At forty-four years old, Dr. David Livingstone had spent the past fifteen years traversing nearly one-third of Africa and working to combat the slave trade by bringing news of the Gospel to the “dark continent,” all while documenting its people, flora, fauna, and geography. He wrote home about his adventures, and British newspapers and church organizations published his edited field notes to rave reviews. Britain in the 1850s was a milieu given over to exploration and improvement, and Africa, seen by many as exotic, pagan, and deadly, as well as debased by slavery, Islam, and a host of other troubling social ills, seemed to cry out for redemption.1 The “simple large-hearted hero” thus quickly became the subject of national fascination. The 1857 publication of his book Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa only further galvanized his fame. On the book tour through Scotland, Ireland, and England, he was feted and cheered wherever he went.

Livingstone, a Presbyterian, set foot on African soil for the first time in 1841. He was supported by a stipend from the London Missionary Society (LMS). The LMS was founded in 1795 as a project designed to incorporate several small interdenominational groups working toward the same end. A product of its time, it grew quickly into something that was large and ambitious.2 By 1818 it was
largely Congregationalist, rather than interdenominational as its founders had imagined; this became even more pronounced as Presbyterians and Episcopalians began to found their own missionary societies.3 Livingstone was inspired to join the mission when his father, who attended the Nonconformist independent Hamilton Church, showed him a pamphlet on medical missionaries in China. The younger Livingstone had long shown an interest in medicine and rural flora and fauna and was immediately drawn to the prospect of traveling overseas.4 Livingstone had received some theological training at university and spent more time learning Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, but that was not enough even for the relatively undemanding society; they deemed him unfit at first application to be a missionary because he “lacked fluency in prayer and the conduct of worship.” It was also not clear how well he knew the Bible. After several months of additional study, he eventually passed the LMS examination and headed to Bechuanaland.5 Although Livingstone considered himself first and foremost a missionary, and remained dedicated to the cause to the end of his life, he had many other interests and did not limit his work to spreading the Gospel. Indeed, Livingstone made for a rather unusual missionary. He was, as the LMS saw it, often distracted from God’s work by exploration, commerce, natural history, geography, and anthropology. Frustrated by his tendency to confuse exploration with evangelism, the LMS ultimately withdrew their support. Livingstone, however, saw no such conflict of interest. He believed that pursuing such a wide range of activities was a mutually reinforcing endeavor. In his view, nothing short of the simultaneous introduction of “commerce, Christianity, and civilization” would save the African body, mind, and soul from the evils of slavery, heathenism, and barbarism.6 The “Three C’s” were the only way to eradicate, Livingstone believed, “such absurdities from the minds of these poor people.”7

Livingstone and the Birth of the UMCA

The son of a deeply religious traveling tea salesman who grew up in the tenements of the industrial periphery of Glasgow, Livingstone was in many ways a personification of the broader trends of which his participation in the LMS was a part. His childhood tenement home abutted a park, the private garden of the estate manager’s large residence. Positioned firmly between the urban and the rural, Livingstone experienced the “contrast between the stark tenement and the verdant countryside, the
laboring poor and the new rich.” This dichotomy was the result of the recent rise of the lower middle classes, a result of the Industrial Revolution. Modest upward mobility and the acquisition of respectability, coupled with the rise of European modernity, produced the eighteenth-century preoccupation with “civilization”—a word that had only recently made its appearance in English. The newly salient differences between civilization and savagery characterized the moral dichotomy between the working class and the middle/upper classes, all of which became wrapped up with a series of what Nancy Rose Hunt calls other “semantic polarities”: “white/black, clean/dirty, lady/woman, home/empire, masculine/feminine, urban/rural, public/private.” Rather than directly critique the failings of the lower classes at home, Britons began to look overseas to the heathen “other” of the dark continent, using their plight and presumed barbarism as a point of comparison for the rising working classes and the “dark satanic” populations at home. Domestically, moral authority, and Christian virtue gained a “civilizing function reaching far beyond the threshold of the home,” causing believers and middle- and upper-class Britons alike to look beyond themselves and into the homes of new colonial subjects and missionary objects.

This preoccupation with civilization also became bound up with commerce in the later decades of the eighteenth century. In the 1780s the Clapham group, a collection of high-minded, upper-middle-class Anglican evangelicals with strong commercial connections, began to adapt this secular ideology to serve Christian morality. They argued that the advance of civilization—one of the goals of commerce, as current thinking had it—would be far better served through legitimate commerce than one based on “illegitimate” slave labor, and far more profitable, too. Moreover, they imagined it would help spread Christianity. Over the next twenty years, the Clapham group also invested in the missionary enthusiasm growing in Britain, and began to extend the rhetoric of civilization to evangelical societies. Largely unconcerned with commerce, missionaries were concerned, however, with civilization—with square houses, straight streets, and sensible shoes, as well as reading and writing and eating with forks. These ideas became ever more intertwined in liberal evangelical circles with hopes for Great Britain’s commercial success as “a divine goad to both economic and religious proselytizing.” While “civilization, Christianity, and commerce” was by no means an official or explicitly stated missionary strategy, it had by the 1830s become a catch phrase widely used to describe the overseas evangelical imperative, and an ideology that underwrote countless expeditions to the continent.
Inspired by the “Three C’s,” Livingstone thus remained in the field, proselytizing Christianity to the benighted heathen, recording the natural geological features of the continent, detailing the foreign customs of the “primitive tribes” he encountered, and working tirelessly to abolish the slave trade. The “unmitigated horror” of the nineteenth-century slave trade was of particular concern to Livingstone, and to the British public, who responded to his stories of brutality with generous financial support. Although it is true that the British had several antislavery treaties in place by the time of Livingstone’s journeys, in a deeply ironic twist the number of Africans involved in slavery on the continent had only increased over the century.

The conditions in which many Africans were living shocked Livingstone. In the interior of the continent, he reported passing village after village that lay burnt, empty, and deserted, ravaged by the trade. Their inhabitants, the people who had planted and tilled the ground and the children who had played among tall maize stalks, had been bound and carried away as slaves. He wrote that he saw women chained together by a yoke made from a tree trunk, fastened in the front with a rough iron bar. As they walked, the weight rubbed their necks and shoulders raw. On Zanzibar, he saw a great slave market where hundreds of Africans, boys and girls, men and women, were sold as animals into what he imagined was lifelong captivity and shame. He was haunted by his assumption that for every living slave who arrived in port, seven or eight died on the journey. In eastern Africa, he saw slave owners who seemed to forget that their slaves were even human, calling “the animal to do this or that,” and cursing them as if they were but a “race of a dog.” The experience tormented him, and in 1871 the man who was trained as a medical doctor offered this poignant commentary in his journal: “I am heartsore and sick of the sight of human blood.”

