

JOHN PIPER



A CAMARADERIE *of*
CONFIDENCE



The Fruit of Unfailing Faith in the Lives of
CHARLES SPURGEON, GEORGE MÜLLER, AND HUDSON TAYLOR

A CAMARADERIE *of*
CONFIDENCE

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THE SWANS ARE NOT SILENT

Book Seven

A C A M A R A D E R I E *of*
C O N F I D E N C E

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J O H N P I P E R

■ ■ C R O S S W A Y[®]
W H E A T O N , I L L I N O I S

A Camaraderie of Confidence: The Fruit of Unfailing Faith in the Lives of Charles Spurgeon, George Müller, and Hudson Taylor

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who have gone out from Bethlehem Baptist Church
for the sake of the Name

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P R E F A C E

This is book seven in the series of biographical studies called *The Swans Are Not Silent*. The series title comes from the story of Augustine's retirement as the bishop of Hippo in North Africa in AD 426. His successor, Eraclius, contrasted himself with Augustine by saying, "The cricket chirps, the swan is silent."¹ It was humble. But in a profound sense, it was untrue. Augustine became probably the most influential theologian in the history of the Christian church. The swan was not—and is not—silent.

So when I say "The Swans Are Not Silent," I mean: there are voices from church history that are still heard, and should be heard, in the ongoing history of the church. My hope is that this series will give voice to some of these swans. In this volume, the swans are Charles Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the nineteenth century; George Müller, the great lover of orphans and supporter of missions; and Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission. Some of the things that bind them together are that they were all contemporaries, based in England, knew each other, encouraged each other, and took inspiration from each other's lives.

When one reads the history of evangelicalism in the nineteenth century,² and reads the lives of Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor against that backdrop, one can't help but see that they were part of something much bigger than themselves. The waves of the Great Awakenings

¹Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 408.

²The stories of the first and second halves of the century are told respectively by John Wolfe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), and David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

had broken over Britain and America, and remarkable advances were happening in the growth of the Christian movement. The Awakening of 1859 was sending its ripple effects from Canada to Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England. The time was right for these three evangelicals, and they were both very like and very unlike their era. But in their similarities and distinctives, they were bound together with each other and with the evangelical movement. They may seem like meteors in their own right. But they were part of a constellation.

Similarly, in our own day, I feel woven together with many people in all the undertakings of my life. For example, when it came to researching the relationships between Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor, there was a community of friends and scholars I could turn to who love these heroes. Here at *Desiring God*, content strategist and staff writer Tony Reinke spearheaded the effort to gather insights about how these “swans” related to each other. With his help, I reached out to Michael Haykin, professor of church history and biblical spirituality at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Thomas Nettles, recently retired professor of historical theology at Southern; Christian George, assistant professor of historical theology and curator of the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Jim Elliff, president of Christian Communicators Worldwide. Mark Noll directed me to the work of Alwyn Austin on the history of the China Inland Mission.³ These friends responded with generous pointers that have shaped this book.

Of course, it almost goes without saying that I am indebted to dozens of other researchers and writers who over the years have studied and written about Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor. I did not have access to any original sources that are not available to everybody. Whatever is fresh about the stories I tell is not owing to fresh sources, but fresh reading and thinking and comparing. So I have a great debt to the

³ Alwyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832–1905* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

biographies and articles in which others have presented the facts of these men's lives.

A new development in my own indebtedness to the community of scholars and students of history and Scripture is the extraordinary possibilities that now exist with Logos Bible Software (now part of Faithlife). Logos has made available the works of Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor electronically so that one can search them for names and words and phrases almost instantaneously. Thus, it is possible in a matter of seconds to see every place where Spurgeon, for example, in his sixty-three volumes of sermons, refers to Müller or Taylor. You can easily imagine the possibilities of looking up terms and phrases. I am deeply thankful for how responsive Logos has been to requests I have made for the addition of certain works to its already massive library of electronic books.

Closer to home, as always, my life is freed and encouraged for the work of writing by Marshall Segal and David Mathis, both writers and editors for *Desiring God*. They provide the practical, critical, and visionary help to make me productive. They are part of the web of relationships without which my life would be a drab and lonely affair.

Saying thank you for the help I received on this book is complicated by the fact that the writing of it spans twenty years. The first draft of the Spurgeon section was written in 1995. The main constant relationships in my life over those years are Jesus and my wife, Noël. There are others, but without these—no books. God has been kind to me. When I ponder the relationships among Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor, I feel a special gratitude for the matrix of relationships in my life. Only God knows what life would have been if anyone were missing.

I pray now that these three “swans” will sing their way into your life. What they have to teach us and show us about the camaraderie of confidence in God, in all his goodness, glory, and power, is enormous. Let them lead you into a life of greater faith and joy and radical commitment to Christ's mission in this world.

