



# The Communion of Women: Missions and Gender in Colonial Africa and the British Metropole

*Elizabeth E. Prevost*

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of British women left home to follow a call to the African mission field. Women's involvement in Protestant foreign missions during this time grew out of organized efforts to professionalize women's social services, to promote white women's distinct ability to emancipate 'heathen' women, and to consolidate the religious framework of the British Empire. Motivated women could therefore pursue their vocation in a skilled, independent capacity, confident in the transformative power of the gospel and its institutional counterparts: the Christian home, school, and clinic.

Yet women's missions did not transplant British paradigms easily onto African soil. Instead, missionary women encountered competing forms of culture and knowledge that caused them to approach evangelism as a series of negotiations and to rethink preconceived notions of race, gender, and religion. The outcome was a feminized, collaborative framework of Christianity which fostered new opportunities for solidarity and authority among British and African women. So powerful were these individual encounters that they decentred collective representations of empire, patriarchy, progress, and 'civilization.' Missionaries accordingly focused their attentions not only on the overseas mission field, but on the British state and church as sites of regeneration, emancipation, and reform, attempting to build a corporate body around women's Christian authority that would ameliorate the trauma of imperialism and war.

Elizabeth Prevost looks at missionaries as the products as well as the agents of the globalization of Christianity, during a time of rapid change at the local, regional, and international level. Anglican women in Madagascar, Uganda, and the British metropole form the basis for this story. Using a rich and largely untapped base of archival and published sources, and encompassing a wide scope of geographical, social, political, and theological contexts, Prevost brings together the fine grain and the broad strokes of the global interconnections of Christianity and feminism.

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