The devastation that so affected Livingstone was the result of a recent and rapid uptick in slaving over the course of the eighteenth century. Whereas the slave trade on the Atlantic coast of Africa had grown from the fifteenth century to a peak in the eighteenth century, in the areas that are now Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania the slave trade had been insignificant before the late eighteenth century. The dramatic rise in the trade in slaves in East Africa was the result of two major and interwoven economic developments. First was the expansion of the slave-plantation complex into the Indian Ocean, which occurred by the final quarter of the eighteenth century. Plantations on the Mascarene Islands, including Mauritius and Reunion, as well as on Zanzibar required vast amounts of slave labor; Omani Arabs in the Persian Gulf also demanded East African slaves as domestic laborers, plantation
laborers, and sailors. The Industrial Revolution spurred its own demand: the need for vegetable oils to lubricate the machines of industrializing economies turned traders on to East Africa's coconut and sesame oils, and they imported copal, a wild resin used to make coach varnish.

Before the advent of these demands for particular raw materials from East Africa, Zanzibar and the neighboring mainland coast had relied on a totally different set of crops and different style of agricultural labor. Subsistence cultivation, not commercial trade, was the primary livelihood of Swahili-speaking people—at least until the final third of the nineteenth century. People living along the Swahili Coast had fostered commercial ties with the Indian Ocean world for centuries; their trade included exports of rare luxury goods such as ivory, rhino horn, tortoiseshell, and coconut oil, and imports such as cloth and porcelain. They also exported slaves, who were bound for the Middle East and to French plantations on the Mascarene Islands. But before the mid- to late nineteenth century, slaves constituted only a small portion of the trade. And within East Africa itself, slaves were generally seen as personal dependents rather than as chattel. They performed a variety of duties and inhabited a variety of roles, including autonomous peasant, professional soldier, domestic servant, concubine, or trusted counselor; slaves were rarely valued only as forced field hands. Indeed, African slavery has largely been idealized as what scholars refer to as “open” or “absorptive.” Slaves were by definition socially marginal, and in an “absorptive” system were sometimes able to reduce their marginality, or even able to eliminate it altogether. This occurred over the course of several generations as masters absorbed slaves into their own communities and kin groups. This would soon change dramatically after the mid-nineteenth century.

The second of two economic factors that fundamentally altered the nature and scope of slavery in East Africa during the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the European abolitionist campaign. It was not until British abolitionists began to call for “legitimate” trade goods, such as those previously mentioned, that the trade in slaves took on such great importance. In 1807, the British passed legislation that effectively outlawed Britain’s central role in the slave trade. Then, between 1815 and 1831, a series of Anglo-Portuguese anti-slave-trade treaties outlawed Portuguese trade north of the equator. This had the effect not of stopping slaving, but of merely pushing procurement further to the south—both in western Africa near Angola and on the eastern Swahili Coast. Additionally, the British negotiated the first in a series of abolition treaties with authorities at Zanzibar. Taken together, these “abolitionist” treaties reduced the price for slaves,
thereby encouraging people to find new local uses for slave labor. A move designed as an abolitionist intervention had the paradoxical effect of increasing the total number of slaves captured each year within East Africa.22

Beyond the two economic factors that spurred the expansion of the trade are several other factors that altered the nature of the slave experience itself. The nineteenth century was a “particularly bad time” for African slaves, in part because in many places masters that had once engaged with slaves in relationships of patronage and dependence were instead treating them as chattel. In responding to growing market demands, masters had to find new uses for slave labor and thus subjected their slaves to much more severe forms of slavery by forcing them to produce agricultural commodities such as cloves, coconut, grains, and sugar.23

Another factor in the transformation of the slave experience was the simultaneous, and in fact interrelated, increase in the ivory trade. The relatively frivolous European demand for ivory combs, billiard balls, and piano keys, which increased over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, pushed the East African ivory frontier—and the destruction and devastation that attended it—further and further into the African interior. The demand had already decimated sources in India and elsewhere, and the soft ivory of East African elephants was particularly alluring for the finer products then in vogue. Ivory traders in the areas that are now Tanzania and Kenya had for centuries passed their goods from hand to hand from the interior to the coast along a series of interconnected, short-distance trading routes. The demand for ivory in the nineteenth century was so steep, however, that individual traders and the occasional small hunting band were insufficient. These longer-standing small-scale suppliers were largely replaced by a system of caravans that traveled thousands of miles along three main routes from the interior, as far as present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, to the coast. Slaves staffed these caravans, and were also added to the caravans at their origin in the interior. The warfare necessary to secure coastal caravans access to the routes also allowed trading entrepreneurs to kidnap and conscript slaves who would perform the backbreaking labor of carrying the ivory to the coast. The advance of the ivory frontier left catastrophe—in the form of infectious disease, loss of life, the decimation of the elephant population, and economic collapse—in its wake.24 It was an ironic cycle of events that dramatically altered the nature of the slave experience in nineteenth-century East Africa: a “boom in legitimate trade induced masters within Africa to work their own slaves harder, the spread of imported firearms gave trading warlords the means to capture more slaves more efficiently, and the
European naval blockades depressed the price of slaves in coastal regions that had once specialized in their export, making slave labor an attractive investment for growing numbers of entrepreneurs within Africa.25 The effects of commercial and political policies devised by European missionaries, merchants, and politicians as a means to salvation were in actuality devastating to individual Africans.

Livingstone and other abolitionists were not wholly unaware of these developments. These men attributed their cause not to European intervention, but to the barbarity of Africans themselves—something that further confirmed the missionary civilizing enterprise. Seeing this “barbarism” firsthand made an impression on Livingstone. Back in England during the fall and winter months of 1857, Livingstone encountered sympathetic audiences. He encouraged members of Britain’s elite universities to follow his example and plant missions in Central Africa with the express purpose of stemming the hemorrhage of slaves. A generation of British abolitionists had argued that Christianity and commerce would free the African, and now Livingstone was offering a practical program by which to realize this goal. His audience at the December lectures in particular, which included hundreds of undergraduates and their faculty, were in a unique position to assist, he argued. The movement, he told them, needed “men of education, standing, enterprise, zeal, and piety.”26 Due to the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical demands of the task at hand, its pioneers “should be the ablest and best qualified men, not those of small ability and education.”27 Students and faculty, who listened to the sermons with rapt attention, responded by cheering “as only undergraduates could cheer,” and resolved to found a missionary society to carry out the work Livingstone had begun.28

With members of Oxford and Cambridge Universities rallied to his cause, Livingstone moved supporters toward establishing the organization that would become the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (UMCA). Yet, for all his celebrity and charisma, Livingstone was perhaps a man better suited to rallying interest than organizing intervention: despite the resounding enthusiasm that attended Livingstone’s travels, no further steps were taken toward a missionary society, and no committees were formed until late the following year. The fire kindled by Livingstone’s visit to the universities might have died away entirely were it not for the 1859 visit of Robert Gray, Anglican Bishop of Cape Town and Metropolitan South Africa, to Cambridge. Gray rightly sensed that despite “a great interest felt in Africa,” momentum for a missionary society was flagging. He used the occasion of his invited terminal lecture to offer “fresh impulse” for a mission to Central Africa.
This time, Gray reported, “the idea took—a committee was formed, and the thing started.” Founders settled on a name for their society—the Oxford and Cambridge Mission to Central Africa—opened subscription lists, distributed circulars, and arranged for a series of public meetings to determine the objectives of the mission.

