crucifixion and the numerous New Testament accounts of compassionate outreach to others index a fundamentally relational mode of moral being? It is impossible to ignore the individualist aspects of many accounts of self-sacrifice. In conjuring the nails of the cross, Goldie certainly implied his own heroism. Brown (1908), more complexly, also constituted himself as hero and many other accounts are awkwardly placed between self-iteration and spiritual concern. But my concern is not whether individuals achieved the near-impossible task of putting aside their own spiritual and worldly concerns. Nor is my primary aim one of deconstructing discourses of self-sacrifice. Rather, I am interested in what such tropes say about models of Methodist personhood at that historical moment. In particular, how can these understandings be understood relative to questions about the relationship between dividualism, individualism and Christianity more widely?

In the abstract, idealisations of self-sacrifice suggest a moral model of relational personhood. Methodists could be fully, morally, human only in relationship with God and other Christians and by expressing themselves through good works. And salvation, understood as achieved through the self-gift of Calvary, was perceived as the ultimate relational act. But, as Mosko (2015, 376) notes, God’s gift was not, in fact, free. It morally obliged the reciprocity of ‘further

10 The value and status of sacrifice is very vexed in Christian theology. For many, Calvary marks the culmination and end of sacrificial religion. For others, self-sacrifice is oppressive – feminist theologians, for example, have criticised Christian associations of self-sacrifice and virtuous womanhood. For still others, the true Christian embraces the suffering on Calvary by humiliating their own flesh (by flagellation, fasting and other privation) or ‘offering up’ their suffering. In other contexts, Calvary serves as imperative to accept suffering on behalf of others. For still others, ‘a positive understanding of sacrifice’ – one shed of violence and conceived in terms of small recompense to God and eucharistic sharing – ‘remains intrinsic to Christian faith’ (Dunnill 2003, 93; Kirwan 2007).
gift offerings (e.g., with confession of sin, prayers, songs of praise, tithes, glorifications, good works)’.

Methodists expressed their obligation less economistically, elaborating themes of love, joy, fellowship and salvation as a free gift, subject only to its acceptance. But this acceptance established a vertical relationship of submission: of self-will to God’s will, of self-interest to the care of others, of self-sacrifice to the quest to extend Christendom. The vertical relationship with God must be expressed in the horizontal relationships of fraternity and sorority with other Christians. The solo Christian engrossed only in their relationship with God was incomplete because they had accepted His love for themselves alone. There is, then, a seemingly endless recursive movement between individual self and personal salvation experienced in one’s own embodied soul and selfhood on the one hand, and, on the other, collective, emotional and spiritual openness, expansive sociality and self-surrender. Missionary self-sacrifice epitomised these vertical and horizontal, individual and relational themes, their suffering, offered upwards to God, simultaneously fostering horizontal earthly relationship.

Christianity has been profoundly linked to the global dissemination of models of the person as a bounded, unique individual (Keane 2007; Robbins 2015), although this is often unduly stressed over other forces (see also Lindstrom 2013, 247). But Methodist missionary personhood was marked by a sense of both a unique, indivisible, but porous, interiority – the Christian individual – and of a less bounded, properly self-giving and relational exteriority.

Even allowing for this doubled self-containment and openness, it would force the concept to interpret Methodist personhood in terms of the partibility and composite personhood of Strathern’s ‘dividual’. Still, missionary materials do highlight how, even in this profoundly ideologically individualist denomination at the height of its willingness to impose its own versions of civilisation

11 For missionaries, there was a third aspect of Christian relationality. Mirroring the hierarchical relationship with God, their sacrifices placed them in vertical relationship with converts. Drawing converts into the wider Christian community through their self-sacrificing gifts of proselytisation, the missionary was constituted as gift to heathen humanity, as Christ had been gift to humanity. They seem to have comfortably accepted this hierarchy in colonial missions, although it undermined the ideal of co-equal Christian fellowship. The contradiction was resolved by rendering converts eternal children, not yet capable of religious adulthood (Thomas 1992). Their self-sacrifices constituted debts acquired by converts and implied clear expectations of reciprocity. In Goldie’s accounts (e.g., 1914), for example, those who rejected conversion, decided to attend other missions – SDA, RC or Anglican – or sought to read their bibles for themselves are characterised as duplicitous, ungrateful, troublemakers or as embracing ‘creed without conduct’.
and human development, these Methodist Christians enacted and experienced porous religiosity and relational imperatives.

Goldie went so far as to ascribe the rapid conversion of the Western Solomons to missionaries’ suffering. Years after his son’s death, he depicted pre-Christian society in terms of evil indigenous sacrifices, juxtaposing it to a Christian life wrought by missionary sacrifice:

> Was it worth while [sic]? Could the reader [...] see the crowd of bright, intelligent boys and girls, clean, alert, bending over their work with happy eagerness [...] [and] the people [...] reverently and intelligently joining in the service of praise on the very spot where [...] men who had been on headhunting raids came to offer sacrifices and to take part in cannibal feasts, he would say, “Yes, it is worth while”. (Goldie 1922, 6)

Many other missionaries, perhaps less grandiloquently, made similar claims.

World religions gain traction in new locales by becoming substantively meaningful. This may result from their fundamental contrasts to cultural hegemonies, as when the individualist connotations of particular Christianity ideas challenge relational values (e.g., Robbins 2002). But in other contexts, synergies between indigenous and exogenous values may be decisive, as many Pacific theologians, stressing affinities between indigenous cultural values and Christianity, have observed (e.g., Boseto 1983; Namanu 1996; see also Forman 2005).

Despite their best efforts to do so, AMMS missionaries did not determine local expressions of Christianity (Dureau 2012). But the sense that individuals, as individuals, must simultaneously surrender their individual selves to collective being echoes many Melanesian understandings of the person as incomplete in and of themselves. Resolute harbingers of new forms of personhood, ideologically disposed to individualist models, missionaries nonetheless idealised the transcendence of individual being. Working in a region where the person was ideally dividual, their message, conveyed in industrial training, school and the ritual life they shared with converts, apparently resonated with indigenous personhood.

On Simbo, a century and more after Christianity arrived as an element in a coercive colonisation, relational personhood is celebrated as both indigenous and fundamentally Christian moral personhood (Dureau undated [b]). People stress moral personhoods contextually and largely understand persons as possessing individual souls, but fully developed only when able to transcend the unitary self. In contemplating death, most worried little about the fate of discrete souls (cf. Robbins 2002) and described the afterlife as the time when they will be reunited with dead kin.
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