It was George Müller who said it, with that holy blessed life of faith at the back of every word; and I was like a child, sitting at a tutor's feet, to learn of him.

Charles Spurgeon

No mission now existing has so fully our confidence and good wishes as the work of Mr. Hudson Taylor in China. It is conducted on those principles of faith in God which most dearly commend themselves to our innermost soul. The man at the head is "a vessel fit for the Master's use." His methods of procedure command our veneration.

Charles Spurgeon

INTRODUCTION

A Camaraderie of Confidence in the Mighty Goodness of God

INDIGENOUS, TRANSFORMING EXILES

In some ways Charles Spurgeon, “the greatest preacher” of the nineteenth century,¹ and George Müller, who cared for thousands of orphans, and Hudson Taylor, who founded the China Inland Mission, were men of their amazing age. In other ways, they were exiles on the earth—a camaraderie of confidence in something beyond this world. This is not an exceptional statement, since the same could be said of almost every Christian who believes the gospel and wants to serve the temporal and eternal needs of his fellow man.

The roots of this simple observation are in the Bible. On the one hand, we are told that Christians are “sojourners and exiles” (1 Pet. 2:11) whose “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). On the other hand, the apostle Paul said, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Not surprisingly, fruitful Christians are people of their age, and yet also people out of step with their age.

It is the divine genius of Christianity that incarnation and transformation are built into the very nature of the coming of Christ. He was one of us. And he was infinitely different from us. He fit in. But

¹David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 40, 267.

he changed everything. Therefore, Christianity spreads in the same way—from age to age and from culture to culture. It adapts to culture and it alters culture. It puts on the culture’s clothes and changes the culture’s heart. Then that heart-change circles back around to the clothes—and everything.

Andrew Walls, a former missions professor at the University of Edinburgh, calls these two truths the “indigenizing principle” and the “pilgrim principle.” Both are rooted in the heart of the Christian faith—the doctrines of justification and sanctification. “On the one hand, it is the essence of the Gospel that God accepts us as we are, on the ground of Christ’s work, alone, not on the ground of what we have become or are trying to become.”² That means we bring our culturally conditioned ways of life into Christ.

But as Walls points out:

[There is] another force in tension with this indigenizing principle, and this also is equally of the Gospel. Not only does God in Christ take people as they are: He takes them in order to transform them into what He wants them to be. . . . The Christian inherits the pilgrim principle, which whispers to him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.³

MEN OF THEIR AGE

Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor were clearly nineteenth-century men. Müller’s life spanned the century (1805–1898). Spurgeon was cut down early by gout and Bright’s disease at the age of fifty-seven (1834–1892). Taylor died five years into the twentieth century (1832–1905). But what made them men of their age was not merely their dates. They

² Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

were part of a great surge politically, industrially, and religiously. One could not live in the nineteenth century and fail to be affected by some of the biggest changes in the history of the world.

CITIZENS OF A GREAT EMPIRE

All three of these men were part of British culture, though Müller was born in Prussia and immigrated at the age of twenty-four. That meant that they were a part of an empire at the peak of its influence. There was only one monarch from 1837 to the end of the century, Queen Victoria—it was the Victorian Age. This stability was matched by a half-century of peace from 1850 onward. Globally, “Britain was at the height of its worldwide prestige.”⁴

The most prominent statesman of the mid-century, Lord Palmerston, expressed the significance of the British Empire to the effect that “just as anyone in the ancient world could announce that he was a Roman citizen and the might of Rome’s Empire would protect him, so Britain’s authority would shield all who could claim to be subjects of the crown wherever they might be.”⁵

FIRST MEMBERS OF THE MODERN WORLD

The Industrial Revolution and the age of invention were sweeping Britain into the modern world. In 1851, London hosted the Great Exhibition, with many new products on display. “But the overriding purpose was to celebrate the technical expertise of Britain, the first country to industrialize.”⁶ Between 1852 and 1892, the production of cotton in Britain tripled. The production of coal increased from 60 million tons in 1851 to 219 million tons fifty years later. It was the same in the United States. Coal production in that period jumped from 7 million to 268 million tons.

Railroads expanded dramatically. Steamships largely replaced

⁴Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 14.

⁵Cited in *ibid.*, 13.

⁶*Ibid.*, 17.

sailing vessels. This was the age of Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell, both born in 1847. Electric lights, radio, the telephone, and other inventions were transforming life across the world. Patterns of life common for millennia were giving way to a new world.

