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**Conversion and conflict in Palestine : the missions of the
Church Missionary Society and the protestant bishop
Samuel Gobat**

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“True Christianity”: expectation versus reality

Introduction

In his annual report for 1858 the lay evangelist Samuel Muller, one of the Protestant missionaries in Nazareth, wrote to the CMS about a young man who visited his house four times a week and on Sundays in order to ‘improve’ himself. In earlier times this person had often gone to the gardens near the village to steal fruit. However, since he visited Muller’s house to hear and read the “Word of God” he despised his former bad habits. Muller wished that Christ’s love would have “an effect upon him to become a true Christian”.¹

The reports written by Evangelical Protestant CMS missionaries and by Gobat are full of similar stories. The authors frequently express the wish that people might become so-called ‘true Christians’, but are also often disappointed because people have not become real converts or ‘true Christians’ yet. This chapter discusses the missionaries’ definition of ‘true Christianity’ and ‘true Christians’, and the tension between their ideal of ‘true Christianity’ and the reality of the mission field. To this end, conversion narratives from the mission field will be compared with typical Evangelical conversion stories. As we shall see, the ideal of ‘true Christianity’ was accompanied by criticism of the material support the other churches offered to their church members. Furthermore, an overview of the methods used in mission work and conversation topics favoured by the missionaries will be provided, which may demonstrate the importance of the Evangelical principles to their work.

Since Gobat closely cooperated with the Protestant missionaries of the CMS, this chapter and the following concentrate on the experiences of both Gobat and the CMS missionaries in the mission field, collected mainly from their letters to the CMS.

¹ Muller to CMS, Annual report, Nazareth, 31 December 1858, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 54/3.

Making converts: the missionaries' expectations

What is 'true Christianity' and how did the Protestant missionaries formulate it? As may be expected they found a model in Evangelical conversion stories. One of such stories, which is deemed a classic, is the conversion story of Sampson Staniforth (1720-1799), a Methodist preacher.² Staniforth had a conversion experience when he was a soldier in the British army. One night it was his turn to stand sentinel. When he was alone, he experienced a serious religious crisis: he "kneeled down, determined not to rise, but to continue crying and wrestling with God, till He had mercy" on him. Staniforth did not know how long he was in "agony", but when he looked up to heaven he saw Jesus there, hanging on the cross. In Staniforth's words: "At the same moment these words were applied to my heart, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee'. My chains fell off; my heart was free. All guilt was gone, and my soul was filled with unutterable peace". His fear of death and hell evaporated.³

Staniforth's story is in many ways typical of Evangelical conversion stories, among which also the story of Gobat's conversion. Gobat had also experienced a night of spiritual suffering, praying and crying constantly. He considered himself a lost sinner and was immensely relieved when he felt that his sins had been taken away. Like Staniforth, he also experienced the presence of Jesus and became filled with peace. In the period leading up to Gobat's crisis of faith, reading the Bible was of great importance.⁴

Such stories focus on the conversion crisis, i.e., the time just before the actual conversion. This crisis could be preceded by a (long) 'pre-conversion' period of inward debate and struggle. The crisis itself then was the breaking-point of this inward conflict; in the end it turned out to be a moment of complete surrender, after which a person was converted.⁵ A central element of people's conversion experience was their sense of

² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 5; According to Bebbington, Matthew Arnold "pinpointed" Staniforth's conversion account as a classic. D.B. Hindmarsh, "'My chains fell off, my heart was free': Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in England", *Church History* 68/4, 1999, 910-929. Hindmarsh discusses Staniforth's conversion story as one of many conversion experiences, a distinct literary genre, in order to highlight the conventions of these stories as they were assumed on the part of author and reader, or speaker and audience. Hindmarsh, "My chains fell off", 910-911.

³ Hindmarsh, "My chains", 910; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 5.

⁴ As mentioned earlier, God's presence had made him realize that the Bible was the Word of God, but at the same time that he was unworthy to read it. For Gobat's conversion, see Chapter 4.

⁵ According to Frederick Bullock the conversion crisis was a point of "entire surrender of the will to what is conceived to be the Will of God". F.W.B. Bullock, *Evangelical Conversion in Great Britain 1696-1845*, St. Leonards on sea, 1959, 196-197, 200, 207. Bullock examines thirty conversion experiences.

sin, which was connected with the theological doctrine of justification by faith: human beings are sinful and therefore estranged from God. The only way to win salvation is trust in Christ as Saviour. In their conversion experiences, both Staniforth and Gobat were fully aware of the fact that they were sinners, and both in the end put their trust in Jesus as their Saviour.⁶ For Evangelical Christians it was very important that people should experience such a conversion. To quote David Bebbington: “The line between those who had undergone the experience and those who had not was the sharpest in the world. It marked the boundary between a Christian and a pagan”.⁷ A person who had experienced a recognizable conversion was, in the language of the Protestant missionaries, a ‘true Christian’.