With trademark enthusiasm, Robert Gray took a leading role in organizing the infant mission. Naturally, he began almost immediately to guide the structural development of the society in a way that fitted with his own theological persuasions. Like most of the organization's earliest members, Gray was an Anglican. More specifically, he and many of the others were High Church Anglicans who aligned closely with a revival movement within the Church of England known as Tractarianism. In general terms, the universities' mission would look like many mid-nineteenth-century missions. It had a modest goal of establishing at least one station in the region broadly defined as “Southern Central Africa,” which would be supported by annual subscriptions from the public for the next five years. Representatives of Cambridge and Oxford Universities were dispatched to “open communications” with other British universities, in the hope that they could expand their pool of supporters and workers. Finally, the association would send a team to include six clergymen, a physician, and a number of trained craftsmen to the continent itself.

The High Churchmen's theological proclivities, however, also required the small party to have “a bishop at its head.” Sending a bishop without a flock or a diocese was a move of which many established missions disapproved, and that immediately marked the new mission as different from its predecessors. Henry Venn, the secretary of the competing Church Missionary Society, regarded the plan for sending a bishop as a “fanciful notion” that was likely to end in nothing but trouble for the mother church. Others thought that appointing a bishop to an undeveloped diocese would inevitably create “petty little sees,” and that it had the potential to “lower the episcopal office.” The British state, too, was concerned that the Church of England was consecrating bishops in areas outside of her domain. Was not the consecration of a bishop in a territory outside of British control essentially equivalent to a claim over that territory? And was it not in the best interest of the state to avoid moves that would lead the state toward more annexation of “backward and expensive lands”? contemporaries wondered.

The mission's founders, on the other hand, felt strongly that the expedition should be led by a “missionary bishop” who could plant an entire church and who would bring all the leadership necessary for it to function independently. Their
model for this new type of mission body was the bishop of New Zealand, George Augustus Selwyn. Bishop Selwyn was also a High Churchman who chose to apply the denomination’s belief in the apostolic succession in the mission field in a very literal way. High Church Anglicans considered bishops to be “apostolic men” who should not be above doing the hard work of evangelism and church-planting themselves, like the first apostles. These men were not afraid to dirty their hands with God’s work, unlike the British Protestant “grandees” who rode in carriages and mingled with royalty, “churchmen of dignity and smooth hands.” Selwyn epitomized the High Church’s ideal of the popular bishop. He arrived in New Zealand, “navigating his little boat through the Melanesian islands, wearing seaman’s clothing, sleeping in the open, cooking his own meals, hauling on cables, digging with his spade, jumping ashore upon islands where no white had landed before, landing without knowing whether he would be greeted by curiosity or a bludgeon.” The Cambridge and Oxford mission sought their own Selwyn, someone who could be dispatched as an “evangelist-in-chief.” The organization’s preference for a “missionary bishop” was not a mundane matter, the result of a simple choice between a bishop on the one hand and a board of directors, similar to those that oversaw field operations in most established mission organizations, on the other. Rather, placing a bishop at the head of the new mission was a fundamental theological declaration that would shape the operations and tenor of the mission through its duration. In part, this decision meant the mission was better able to respond to the vagaries and vicissitudes of life in the field, of which there were many. This decision also embedded within the mission a spirit of evangelism, something that pervaded the work of the UMCA’s clerics’ wives and teachers and shaped their relationships with colleagues, protégées, and community members.

Tractarianism

In making this matter of church leadership the sine qua non of the infant mission, Gray and his colleagues also firmly established their new mission society as an heir of the particular iteration of High Church Anglicanism called Tractarianism. So called for a series of epistles published between 1833 and 1841 under the title *Tracts for the Times*, the ideology was a product of a revival movement within the Church of England. The Oxford Movement, named for the movement’s birthplace and its founders’ place of residence and work, first gained footing at Oxford in the 1820s,
when many of the university’s High Church Anglicans began to express discontent at the state of religion in England. Some among the Oxford community saw in the eighteenth-century Church of England widespread corruption and somnolence, and believed that Anglicanism had been debased by Erastianism—the supremacy of the state over the church in ecclesiastical matters—liberalism, and a rash of other troubling “-isms,” such as materialism, utilitarianism, rationalism, scientism, latitudinarianism, evangelicalism, Methodism, and “aggressive anti-Popish Protestantism.” Further, the reformers believed that the Church of England had been meeting the country’s most recent period of rapid and radical change—defined, as they saw it, by industrialization, urbanization, accelerating population growth, the erosion of traditional social norms, and the undermining of social structures—with “intransigence, conservatism, inflexibility, and lack of understanding.” The structure and organization of the church were “archaic, its social and political ideology was outmoded and there was a lamentable absence of insight and vision,” these dissenters argued. Unease over the church’s decay helped to sharpen Tractarian theology, and the Oxford Movement became a rallying cry to revive the Church of England.

Redemption of the Church of England would come, the Oxford Anglicans postulated, not in doctrinal innovation but in a return to the principles of the universal Catholic Church, before it was divided in practice in the late fourth century. In other words, they saw the Church of England as a doctrinally sound, though increasingly lax, expression of the church catholic. Their catholic church was to be “faithful in doctrine and ethos to the church of the fathers, in origins and authority absolutely independent of the kingdoms of this world.” What distinguished this new church from Roman Catholicism is that it would not be led by the pope, but guided by an apostolic succession of bishops. Tractarianism was a clarion call to the Church of England to rally around former conservative, traditional values; it was thus both a product of the age in which it arose and a determined effort to “turn back the tide of history.” In contrast to most Anglican missions of the mid-Victorian period, which were to some extent influenced by what became known as the Oxford Movement, the UMCA was a self-consciously Tractarian mission from its inception.

The same forces that gave rise to the movement influenced its spiritual temper. While the Oxford Movement was at its core a spiritual revival, contrary to many contemporary dissenting groups its leaders were not necessarily interested in doctrinal invention or innovation; rather, the movement’s leaders were interested in returning to the church of antiquity and its principles. Tractarians privileged
the inheritances of “ancient” Christianity, such as asceticism and ritualism, and sought holiness “through self-denial and mortification of bodily and worldly appetites.” Tractarian asceticism manifested itself in a restatement of the monastic and contemplative ideal (which would become a hallmark of the mission’s British workers, as well as some Africans), as well as in “strict notions of prayer, alms-giving, fasting, the ideal of poverty, voluntary retirement, repentance, and penance.”