Medical discoveries abounded. “In Britain over seventy special hospitals were founded between 1800 and 1860. . . . Among the drugs isolated, concocted, or discovered between 1800 and 1840 were morphine, quinine, atropine, digitalin, codeine, and iodine.”⁷ Along with industry and invention and discovery, prosperity followed. “For the first time many families had money to spend over and above what had to go toward subsistence.”⁸

HEIRS OF THE GREAT AWAKENINGS

The first and second Great Awakenings had given a lasting impetus to world Christianity. Along with the population in general, the churches were expanding significantly. For example, between 1800 and 1850, the number of Methodists in England expanded from 96,000 to 518,000. The same was true for churches in Wales and Scotland. In the United States, it was equally dramatic. “Methodists increased from rather over 1,250,000 to about 5,500,000 members over the second half of the 19th century. Baptists rose from about 750,000 to about 4,500,000.”⁹

More specifically, the Awakening of 1859 had a direct effect especially on Taylor’s effort to reach China by founding the China Inland Mission. Alvyn Austin describes it:

In 1859, while Hudson Taylor was still in China [on his first term before founding the CIM], a revival broke out in Northern Ireland that led to a religious movement so pivotal in British religious history that it came to be called the Revival or “Awakening of ’59.” . . . Although Taylor missed the first phase of the revival, he arrived in

⁷Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), n.p., cited at <http://www.victorianweb.org/science/health/health12.html>.

⁸Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 18.

⁹*Ibid.*, 253.

Britain in time to reap its benefits. As J. Edwin Orr noted, “there is reason to believe that the whole [of the China Inland Mission’s first] party [of 1866] was made up of converts and workers of the 1959 Awakening.” . . . It is generally agreed that “something happened” in 1859–60, and that its ripples continued to reverberate for the rest of the century.¹⁰

It deserves mention in passing that this awakening was simultaneous with events that were hostile to the Christian faith. “In the secular realm, 1859 was equally momentous, with the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and John Stuart Mill’s essay *On Liberty*.”¹¹ I mention this to show that we should be slow to assume that any particular cultural development (as in our own day, with the unraveling of the moral fabric of Western culture) should be seen as defining the trajectory of the future. God is always doing more than we know. Just when secular ways of seeing the world were intensifying, evangelical strength was also increasing.

At the end of the century, one estimate was that evangelicalism “represented the beliefs of ‘not less, and probably many more, than sixty millions of avowed Christians in all parts of the world.’” David Bebbington endorses this estimate: “Including the converts of the missionary movement, [this] estimate was probably not far wrong.”¹² Evangelicalism was the dominant form of Christianity, and Britain was the dominant empire.

THEY WERE EVANGELICALS

Bebbington has given one of the most compelling definitions of “evangelicalism” as a distinct movement rising out of the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and continuing to this day. Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor were supreme exemplars of this movement in their time.

¹⁰ Alwyn Austin, *China’s Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832–1905* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 82–83, 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹² Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 263.

Bebbington argues that evangelicalism is a movement within Christianity marked by “crucicentrism, conversionism, Biblicism, and activism.”¹³ Or, more simply, “Bible, cross, conversion and activism were the characteristic themes of the evangelical movement.”¹⁴ Evangelicals “were stirred by the teaching of the *Scriptures*; they were eager to proclaim the message of *Christ crucified*; and they were unflagging in their quest for *conversions*. Hence they were dedicated *activists* in the spread of the gospel.”¹⁵

The mark of evangelicalism that linked Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor most clearly to their age was their activism. For all the depth of their theology and spirituality, these three giants were consummate doers. Bebbington notes, “The final mark of the evangelicals was an eagerness to be up and doing.”¹⁶

ACTIVISM WAS IN THE AIR

Activism for social betterment was in the air. It was the air that evangelicals breathed. For example, one of the legacies of John Wesley (1703–1791) was a rule of his societies that Christians ought to avoid “soft and needless self-indulgence.” In 1883, a New York Methodist newspaper asked what these words meant, and the *Christian Advocate* gave the official reply. The words covered “over-feeding, over-sleeping, over-clothing, idleness, pampering the body, living an easy, idle life, regarding work as an evil, and gratifying the appetites and passions.”¹⁷ We get the idea. The “idle life” is defective. Work is not evil. Self-indulgence is sin.

Social engagement for the betterment of the life of the oppressed was one pervasive expression of this activism. It may surprise some

¹³Ibid., 23.

¹⁴Ibid., 267.

¹⁵Ibid., 50 (emphasis added). To say it one more way, “evangelicalism typically chose to give prominence to conversion, the Bible, the cross and missionary activity. . . . These qualities renamed the defining features of evangelicalism down to the end of the century and beyond. . . . There were the typical emphases on the atoning work of Christ on the cross; the need for personal faith through conversion; the supreme value of the Bible; and the binding obligation of mission.” Ibid., 22–23.