If persons had genuinely been converted they felt a great desire to convert other people, because they wanted to share their salvation. This ‘activism’ is clearly reflected in the fact that Gobat and the CMS missionaries went to Palestine to spread the Gospel.⁸ Their own conversion must have incited them to spread Christianity, or (Evangelical) Protestantism abroad. Although the Protestant missionaries did not explicitly formulate what they meant by being a ‘true Christian’,⁹ with the typical Evangelical conversion stories in mind one might conclude that they expected their future converts to have a similar conversion experience, containing all the typical elements of such a change: inward struggle and debate, prayer, sense of sin, complete surrender, and finally trust in Jesus as their Saviour. Only then did a person become a ‘true Christian’.

Conversion narratives: reality of the mission field

Although it was the mission’s primary aim to make converts, few typical Evangelical conversion stories are found in the letters of Gobat and the CMS missionaries. They did, however, regularly write about people who had inwardly changed, had improved their behaviour, or desired to become Protestants. In their reports to the home front, the missionaries used such stories as proof of the accomplishments of the Protestant missions. In addition, these success stories also contained ‘full-life stories’, deathbed narratives, and stories about group conversions. Although the missionaries must have

⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 6; Bullock, *Evangelical Conversion*, 200.

⁷ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 5.

⁸ Cf. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 3. See also Chapter 1.

⁹ The expression ‘true Christianity’ was probably considered to be generally known to the home front.

wanted to stress the success and necessity of the Protestant mission to the Home Board Secretary and the home public,¹⁰ such stories also shed light on the tension between the missionaries' expectations regarding conversions and the reality of the mission field.

'Full-life stories'

Of the different kinds of success-stories the so-called 'full-life stories' come closest to the typical Evangelical conversions. In general 'full-life stories' describe a person's life before conversion, the conversion itself, life afterwards, and the deathbed. Two 'full-life stories', both written to the home front in the 1870s, stand out: the tales of Elias Essafourih and Oudi Azzam. These two were considered "the first fruits" of the Protestant mission in Palestine.¹¹

The conversion and death of Elias Essafourih of Kafr Kana, a village near Nazareth, were described by CMS missionaries Michael Kawar and James Huber, both from the Nazareth mission. Elias Essafourih had passed away in 1873 after a "lingering illness". His death was a reason for Kawar and Huber to look back on his life. According to Kawar, he himself and Essafourih were the "first fruits of the faith in the Gospel in Galilee". Where Huber only tells us that Essafourih "got his conviction by reading the Word of God and searching the Holy Scriptures", Kawar gives a more detailed account of Essafourih's conversion.¹² Formerly, Essafourih used to be a "singer in the Greek Church". One day in church, he was singing the hymn text: "Do not worship the creature, but only the Creator; the perfect in judgment (wisdom), the rich", when at the same time the priest went to the altar to bow before the images in worship. According to Kawar, Essafourih suddenly saw all the 'errors' of the Greek Church: "All at once, the thought struck his mind: that what he now saw before him, was exactly the worshipping of creatures". This realization was the start of a period of inward struggle. Every time he attended divine service he remembered what he had experienced during

¹⁰ As already mentioned in the Introduction, the missionaries' reports were sometimes published in the CMS publications.

¹¹ "Translation of the Revd. Michael Kawar's report of the quarter ending June 30th 1873" (original in Arabic), part 2, Nazareth, 13 October 1873, C M/O 40/3; Huber to the CMS, "Report of the quarter ending Sept. 30th 1873", Nazareth, 30 September 1873, C M/O 34/81. Both Birmingham/UL.