Members of the Oxford Movement were also influenced by the Romantic response to the Enlightenment. Leaders’ embrace of Romanticism was spiritually liberating for Oxford’s Anglican High Churchmen, who moved away from their old devotional practice because it was “cold” and “formal.” Reformers instead came to identify more with the religious feeling and “heart religion” associated with evangelicalism, and as the movement progressed, Tractarianism became marked by a more “emotional and ecstatic spirituality.” Reformers expressed a unique willingness to “learn from the ‘primitive,’ the unsophisticated, and the unfamiliar,” and stressed a “reverence for the sublime, the mysterious, and the awe-ful.” The relationship between mysticism and ritualism expressed by the ancient church fathers also resonated with the Tractarians, and they emphasized the importance of an embodied, emotional spirituality. This embodied, emotional spirituality would become a hallmark of the mission’s evangelical process, forming the basis of the relationships of affective spirituality that lay at the heart of the multigenerational network of Mbweni’s female lay evangelists. An embodied, emotional spirituality was itself a powerful evangelical tool, inspiring Mbweni’s former schoolgirls not only to maintain the relationships and lifestyle they had developed at Mbweni, but to re-create their experiences in their new communities.

Tractarianism was inherently missiological, and reformers were immediately faced with the question of how to bring new members into the fold. Particularly challenging was the need to balance the heightened emotionality of Tractarian Anglicanism with the ancient belief in revealed meaning. “Revealed meaning” in this context is the belief that there was more to the Bible, and therefore Christianity, than its literal meaning—the longer one practiced Christianity, the deeper one could venture into the religion’s truth. One had to earn this deeper meaning, however, through a gradual mastery of the more basic elements of Christianity. The answer was an inheritance from the ancient church—the doctrine of “reserve” in communicating religious knowledge. Tractarians’ understanding of the notion of reserve or “economy” is based on the disciplina arcani, a theological principle of the ancient church, which urged restraint in the timing and means of imparting
religious knowledge. Tractarians’ embrace of this ancient philosophy stemmed in part from their aversion to newer methods of evangelism, in which the “preacher forcefully declared the holiest and deepest mysteries of the Christian religion before crowds in the effort to secure conversion.” Rather than mimic what they considered to be contemporary dissidents’ “irreverent” behavior, Tractarians sought to follow the example of the apostles and “begin with milk in order that the hearers may grow up and later receive meat.” Those invested in the principle of reserve attacked the “unreserved and indiscriminate application of strong evangelic language to Christians who might be in the infancy of their growth” and counseled “an adaptation of imparted revealed truth to the capacities and understanding of the receiver.”

Tractarian spirituality, wrote one historian of the movement, “disliked what was flamboyant. It shrank from religion in the market-square. It was not fond of seeking publicity . . . They were quiet men [who] stay away from too much traffic with the world and say [their] prayers.” Proselytizers from the UMCA would not, in other words, preach from a pulpit in the town square, converting new “believers” on the spot, and counting their success in numbers of new adherents.

According to Tractarians, the right way to promote truth was through slow revelations of the Gospel through ritual and practice and through the “formation of moral character by habit.” Intellectual learning, though important, took a backseat to other modes of experiencing God. Tractarians rejected the “presumptuous turn of mind, the reliance on intellectual ability, supposed to result from instruction addressing itself to the intellect alone” that accompanied the Enlightenment in favor of allowing the soul to grow slowly “into apprehending Calvary by doing right, by allowing grace to sanctify.” Conversion was to be achieved through a change in “conscience, not logical reason . . . ethical judgment rather than the argumentative judgment.” It was not that learning was unimportant, but Tractarians believed that “true learning consisted of more than mere cultivation of the intellect. The prerequisites for the reception of the truth of the Gospel were not intellectual attainment or rational enquiry, but the simplicity and teachable disposition of little children.” To anticipate my argument, this was a fundamental component of the missionaries’ strategy—they intended to work among children and teach them the fundamentals of Christianity through daily practice. While their focus on children became untenable, they retained a focus on quotidian practice and embodied performance. This theological particularity was the very trait that allowed the mission to incorporate such a diversity of ethnic backgrounds; allowed congregants to build intimate, affective spiritual
relationships; and allowed evangelists to knit a network of believers across discontinuous lands and through several generations.

To Tractarian reformers, the way of knowing the truth was not merely intellectual—it was embodied and felt rather than reasoned; practiced and experienced rather than taught. Tractarians' stress on the limitations of human reason and intellect in perceiving religious truth led them to focus instead on the “sacramental principle.” There are, argued Tractarians, “deeper moral truths that [lie] above and beyond nature, in the unseen world" that cannot be reached with speech or reason alone, but must come to be known through allegorical understanding. Sacraments and devotional rites are meant to reassure followers of the mystical realm of being, to the other “modes of being, operation, presence, extension, continuance, growth, production, union, incorporation, besides those we are permitted to discern in the visible creation.” Reformers thus recalled certain sacraments for inclusion in Tractarian devotional practice as a way of assisting the faithful “in realizing Divine contemplations.”\(^48\) While this meant that in practice Tractarians received Christ on their knees and made the sign of the cross, it also meant that cultivating quotidian habits, performing embodied knowledge, and living out Christian principles were central to the Tractarian evangelical repertoire. It also means that the founders’ Tractarianism resonated for more than a century in the work of the UMCA's multigenerational network of female lay evangelists.

Theology and Abolition

The Oxford Movement's call for a revival of catholicity within the Church of England and a remaking of the church abroad was, again, inherently missiological. This doctrinal mandate for missionary outreach coincided in the 1850s with the imperatives of an age given over to exploration, redemption, and improvement—the two reform movements coalesced to ultimately produce the UMCA.\(^49\) The circumstances that potentiated the mission were unique to the time, for up to this point, the religious philosophy that drove many Protestant missions overseas was a millennial discourse that glorified contemporary Western culture as the most enlightened path to salvation, and emphasized conversion of the world as a means of ushering in the millennium of peace, happiness, and plenty that adherents believed would herald Christ's return to Earth.\(^50\) Such eschatological—or end-of-the-world—beliefs were closely connected to secular moral philosophy that arose
from the Enlightenment. Further, in the years after the American Revolution, the British saw a need for some “basic adjustments” to their overseas policies and began to look toward India and Africa. After the mid-eighteenth century, however, imperialism, secular humanitarianism, and economic policy further incited church organizations to turn their attentions overseas.

Overseas missionary organizations founded in and after the 1850s, and in particular the organization that became the UMCA, were influenced by moral secular philosophy as much as they were by religiosity. During the late eighteenth century, Europeans adopted a secularized version of Christian charity and came to believe that “human misery was not only an evil: to some degree it was a preventable evil.” This inspired a new faith in the importance of “progress” and a renewed hope for the improvement of the human condition. The post-Enlightenment ideal that the rights of one man were the rights of all men, and that “human progress should be shared by all,” further aligned secular humanism and the values of Christian charity. In the late eighteenth century, the British came to believe that men and women, particularly British Christians, could remove the evils of the world they saw around them—such as slavery, barbarism, heathenism, polygamy, and poverty. Particularly after the Napoleonic wars, Britain’s overseas humanitarian urges became emblematic of national virtue. Britons saw few of these social ills at home and took pride in their own civilization and culture. This sentiment led to the “easy assumption that the good life was possible only within the framework of Western culture,” and that “civilization” was the panacea to the world’s ills. Indeed, the British people’s deep faith in the moral virtue of spreading Western civilization was deeply entrenched in mid-nineteenth-century national identity. Both missionary and secular reformers rallied behind the cause of carrying the light of “civilization” to the “dark places” of the world. “Civilizing” Africa would satisfy moral obligation, stimulate economic growth, and secure commercial profits for those involved in the African trade.