¹⁶Ibid., 36.

¹⁷Cited in *ibid.*, 37.

people today, but evangelicals were at the cutting edge of this social activism for the sake of the poor. Bebbington gives abundant illustrations of the truth that “a plethora of churches and church-sponsored organizations throughout the English-speaking world tackled aspects of social destitution.”¹⁸

The suspicion that many of us have inherited concerning the dilution of evangelism amid social concern was not true in general of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. “The typical disparagement by fundamentalists of concern for physical welfare was only just beginning as the 20th century opened. Down to 1900, what would later be called holistic mission was part of the agreed program of evangelicalism.”¹⁹ Thus, there were a “host of evangelicals of all denominations who attempted to redress the social conditions of Victorian Britain.”²⁰

One of the most prominent burdens felt by society and church was the plight of orphans. This plight was a common theme in the novels of nineteenth-century writer Charles Dickens (1812–1870). One feels the plight in the description of Oliver Twist: “He was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none.”²¹

CARING FOR ORPHANS BY FAITH

Ministers across Great Britain founded institutions to relieve the plight of the orphan. And that social work carried over into pressure for reform of working conditions and public treatment of the poor.²² Müller was the most famous of the founders of orphanages, not because he was the only one doing it, but because of how he did it—namely, without asking for money or going into debt. Spurgeon,

¹⁸Ibid., 100–101.

¹⁹Ibid., 263.

²⁰Ibid., 39.

²¹Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1838; repr., Ware, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth, 1992), 5.

²²Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 38.

in London, seventy miles from Bristol, where Müller's orphanages were, founded his own orphanages at Stockwell in 1867.

Taylor did not found a ministry directly for orphans, but the link with Müller's ministry is significant. Taylor's commitment to go to China as a missionary included his eagerness to be a blessing to the whole person, physical and spiritual. Hence, in 1851, on his nineteenth birthday, Taylor went to live with Dr. Robert Hardey in Hull as an apprentice in medicine.²³ While he was there, he became part of a Plymouth Brethren²⁴ fellowship where Müller was very highly esteemed.

Here is how Taylor's son, Frederick, recounts the importance of this connection with the Brethren and Müller, who himself was part of the Brethren:

[Hudson] was hungry for the Word of God, and their preaching was for the most part a thoughtful exposition of its truths. He needed a fresh vision of eternal things, and the presence of Christ was often so real on these occasions that it was like heaven on earth to be among them. He was facing a difficult future, and they set before him an example of faith in temporal as well as spiritual things that surpassed his utmost thought. For this meeting was in close touch with George Müller of Bristol, whose work was even then assuming remarkable proportions. He had already hundreds of orphan children under his care, and was looking to the Lord for means to support a thousand. But this did not exhaust his sympathies. With a deep conviction that these are the days in which the Gospel must be preached "for a witness unto all nations," he

²³ Frederick Howard Taylor and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor in Early Years: The Growth of a Soul* (Littleton, CO; Mississauga, ON; Kent, TN: OMF Books, 1995), 105.

²⁴ There is some ambiguity about the lifelong connection between the Plymouth Brethren and Taylor. The most extensive, scholarly study of the China Inland Mission and Taylor makes these observations: "Historians of the Brethren Movement claim Hudson Taylor as one of their own. As secretary Richard Hill whispered to Geraldine Guinness Taylor [Hudson Taylor's daughter-in-law], herself a second-generation Brethren: 'You know of course that the great majority of the earliest supporters were either or practically P.B.s [Plymouth Brethren].' Yet in her thirty books the word 'Brethren' never passed Mrs. Taylor's pen, hidden behind a cloud of euphemisms like 'chapel' and 'meeting.' A. J. Broomhall went to great lengths to deny the 'false label' that Taylor was connected with the Plymouth Brethren, that is, John Nelson Darby's Exclusives who practiced second-degree separation, which Taylor 'repudiated,' as well as the equally 'false label' that Taylor was a 'Baptist.' Broomhall did acknowledge that 'the non-sectarian, trans-denominational practices and principles of China Inland Mission . . . owed much' to the non-Plymouth or Open Brethren, like Berger, Grattan Guinness, and the Howard family." Austin, *China's Millions*, 94.

sustained in whole or part many missionaries, and was engaged in circulating the Scriptures far and wide in Roman Catholic as well as heathen lands. All this extensive work, carried on by a penniless man through faith in God alone, with no appeals for help or guarantee of stated income, was a wonderful testimony to the power of “effectual, fervent prayer.” As such it made a profound impression upon Hudson Taylor, and encouraged him more than anything else could have in the pathway he was about to enter.²⁵

So even though Taylor did not found an orphanage the way Müller and Spurgeon did, he was inspired by such work and in his own way became no less an activist, mobilizing thousands of missionaries for China—which to this day is transforming the way the Chinese think about children.

THE PERVASIVENESS OF PRACTICALITY

Of course, Spurgeon’s orphanage was the tip of the iceberg of his activism. By the time he was fifty years old, he had founded, or was overseeing, sixty-six organizations. Lord Shaftesbury commented that this was a “a noble career of good . . . for the benefit of mankind.”²⁶

It would be a huge mistake to describe Spurgeon’s activism as if he were not a man of profound personal faith and deep reliance on the Lord, with powerful capacities for enjoying the beauties of Christ and his world. We must get out of our heads entirely, when thinking of Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor, that their activism was like the pragmatic activism of some today, who replace piety and prayer and meditation and worship with endless work. As will become clear in the chapters to follow, all of these men were mystics in their own way. That is, each had a profound, heartfelt, personal relationship with the living Christ.

Nevertheless, one cannot miss the pragmatic cast that colors even the most spiritual acts of Spurgeon. This is strikingly evident in his own words about prayer:

²⁵Taylor and Taylor, *Hudson Taylor in Early Years*, 111–13.

²⁶Cited in Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 173.

When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a bank clerk when I have [a] cheque to be cashed. I walk in, put the cheque down on the counter, and the clerk gives me my money, I take it up, and go about my business. I do not know that I ever stopped in a bank five minutes to talk with the clerks; when I have received my change I go away and attend to other matters. That is how I like to pray; but there is a way of praying that seems like lounging near the mercy seat as though one had no particular reason for being found there.²⁷

Again, it would be a caricature to take from these words the notion that Spurgeon did not believe in the sweetness of enjoying the presence of Christ in meditation and prayer. But one can hardly imagine someone talking like this three hundred years earlier. We are all profoundly shaped by the way the Holy Spirit meets us in our own age.

MODERN MAVERICKS

Part of the spirit of activism that was woven into the fabric of evangelicalism and into the expansive nineteenth-century ethos was a measure of pragmatic individualism. Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor exploited this freedom to the full. I am not referring to a crass pragmatism that compromises biblical principles for the sake of measurable results. Almost the opposite. I am referring to a willingness to adjust inherited ways and traditions to put personal biblical convictions to practical use. If that makes one a maverick, so be it. Hence the individualism.

Bebbington points out how prevalent this spirit of pragmatic, can-do individualism was in the age of Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor, in both Britain and America:

The strength and number of para-church organizations—at the time called benevolent associations in America—is a sign of the

²⁷Cited in Erroll Hulse and David Kingdon, eds., *A Marvelous Ministry: How the All-Round Ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon Speaks to Us Today* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), 46–47.

same spirit of adapting church life to contemporary requirements. The range of miscellaneous but vigorous groups was immense—including in England the Army Scripture Readers' Society, the Christian Vernacular Society for India, the Working Men's Lord's Day Rest Association and the Society for the Relief of Persecuted Jews. Evangelicalism characteristically spawned organizations beyond the control of strictly ecclesiastical bodies.²⁸

Both Müller and Taylor were disillusioned with the existing organizations of the day. In another age, they might have simply adjusted and made the best of things through slow reform. But in the nineteenth century, one could actually dream of taking charge, creating a new institution, and running and funding it practically as one saw fit.

MÜLLER'S LARGE AND LIBERAL ENTREPRENEURIALISM

In Müller's case, the orphan work was only one branch of a larger organization that he founded in 1834 (the year Spurgeon was born) called the Scripture Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad. Through this Institution, he lavished his generosity (and remarkable fund-raising skill) on other causes of the gospel. For example, Müller became the largest donor to Taylor's China Inland Mission:

In its early years he kept the mission afloat. From the fragmentary financial records, Moira McKay has ascertained that Müller contributed one-third of the CIM's income between 1866 and 1871, a total of £780 to the general fund and £560 to individual missionaries; this does not include money he gave Hudson Taylor personally for his own use, nor the money he remitted directly to China.²⁹

Müller was committed not only to his own ministries. His large and entrepreneurial heart had a wider kingdom focus. But it should be mentioned that, for all the wideness of his generosity, he never lost

²⁸ Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 145.

²⁹ Austin, *China's Millions*, 96.

his doctrinal bearings. There came a point, for example, when he withheld his contributions to Taylor's CIM until the resignation of a key leader who had come to embrace the view of annihilationism in place of the biblical view of hell as eternal, conscious torment.³⁰

A. T. Pierson, Müller's authorized biographer, said Müller's Scripture Knowledge Institution "owed its existence to the fact that its founder devised large and liberal things for the Lord's cause."³¹ Indeed, that banner could be waved over the lives of all three of these men: they "devised large and liberal things for the Lord's cause."