Britain’s theological, humanitarian, economic, and fledgling imperial interest in Africa focused first and foremost on the abolition of the slave trade. A new interest in the plight of all men caused Europeans to see, many for the first time, the suffering on the African continent caused by the trade in slaves, the horrors of the Middle Passage and other routes, and the brutality on both African and New World plantations. Despite their own hand in the transformation of the slave trade and their unremitting consumption of the products of slave labor, when abolitionism gained popularity in England, British humanitarian reformers shifted their rhetoric
to characterize Africans as barbarians in need of salvation. Citing what Europeans understood as long-standing institutions of slavery on the continent and Africans’ apparent willingness to trade in slaves, European humanitarian reformers constructed an image of Africans as a different sort of man than Europeans—they were “‘fallen men,’ degraded by their savagery and by the equally savage Christians that carried out the slave trade.” If slavery and the slave trade caused African barbarism, then abolition was the cure. Britain, the self-proclaimed leader among nations, claimed an ethical right to work against the slave trade and, by extension, “a moral right to intervene in Africa for the sake of carrying civilization to the barbarians.”

The imperatives of a time given over to humanitarianism and abolitionism and the clarion call to reestablish the church abroad coalesced in the Tractarians’ mission to Central Africa. Part of the responsibility of Christ’s Holy Catholic Church, particularly that pure and reformed part of it established in this Kingdom,” reformers argued, was to “make our pure part of His Church the means of informing all that are in ignorance, and of reforming all that are in error.” In a series of sermons laying out a blueprint for a Tractarian approach to overseas evangelism, George Augustus Selwyn had once likened Britain’s missionaries to the patriarch Abraham, the man who “of all the characters of Scripture, [is] the one best adapted to be the guide and example of the colonist.” If Britain and her Tractarians were planning to “claim the stewardship of Abraham to be the Father of many nations,” it would not be enough to tend to the heathen at home, but they must both “attack a citadel close at hand, and to advance against an enemy in the field.” The universities’ mission embraced these values with a fervor unparalleled in earlier missions and began their new endeavor “committed both to missionary outreach and to the principles of the Oxford Movement.”

**Building a “Native Church”**

Tractarian philosophy mandated that the fledgling Oxford and Cambridge Mission to Central Africa would be both self-sustaining and evangelical, for, as Isaiah’s prophecies told them, a true Zion in East Africa would only come through the work of the faithful themselves. Founders envisaged a church that was “native in the true sense of the word: the church of the people of the land, irrespective of European influence, and adapting itself to the special circumstances of the race and the country in which it exists.” In reality, this meant that the missionaries
were pushing for a mediated form of Christianity—one they considered neither too “European” nor too “African,” but which would incorporate habits of Christian living in a way that would resonate with the local culture. The new mission was not the only organization to doubt the universal applicability of the “Three C’s.” Indeed, missionary planners were beginning to see that “civilization” could mean something different to everyone who used it. For the Tractarians, their emphasis on quotidian performance and revealed meaning permitted the natural integration of certain local forms of expression and some longer-standing African practices into the new church. While “civilizing” Africans was important, Tractarians conceded that the day-to-day realities of African life made some behaviors and accoutrements of Western culture impractical. For example, the starched, high-necked dresses that defined Victorian respectability back in Britain seemed unfeasible in the muggy and dusty equatorial climate. While rarely stooping to forego the buttons and frills themselves, female UMCA workers would dress their charges in the cheaper and less maintenance-intensive kanga, or cloth lengths, popular in East Africa at the time. Missionaries were convinced that “a native ministry which relied on European customs, and was asked to accept the definitions of either England or Rome,” would never be a success in East Africa, because “European customs and definitions were the result of a history and circumstance in which Africans did not share.” In contemporary terms, theirs was a relatively progressive approach to cultural change—other missions required a far more strict adherence to European values.

The idea of creating a “Native Church” was, however, not unique to the UMCA. No missionary society could possibly send enough workers to lead the new church, and many felt the best way to ensure its longevity was to train Africans to preach and as administrators. How this worked in practice was not consistent across missionary organizations. In 1874, for example, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) undertook the care of slaves freed near Mombasa, Kenya. The station was staffed in large part by individuals the CMS referred to as “Bombay Africans.” These Christians were Africans who had left the continent as children, and who were then liberated during the 1850s in the Indian Ocean and in port cities of southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf before being turned over to the British municipality in Bombay. After brief stints living with European families in the colony, they were collected into an “African Asylum.” There they adopted biblical first names and the surnames of their missionary caregivers, dressed in the contemporary British styles—women with ankle-length, shirtwaisted dresses, leggings, long sleeves, and
collars, hair straightened and pinned in a bun behind their heads; men dressed in trousers and coats, often with vests, cravats, high collars, boots, and felt hats. They embraced European language, education, and habits. Throughout the continent, missions employed the strategy of catering a message to local conditions. And, to be sure, the process of translation in and of itself could produce nothing other than churches that were inherently “native” in terms of belief and understanding. The process of learning about Christianity and determining its social and political performance was "a series of collective and contradictory acts of creation." Despite this, many organizations in Tanzania in particular changed their tack after German conquest in 1914, in particular by encouraging converts to abandon old beliefs. Even then, however, the UMCA would not adopt the Volksmission strategy of converting societies from the top downwards as a unit by adapting Christianity to the society’s “distinctive culture.”

As their Tractarian values would suggest, the mission’s earliest cohort of workers also believed that a successful native clergy, and indeed all African Christians, were best cultivated from childhood. Religious knowledge was something most successfully revealed over time, and shepherding adult Africans to Christ, missionaries realized, would require an abrupt and fundamental shift in morality—from “barbarism” to Christianity—and the renunciation of forms of authority with which they had lived their entire lives. Although the British Tractarians were content to let some native institutions and practices continue, they thought that most adult Africans lacked the capacity to transform their lives of sin and moral depravity to lives of godliness. On the other hand, they thought African children had not yet succumbed to the moral depravity that characterized their parents, and that they therefore possessed the capacity to be better Christians. They were, in other words, a blank slate—or, as one missionary at the CMS station in Mombasa put it, “clay for the potter.” In a decided departure from the biological racisms of the day, missionaries saw their young adherents—be they freed slave children, orphans, or youths who were entrusted to the mission by their parents or who boarded at the mission’s schools—as having been spared the “heathen” influence of their families and communities, leaving them open to a more full acceptance of Christ. As one mission worker explained about the differences between children and adult former slaves, “the children because they have never been slaves, loose [sic] this failing of their parents [their “heathenism”] and are far superior to them and are better Christians (as far as man’s eye can judge), sharper ie: more intelligent.” Children were malleable and impressionable, and their capacity for learning was untainted
by years of barbarism and savagery. This preference for work among children was supported by Tractarian doctrine that, as we have seen, was based on the idea that the prerequisites for the reception of the Gospel were “not intellectual attainment or rational enquiry, but the simplicity and teachable disposition of little children.” The mission’s orphans and other children would, in the missionaries’ ideal world, grow slowly into the moral disposition required of Christians and come to embody the virtues and values of modernizing Christianity.