But the impetus for new ministries was not merely entrepreneurial. When asked why he did not use existing institutions, Müller answered that they were out of step with what he saw in the Scriptures. "We found, in comparing the then existing religious Societies with the word of God, that they departed so far from it, that we could not be united with them, and yet maintain a good conscience."³² Specifically, he said, (1) they tended to be postmillennial, (2) too many unregenerate persons were involved in running them, (3) they asked unconverted people for money, (4) the rich and unregenerate even served on their boards, (5) they tended to look for persons of rank to lead them, and (6) they were willing to fund their ministries by going into debt.³³

So Müller started his own agency and led it in the way he understood the Scriptures to teach. From this individual commitment and vision flowed enormous energy and fruit. Besides caring for more than ten thousand orphans in his lifetime, the Scripture Knowledge Institution spread day schools across continental Europe, eventually serving more than one hundred twenty-three thousand students.³⁴

³⁰Ibid., 190.

³¹Arthur T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 248. Originally published as "Authorized Memoir" (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1899).

³²George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Muller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Muller Complete and Unabridged*, vol. 1 (Muskegon, MI: Dust and Ashes Publications, 2003), 80.

³³Ibid., 80–81.

³⁴George Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller, or A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer*, comp. G. Fred Bergin (Denton, TX: Westminster Literature Resources, 2003), ix.

And the Institution was among the first to get behind Taylor's China Inland Mission when it was founded in 1865.

TAYLOR FOLLOWS MÜLLER'S MODEL

Taylor's decision to start his own foreign mission sending agency was similarly driven by his disillusionment with the way other societies were run. He had gone to China in 1853 with the Chinese Evangelisation Society. But within four years, he resigned because he disagreed with the policy of the society to borrow money to pay its bills. "The Society itself was in debt. The quarterly bills which I and others were instructed to draw were often met with borrowed money, and a correspondence commenced which terminated in the following year by my resigning from conscientious motives."³⁵ Eight years later, he founded the China Inland Mission on principles like those of Müller's Institution. We tell that story in chapter 3.

THE MODERN MAVERICKS WERE VERY UNMODERN—NO DEBT!

This issue of debt, together with the readiness to trust God to meet practical needs, is an example of how their very individualism and pragmatic adaptability could put Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor not only in step with the spirit of the age, but radically out of step with it. All three of them rejected debt as a way of running any Christian ministry. And in its place, Müller and Taylor put a "faith principle"³⁶ that meant they would look to God and never directly ask another person for money.

Müller's conscience was bound by Romans 13:8: "Owe no man any thing" (KJV). He said: "There is no promise that He will pay our debts,—the word says rather: 'Owe no man any thing.'"³⁷ He believed

³⁵*The Works of J. Hudson Taylor* (Douglas Editions, 2009). Kindle edition, locations 1508–1510.

³⁶Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 185–90, describes how this "faith principle" rose up in the nineteenth century and shaped most of the evangelical movement. "By 1900 Anglican evangelicals were predominantly Keswick in their spirituality, millennial in their view of the future and at least respectful toward the faith principle." *Ibid.*, 259.

³⁷Müller, *A Narrative*, vol. 1, 316.

deeply that this way of life was the duty of every Christian and called on believers to repent if any were in debt. “The Lord helping us, we would rather suffer privation, than contract debts. . . . May I entreat the believing reader, prayerfully to consider this matter; for I am well aware that many trials come upon the children of God, on account of not acting according to Rom. xiii. 8.”³⁸

Müller went so far as to refuse to pay the milkman weekly, but would only pay him daily.³⁹ He did pay his workers a salary, but only with the understanding that “if the Lord should not be pleased to send in the means at the time when their salary is due, I am not considered their debtor.”⁴⁰

Taylor was born the year that Müller founded his Scripture Knowledge Institution. In due time, the reputation of Müller’s faith made a huge impact on Taylor. The obituary that Thomas Champness wrote for Taylor in 1905 shows the extent of Müller’s influence:

HUDSON TAYLOR is no more! A Prince of Israel has been gathered home. He died in China, the land he loved more than life. Now that he has gone we shall hear more of him. In his way he was as great a man as George Müller. Like him, he had more faith in God than man. The China Inland Mission, of which he was the founder, was run on similar lines to the Orphanage at Bristol. What the writer of these lines owes to Hudson Taylor will never be known.⁴¹

Under Taylor’s leadership, the China Inland Mission was never in debt and never directly asked for money.

The influence of Müller on Taylor was direct from the first time that they met:

Although Müller had given financial contributions to Taylor since 1857, they do not seem to have met until 1863, when Taylor took Wang Lae-djün to Bristol to sit at Müller’s feet. . . . The grand

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴¹ *In Memoriam: J. Hudson Taylor* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1906), 102.

old man—he was nearing sixty, almost gaunt-looking, with a white beard and unruly hair—bequeathed two gifts to the young man. The first were his mottoes, which became the watchwords of the CIM: “Ebenezer” (“Hitherto hath the Lord helped us”) and “Jehovah-Jireh” (“the Lord will provide”). Taylor transcribed them into Chinese, and printed them on the cover of every issue of *China’s Millions: Yi-ben-yi-shi-er* and *Ye-he-hua-yi-la*. Müller’s second gift was his system for divine bookkeeping: each donor was given a numbered receipt, which Müller published in consecutive order, anonymously, on regular occasions.⁴²

Like Müller and Taylor, Spurgeon said he hated debt the way Martin Luther hated the pope. All the buildings he built were entered debt-free.⁴³ But it does not appear that he embraced the principle of not asking for funds the way Müller and Taylor did. The explanation seems plain enough. He was a pastor charged with preaching the Scriptures to his flock and applying it, not merely to parachurch organizations, but specifically to his people’s relationships. One of those relationships was with the local church to which they belonged—the Metropolitan Tabernacle. If any text a pastor touches involves the teaching that the members of a church should sustain the church financially, then not only *may* the pastor exhort the people to give, he would be untrue to the text if he didn’t.

Spurgeon loved Müller as a close comrade in ministry and as one of his heroes. He conversed with him often⁴⁴ and called him his “dear friend.” Müller preached occasionally in Spurgeon’s Metropolitan Tabernacle.⁴⁵ Spurgeon’s praise for Müller was unparalleled for any man in his day. “I never heard a man who spoke more to my soul than

⁴² Austin, *China’s Millions*, 95–96.

⁴³ Eric W. Hayden, *Highlights in the Life of C. H. Spurgeon* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), 95.

⁴⁴ Müller shared Spurgeon’s affection and recalled several conversations when Spurgeon was on vacation in Mentone, France. “At Mentone I enjoyed especially the intercourse I had with Mr. Spurgeon, with whom I spent repeatedly a considerable time.” George Müller, *Autobiography of George Muller: A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer* (London: J. Nisbet, 1914), 532.

⁴⁵ “On our way to Sunderland, I preached in the large Metropolitan Tabernacle for Mr. Spurgeon.” *Ibid.*, 526.

dear Mr. George Müller.”⁴⁶ “I think, sometimes, that I would not mind changing places with George Müller for time and for eternity, but I do not know anybody else of whom I would say as much as that.”⁴⁷

Perhaps only slightly less was Spurgeon’s admiration for Taylor. In the nature of the case, the relationship could not be as close, since Müller was only a few hours away in Bristol, while Taylor was often in China. Nevertheless, Spurgeon sang the praises of Taylor and the China Inland Mission:

No mission now existing has so fully our confidence and good wishes as the work of Mr. Hudson Taylor in China. It is conducted on those principles of faith in God which most dearly commend themselves to our innermost soul. The man at the head is “a vessel fit for the Master’s use.” His methods of procedure command our veneration—by which we mean more than our judgment or our admiration; and the success attending the whole is such as cheers our heart and reveals the divine seal upon the entire enterprise.⁴⁸

In other words, Spurgeon’s unwillingness to trumpet the exact same funding strategy as Müller and Taylor did not diminish his affection and admiration and support for them. In fact, he admired their faith and their strategy

THE UNIFYING ROOT OF RENEGADE FINANCES

Why did Taylor and Müller adopt the pattern of not asking people directly for funds?⁴⁹

Müller gave the clearest answer. And this answer shows how he and Spurgeon and Taylor were utterly out of step with their age.

⁴⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 29 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1883), 389.

⁴⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 49 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 238.

⁴⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel: 1869* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1869), 7.

⁴⁹In the following chapters, it will become clear that while *direct* appeals for funds were not given, nevertheless both Müller and Taylor were vigilant about making use of the latest means of communicating to the world how God was meeting their needs, and thus *indirectly* communicated their needs and pulled at people’s hearts.

Müller gave three reasons for establishing the orphan houses, and he gave them in the order of their importance in his mind:

The three chief reasons for establishing an Orphan-House are: 1) That God may be glorified, should He be pleased to furnish me with the means, in its being seen that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him; and that thus the faith of His children may be strengthened. 2) The spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children. 3) Their temporal welfare.⁵⁰

This is really astonishing, and a sure sign Müller was an exile and sojourner on the earth, with a true citizenship and treasure in heaven. The glory of God was preeminent for him, not the temporal welfare of the children. Caring for the children was the fruit of aiming to glorify God by showing him trustworthy. This is the highest and best gift he has for the children and for the world. Without this gift, all is in vain.