The belief that the British, with the Oxford Tractarian reformers chief among them, were uniquely qualified to re-create the church abroad while simultaneously ushering in a new type of church underwrote the mission’s endeavors from the start. Inspired by their abolitionism, the founders of the UMCA imagined that their “native congregants” would be former slaves, refugees from the slave trade, and slave traders. Sure in their religious calling, officials saw biblical parallels at nearly every turn. In general terms, officials would be, as Selwyn put it, the “true children of Abraham, the fosterfathers of many nations,” guiding “wretched troop[s] of slaves” from throughout East Africa to Christ. More specifically, there were obvious parallels between the triumphant return of the Israelites to Jerusalem as the founders of God’s new kingdom on earth and the redemption of Africa’s heathen slaves for the work of Christ in East Africa. And indeed, UMCA officials turned in particular to the text of Isaiah time and again when speaking of their own chosen people—the freed slaves, their descendants, and other adherents among whom they would work. The Book of Isaiah offers a compelling tale of sin, judgment, redemption, the unifying power of the love of God, and shared religious identification. The account of Isaiah’s prophecies to the Israelites opens by recounting the prophet’s chastisement of the Israelites for the heathen practices of many among them, such as disbelief in God’s word, superficial worship without true piety, idolatry, ungodliness, immorality, and a “want of honesty and uprightness” and “of humanity and compassion.” Isaiah warned the Israelites of the urgent need for confession and atonement, and presaged the destruction and calamities that would befall them should they fail to do so. Their refusal to repent ultimately led to their destruction at the hands of hostile nations, the plundering and wasting of the land, and their exile from Jerusalem. The city was left in ruins.

Isaiah’s message was not complete, however, because the Israelites’ trials and the destruction of Jerusalem were in fact what ultimately permitted their salvation and redemption. Isaiah prophesied that God, in His grace, would offer “redemption to His helpless people, for whom no one pleads, and who have so
little of their own to recommend them.” He would then heal the “outward and the spiritual wounds” of the faithful and penitent among His people, which they had received as a result of their disbelief and exile. As they returned home safely through what was once dry and wasted land, they would experience the miracle of God’s favor, for where menacing dragons and jackals once roamed was an oasis, verdant, rich in bloom and color. The faithful among the Israelites would return to Jerusalem, which God had also restored, as “a purified, glorified people of God.” As a nation they would constitute the core of the new Church of Zion, the “centre of God’s kingdom on earth.” The new spiritual nation would be “the foremost witnesses of the message of salvation to the whole world” and it would be them to whom the heathen would “join themselves in order to share in [the Kingdom of God’s] blessings.” Gentiles from every quarter would flock to Zion, constituting a “cleansed, glorified, and blissful Church” where “distinctions of race were to be abolished,” and the community that emerged would be unified above ethnic and linguistic differences.

The universities’ mission so closely aligned with the stories in the Book of Isaiah that the archbishop of Canterbury spoke on the lessons in the spring of 1889 to commemorate the organization’s twenty-eighth anniversary. In commemoration of the mission’s progress in “winning . . . Eastern Africa for Christ,” and of the role mission supporters believed the organization was playing in reviving the Church of England, the archbishop delivered a sermon in which he recalled for parishioners the Israelites’ glorious return to Jerusalem and the subsequent rebirth of the Church at Zion. Laced with poetic imagery and evocative biblical allusions, the sermon was doubtless designed to elicit listeners’ sympathy in the form of financial contributions and pledges to join as missionaries:

The vision of Isaiah did not fade from the prophet’s sight when he had but seen the serpent homes transformed into sweet pastures. He saw the way of holiness, the new highway of nations, engineered by man, for man. Our maps of to-day exhibit to our sickening sight “what man has made of man” in hard lines and geographic colours. They show us the depopulated territories, the slave stations, the routes of those ghastly caravans. The prophet speaks of a morrow, when the highway shall be there, the way of holiness, and no ravenous nor unclean soul be found there; but new processions . . . shall stream along it, the redeemed of the Lord returning and coming to our Sion [sic] with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. That is the mystical epic of the day and of the day’s work you have begun.
According to the archbishop, the UMCA’s Native Church was in fact the epitome of Isaiah’s vision. He would ask his congregation: Could “Isaiah himself have had present to that divine imagination of his a more perfect fulfilling of his image?” Analogous to the Israelites’ desert were the East African freed-slave communities, recently ravaged by the spiritual and physical destruction of the slave trade. Here “the victims of the old serpent lay strewn, crushed and starved anatomies from the slave-show,” and they were but “fed up for crueler servitudes and nameless degradations.” To the minds of the British UMCA workers, the Africans’ salvation and deliverance from their figurative exiles, their sins, and their spiritual depravity came not directly from God himself, but through the knowledge of Christ offered by British missionaries. English men and women, “afired [sic] with love and energy,” brought together Africans “of all peoples and tongues” keen to confess and atone for their sins, and to pledge themselves as Christians. Africans willing to abandon their “heathen” practices—their ignorance of God and practices of idolatry and polygamy, for example—were consecrated as the core of the new church. As in Isaiah’s prophesies, at the core of the new African church was a community of penitent faithful; the cathedral they had built at Mkunazini, Zanzibar—at the very site of the old slave market about which Livingstone had written—was itself Zion. There, in the ruins and depravity of the slave market, “there are their houses, their friendships, their industries, the discipleship, their choirs, their sacraments.” Slaves from communities throughout East Africa came together at Zanzibar in spiritual union, constituting a spiritual nation as diverse as Isaiah’s Zion. These new African Christians, the foundation of the Native Church, would be the messengers of salvation throughout East Africa. According to the archbishop, by the time of his sermon in 1889, UMCA congregants had begun to realize Isaiah’s prophesies. African evangelists had carried God’s message from Zanzibar “far away to the south” to the “great settlements of the Rouvuma [sic],” and expanded God’s kingdom “far away to the west [at] the vast waters of Nyassa”—in other words, from Zanzibar to the mainland, and across Tanzania to Mozambique and Malawi. Under the banner of Christ, “farms and villages are growing with all the energy of free labour dawning on peoples who once dreamt of nothing between lifelong idleness and toil under the scourge,” along with schools offering “their minds the first glimpse of the great secrets of knowledge and self-restraint and power.” In the sermon, the archbishop drew upon much-longer-standing discourses of religious and ethnic unity within the mission community, discourses formed in the Tractarian move toward missionization in the 1850s, to make his point. Indeed, these same discourses
were at play nearly three decades earlier, when church officials were preparing the first party of missionaries to enter the mission field. As they did so, they looked toward Central Africa with the longer-standing Tractarian discourses of religious and ethnic unity, of building a Zion in East Africa, as encouragement.

Toward Africa

In what would prove to be a rather ignominious start to their “grand scheme,” on November 1, 1859, the Home Committee named Charles Frederick Mackenzie the first bishop of the new mission. No longer simply the Oxford and Cambridge Mission to Central Africa, the organization was now called the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (or UMCA) in honor of Dublin and Durham Universities joining the cause. At thirty-four, Mackenzie was “young, healthy, and determined.” He was also a devoted High Churchman who was “keenly receptive” to the founders’ Tractarian designs for the mission. Although in his younger years he had showed “very little great intellectual ability,” Mackenzie was apparently not lacking in diligence, tenacity, or hard work, because he eventually flourished at Cambridge. A vocation for theology ultimately led Mackenzie to pursue ordination. In his late twenties Mackenzie heard an “unmistakably clear” call to mission work, which he pursued as the archdeacon of Natal, South Africa, in 1855.

Thus, when he assumed the helm of the UMCA, Mackenzie was a “reasonably experienced Africa hand.” In Natal, Mackenzie was initially responsible for an urban congregation at Durban. The posting was less than ideal, not least of all because the congregants battled him and each other over the direction of the church and the tenor of its services. He found solace in his work among the “Kaffirs” outside of Durban, and was greatly relieved when in 1856 he was released from “his harassing charge” and placed instead at Pietermaritzburg. The following year he received what he had long hoped for—a rural posting. It was in the rural areas of Umhlali, forty miles north of Durban, where Mackenzie did the bulk of the work that would soon recommend him for the bishopric of Central Africa. The archdeacon split his time between the central station, a military encampment a short ride away, and two more distant stations, growing the number of churches served from the central station to four and meriting the addition of another priest to the diocese. In letters to family and friends back in England, Mackenzie reported that his happiness living with his two sisters in Kaffir huts was constant, even in the face of “floods, vermin,
and poisonous reptiles." And indeed, for four years Mackenzie did God's work with a “zeal and cheerfulness” that firmly established in the minds of colleagues his “true missionary spirit.”\textsuperscript{83} In early 1859 Mackenzie made plans to return to England for consecration as coadjutor bishop for the Zulu country. When the appointment fell through, Mackenzie returned nonetheless, arriving home without employment. Mackenzie’s return to England was serendipitous, for the UMCA’s Home Committee had just begun the search for a bishop. Home Committee members were impressed by his résumé and experience in the South African mission field. Mackenzie's reputation for “muscular swashbuckling Christianity,” however, seems not to have been immediately worrisome.

Mackenzie’s enthusiasm for planting a church in Central Africa was unbridled (a trait that would ultimately prove to be much to the church's detriment). In 1860 Mackenzie wrote to the bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, that “we are more popular in the country, than any other mission ever was, I believe.”\textsuperscript{84} Mackenzie’s robust faith, his time spent in Africa, and the timing of his return seem to have instilled in administrators an elevated sense of confidence with regard to the upcoming mission. The party's imperfect preparation for the task was, in hindsight, evident as early as before their departure. Even the most important detail—where they would settle—was a “matter of perfect indifference,” so eager were the missionaries to begin their work. They had left the matter of a station location to David Livingstone, on whose countless travels and work in the mission field the party would soon learn they relied much too heavily. In March 1859, Robert Gray had written to Livingstone to tell him of the universities’ determination to begin work in Central Africa, and to ask Livingstone’s advice about the most suitable field for these men. The decision was difficult for Livingstone. In his view, the Shire Highlands of modern-day Malawi “needed colonists and not just an isolated group of missionaries, who would be able to do little about the serious problems which would face them there.” He feared, however, that if the news got back to London and the Foreign Office that this was not a suitable area for missionaries, plans for a colony there would also be tabled. So, in October 1859 Livingstone wrote to invite Mackenzie and the UMCA to settle in the Shire Highlands. We know that Livingstone saw the invitation as somewhat risky, but he did not at the time know how great a risk the UMCA would undertake.\textsuperscript{85}

The party responded immediately and set a departure date for the following October. The timing of the invitation left little time to gather much useful knowledge of the communities among which they would be living, of the language, or of the
local politics. Ignorance in each of these subjects would prove a disservice in the months ahead. Further, few among the missionaries who accompanied Mackenzie had field or travel experience. Several were not temperamentally suited to the realities of mission work.\textsuperscript{86} Despite the party’s rather lackluster preparation, the team nonetheless had the “confidence to go forth on this mission.” They fancied themselves, in the words of the new bishop, “a small body indeed amongst the mass of heathenism.”\textsuperscript{87} Trusting that they had all they needed in God’s blessing, the party departed after a solemn farewell service in Canterbury Cathedral on October 4, 1860. Mackenzie’s parting words echoed the solemnity of the service. “I am afraid of this,” he wrote, for “most great works of this kind have been carried on by one or two men, in a quieter way, and have had a more humble beginning.” Perhaps Mackenzie feared that the excitement and focus that attended raising funds and recruiting workers obscured their more practical preparations for the field. Whatever the reason, he had cause to be afraid.

The party set sail for Cape Town on October 6, 1860. There the missionaries tackled bureaucratic details, such as Mackenzie’s consecration, and convened with Livingstone to make their way to the mission site. Livingstone had selected a spot along the Shire River near Lake Nyasa, in modern-day Malawi, which was not where the party had initially expected to work. After a two-month journey into the Congo mouth of the Zambezi and its smaller tributary, the Shire—a journey that was marred by mounting evidence that Livingstone had misled them—the party reached their destination in the spring of 1861.\textsuperscript{88} Rather than the verdant, fertile lands Livingstone had promised, the rolling hills and wide plains were dotted with rocky protrusions and were devoid of any crops, apparently hostile to cultivation. Equally inhospitable were the local inhabitants. The party encountered from the first only widespread instability and insecurity. They passed heavily fortified villages, which shielded people who were concerned only with their own safety. One record of this journey tells of Bishop Mackenzie entering his new diocese carrying his shepherd’s crook in one hand and a shotgun in the other.\textsuperscript{89}

The failure of the first UMCA station at Magomero has been recounted elsewhere, but the broad outlines of the story offer context for understanding the mission’s dramatic change in focus—both ideological and geographical—that followed their initial foray to the heart of the continent.\textsuperscript{90} It is also an example of the ways in which the UMCA, and indeed other missions, set out with a goal in mind but were thwarted by their lack of historical and political context, poor language skills, and the overconfidence that often attends good intentions. It also