This is why Müller ran the orphanages the way he did—and in this goal, he was one with Spurgeon and Taylor. He wanted to give a living proof of the power and the trustworthiness of God, and the value of living by faith and prayer—without debt. When explaining why he never purchased anything for the orphan houses on credit, he said:

The chief and primary object of the work was not the temporal welfare of the children, nor even their spiritual welfare (blessed and glorious as it is, and much as, through grace, we seek after it and pray for it); but the first and primary object of the work was: *To show before the whole world and the whole church of Christ, that even in these last evil days the living God is ready to prove Himself as the living God, by being ever willing to help, succour, comfort, and answer the prayers of those who trust in Him: so that we need not go away from Him to our fellow-men, or to the ways of the world, seeing that He is both able and willing to supply us with all we can need in His service.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Müller, *A Narrative*, vol. 1, 103.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 317. See also 105.

Though there may have been minor differences in strategy and application, this passion for displaying God's faithfulness to the world bound these three friends together in their respective focuses of church (Spurgeon), orphan care (Müller), and world missions (Taylor).

INDIGENOUS PILGRIMS

Like every human being who lives in space and time—that is, in a particular culture and age—Charles Spurgeon, George Müller, and Hudson Taylor were shaped significantly by the explosive new world they inhabited. Their activism and individualism and pragmatism and resistance to elite privilege and identification with the common man (none of them had a theological degree) made them men of their age. Nevertheless, they were radically different from the unbelieving masses of their day.

What will become clear in the coming chapters is that, for all their differences, there was a profound camaraderie of confidence in God among them. They were indeed evangelical in their emphases on Scripture, the atoning work of Christ on the cross, the necessity of the new birth and conversion, and the resulting energy of activism and mission. But in each man's life, the suffering each would endure brought out an extraordinary confidence in the mighty goodness of God. Beneath all their talk of faith and the simplicity of trusting God to fulfill his promises for us in everyday life lay a massive vision of God's right and power to govern every detail of life, the evil and the good—with nothing able to stop him.

Taylor, who, among the three, was the least given to theological systematizing and labeling,⁵² gave one of the strongest statements of this common conviction. When his wife Maria died after twelve years of marriage, Taylor was thirty-eight years old. He wrote to his mother,

⁵²Spurgeon and Müller were self-confessed Calvinists. But in all the works by and about Taylor that I have seen, there is no clear statement on the matter. One pointer might be this excerpt from his commentary on the Song of Solomon: "In the little sister, as yet immature, may we not see the elect of God, given to CHRIST in God's purpose, but not yet brought into saving relation to Him?" Cited in J. Stuart Holden, "Foreword," in *Union and Communion; or, Thoughts on the Song of Solomon*, 3rd ed. (London: Morgan & Scott, 1914), 78.

“From my inmost soul I delight in the knowledge that God does or permits all things, and causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him.”⁵³ Fourteen years later, at the age of fifty-two, he wrote, “So make up your mind that God is an infinite Sovereign, and has the right to do as He pleases with His own, and He may not explain to you a thousand things which may puzzle your reason in His dealings with you.”⁵⁴

Spurgeon and Müller said the same in similar contexts—Müller at the death of his wife, Spurgeon in the face of debilitating suffering. This was the uniting foundation of their camaraderie in confidence in the goodness, glory, and power of God. This would be the key to Spurgeon’s powerful preaching through relentless adversity, Müller’s unshakable satisfaction in God, and Taylor’s enjoyment of his lasting union with Jesus Christ.

⁵³ Cited in Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*, Kindle edition (May 25, 2013), 163.

⁵⁴ Cited in Jim Cromarty, *It Is Not Death to Die* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008), 8.



When Augustine handed over the leadership of his church in AD 426, his successor was so overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy that he declared, “The swan is silent,” fearing the spiritual giant’s voice would be lost in time. But for 1,600 years, Augustine has not been silent—and neither have the men who faithfully trumpeted the cause of Christ after him. Their lives have inspired every generation of believers and should compel us to a greater passion for God.

“Most people don’t realize that Spurgeon, Müller, and Taylor were contemporaries who knew and loved each other. For all their differences, there was a profound camaraderie of confidence in God among them. They were thoroughly evangelical in their emphases on Scripture, the atoning work of Christ, the necessity of the new birth and conversion, and the resulting energy of activism and mission. But the suffering each would endure brought out an extraordinary confidence in the mighty goodness of God. Beneath all their talk of faith, and the simplicity of trusting God, lay a massive vision of God’s right and power to govern every detail of life, the evil and the good—with nothing able to stop him.”

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