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demonstrates, as we will see time and again in the pages that follow, the ways in which African initiative, creativity, and societal roles and frameworks shaped the nature of the work the mission accomplished. In the case of the UMCA, by the time the mission party arrived at their new destination, it had become painfully clear that they were ill-prepared for the social and political realities that awaited them. While en route to the Shire Highlands, a chance encounter with a passing slave caravan provided the missionaries with the opportunity for which they had long dreamt, that of liberating slaves from their “Arab” captors. Burdened now with eighty-four dependents, whom they guarded with guns and arms, they appeared to locals not as the “liberators” they saw themselves to be, but as slave traders. Hasty and uninformed political alliances, as well as a propensity to take up arms, put them at odds with large swaths of neighboring communities. The missionaries were absolutely unable to discern local politics, and were betrayed by the mutability and fluidity of the ethnic identities they thought were decisive. Their apparent ignorance and naïveté about agriculture, despite their protestations that they had come to work the land, baffled locals and caused concern about their true intentions. They had intervened in local markets, offering their imported goods in exchange for slaves or interest in the church, to such an extent that they destroyed the economy and stripped the land of surplus food. By November the missionaries were in dire straits: they had lost the support of their primary local ally, were hosting more than two hundred dependents on a peninsula devoid of crops and the promise of food, had run out of supplies, and were effectively at war with their neighbors.

Early the following January, while on an armed raid to “free” captives from neighboring tribes who they believed were trafficking in slaves (such expeditions were leading their neighbors to believe that they were, in fact, also trading in slaves), Bishop Mackenzie fell ill from exposure and diarrhea. Poor weather and flooded rivers delayed their progress toward home, and the party lost their medicines in a canoe accident. Mackenzie’s health failed, and he died on January 31. When the team returned to Magomero without their bishop, it became obvious that the mission settlement was doomed. While they were gone, the famine had intensified, and was further aggravated by an outbreak of amoebic dysentery. Adherents absconded in search of greater security under other patrons. In April, unhealthy missionaries, a dwindling congregation, and increasing local insecurity confirmed the missionaries’ fears: their experiment was over. Those who remained from the settlement at Magomero built a new settlement near the Shire River, where they waited for nearly a year for their new bishop, intent only on survival. The experience at Magomero
left many among the UMCA bitter “beyond all possible expectation,” but it did not weaken their resolve to host a mission in Central Africa.92 All agreed, however, that there would be some changes.

Zanzibar

After the shocking news of Mackenzie’s untimely death in the highlands of East Africa reached England in 1862, the Home Committee wasted no time in consecrating a new bishop. The Reverend William George Tozer, a vicar in Burgh-cum-Winthorpe, Lincolnshire, assumed leadership of the mission on February 2, 1863. Tozer was, according to his friend and colleague Dr. Edward Steere, a man who “shrinks from nothing and succeeds in everything.”93 The new bishop would find himself drawing on this enterprising nature many times in the months and years ahead. Tozer sailed immediately for South Africa upon appointment and immediately undertook the several-hundred-mile trek to the mission, arriving in the Shire Highlands on June 26, 1863.

In the dry lands of the Shire Valley, Tozer found a flailing mission. Four of the original members were dead, and two he immediately deemed medically unfit to serve. There was little food to be had, the surviving population was at war, and transportation and navigation on the surrounding rivers were untenable. Tozer saw no future for the site and closed it immediately. Thinking it best to cut all ties to the area, Tozer refused to accept responsibility for the mission’s dependent men, women, and children and left them unmoored in the still-volatile region—an ironic move for an abolitionist mission.94 The UMCA would start fresh elsewhere.

Tozer proposed the island of Zanzibar, which sits about twenty-five miles off the coast of Tanzania, as a location more centrally located, closer to sources of food and other supplies, and, as mission sources recall, altogether more “civilized.”95 This did not sit well with mission administrators, neither those back in England nor those left alive in Malawi, despite his assurances that it was a place “where the good seed might be sown and reared and whence by another route the Great Lake might be reached.” Continued resistance notwithstanding, Tozer closed the mission and left the continent for Zanzibar with his party in tow on August 31, 1863.

Although the UMCA formally established a mission station on Zanzibar in 1863, it was not until late in 1864 that the organization had its first African congregants. The first five congregants were all young boys and were a gift presented by Sultan
Majid, the Zanzibari head of state, as a token of his support for the greater abolitionist cause. The first female congregants would not arrive until halfway through 1865. It was due in part to theology and in part to circumstance that the mission grew so slowly in its first few years. As their Tractarian roots dictated, the UMCA’s intention was never, as Dr. Steere put it, “to bring in such numbers as that we might be overwhelmed by a mass of heathenism, but to try to give a Christian tone to our first scholars, and then to bring a few, time after time, so that they might catch the rising spirit.” And indeed, after acquiring the first five adherents in 1863, Tozer explained in a letter to his sister Helen that he was determined to “creep rather than walk.” He therefore “declined having for the present any addition made to our little group of boys, who thus far are very satisfactory,” and pledged that only once “these five are taught something and got into order, we can very well take more.” Female congregants were not at the time a possibility anyway, for there were as yet no female workers at the mission. Victorian decorum and the Tractarian emphasis on ritual learning meant British “lady” workers would be the best teachers for young female adherents.
Mass conversion campaigns would not have been possible either. First, the Tractarians’ long-term theological goals precluded the quick, mass conversions of adults and focused instead on growing the Christian spirit in uncorrupted children over time. Moreover, the political environment at Zanzibar was not conducive to large-scale campaigns. Sultan Majid and the island’s Muslim majority generally tolerated the mission, as long as they kept their proselytizing “to slaves and infidels” and left professed Muslims alone. It took little more than a death sentence leveled against a Muslim man who listened to Steere’s vernacular street preaching to convince the missionaries that large-scale conversion campaigns would not be tolerated in Zanzibar. Small-scale proselytizing did inspire some few congregants from the local Chinese, Hindi, Goanese, Indian, and European expatriate communities; however, African “converts,” both slave and free, were scarce. D. Y. Mills, a prolific missionary author, could recall but a single case of a local freewoman who came to the mission expressly for Christian teaching, and even she was not new to Christianity but had been exposed to the Gospel while living as a child near a Church Missionary Society station in Uganda. In general, the local Zanzibari community responded to the mission’s advances with about the same passing curiosity they afforded other foreign faiths espoused by travelers and settlers introduced into their cosmopolitan society.

On June 25, 1865, however, the UMCA’s first two British female missionaries arrived at the Seychelles en route to Zanzibar. The 155-island nation situated northeast of Madagascar frequently served as a way station for travelers from Europe to the African continent, and for British navy cruisers policing the Indian Ocean for slaving dhows. In fact, at least as mission legend would have it, the arrival of the British “lady workers” coincided with the very moment a British cruiser docked in the same Seychellois harbor after a battle at sea with an Arab slave ship. On board were several hundred slaves who had survived a dramatic rescue by British mariners from the illicit slave dhow. To commemorate the arrival of the UMCA’s “lady workers,” Sultan Majid presented Tozer with fourteen of the children on board HMS Wasp, to add to the five boys he had given to the mission in September of the previous year. The gift included nine girls and five boys, and constituted the advent of the UMCA’s ministry to women.