¹² Huber to the CMS, "Report of the quarter ending Sept. 30th 1873", Nazareth, 30 September 1873, C M/O 34/81; "Translation of the Revd. Michael Kawar's report of the quarter ending June 30th 1873", part 2, Nazareth, 13 October 1873, C M/O 40/3. Both Birmingham/UL.

the hymn. He therefore started “to search the Holy Scriptures; for the Protestant Books were already diffused in Galilee”.¹³

During this period of inward debate Essafourih met Kawar in Nazareth. Kawar stated that as he “was more advanced in the knowledge of the Word of God” he had helped Essafourih “to leave all the traditions of the Greek Church, and to follow the way of salvation as revealed in the pure Word of God”.¹⁴ According to Huber, through reading the Bible Essafourih “became wise unto salvation”, he “boldly confessed Christ also before the Mohammedans” and was able to give good advice to and answer the questions of both Christians and Muslims. Huber added that Essafourih’s faith was sparkling until the end. “The more his bodily weakness increased the more ripened his spirit” became in preparation to enter “another and better world”.¹⁵ On 4 August 1873 Essafourih died.

Huber and Kawar clearly wanted to use the story about Elias Essafourih to highlight one of the Protestant mission’s successes in Palestine. However, in their accounts Essafourih’s conversion differs from the typical Evangelical conversions. Huber and Kawar do not mention that Essafourih was in agony, had feelings of sin or repentance, and had accepted Christ as his Saviour. Most probably, Essafourih did not experience this type of conversion crisis; otherwise Huber and Kawar would certainly have mentioned it in their letters to the CMS.

The ‘full-life story’ of one of the members of the Jerusalem congregation, Oudi Azzam, shows more similarities with the ‘classic’ Evangelical conversion accounts. Some months before he died in February 1876, Oudi Azzam had described his conversion to the Protestant minister Chalil Jamal, who recounted it in his Annual Letter to the CMS. Oudi Azzam was born and bred in Nazareth. As a fifteen-year old, he served as a deacon in the Greek Orthodox Church.¹⁶ He first heard about the Protestants when the ABCFM missionary Jonas King visited Nazareth.¹⁷ He then discovered

¹³ “Translation of the Revd. Michael Kawar’s report of the quarter ending June 30th 1873”, part 2, Nazareth, 13 October 1873, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 40/3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Huber to the CMS, “Report of the quarter ending Sept. 30th 1873”, Nazareth, 30 September 1873, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 34/81.

¹⁶ Although Jamal does not mention that Oudi Azzam was a deacon, we might assume he was, as his tasks were to light the candles, to put fire and frankincense in the censer, and to read Psalms and prayers.

¹⁷ For Jonas King see Chapter 1. From Jamal’s letter it appears that King had visited Nazareth in the early 1830s.

that Protestants believed neither in 'fastings' nor in the Virgin Mary. He therefore did not want to have anything to do with these "unbelievers", as he considered these two aspects "the foundation stone of Christianity". Looking back on his past, Oudi Azzam told Jamal that his "religion then consisted in observing the outward forms and ceremonies of the Church". He believed that he was justified by fasting only, as he "knew nothing then of the value of the precious Blood of Christ, or the Blessed Working of the Holy Spirit in the heart".¹⁸

When he was nineteen years old, Oudi Azzam moved to Nablus where he met a Protestant minister from Mosul. Oudi Azzam admired his "readiness in quoting and repeating passages from the Bible". The minister advised Oudi Azzam to read the Bible. Reading it thoroughly, Oudi Azzam went through a serious religious crisis. His "faith in the traditions of the fathers, began to totter and shake, two stones of the old and rotten traditions remained, viz. the intercession of the Virgin Mary [...] and fastings". These two traditions caused "great mental trouble". At that time Oudi Azzam considered himself neither a Greek Orthodox nor a Protestant. He prayed to God that the Holy Ghost might enlighten his mind and understanding, and felt that God was working "mysteriously" within him. One day, Oudi Azzam went to Jerusalem to visit Bishop Gobat, who "explained" to him "several subjects". No information is given about Gobat's explanation, but afterwards Oudi Azzam returned to Nablus "rejoicing in the Lord" and became a Protestant. Jamal considered Oudi Azzam a "most zealous man, and a very earnest and sincere Christian" after becoming a Protestant. The missionary tells us that Oudi Azzam did not lose any opportunity to speak about Jesus to Christians, Jews and Muslims in order to spread the faith. He never missed family prayers and every day read a chapter of both the Old and the New Testament. He used to write down "every passage that forbids the taking or making of images or pictures" plus the passages about "Christ as the only mediator or intercessor". In the meantime Oudi Azzam and his family had moved to Jerusalem, where he died of a heart attack at the age of sixty. A few hours before he died, he was heard saying: "The Saviour, the Saviour who came to

¹⁸ Jamal to the secretary of the CMS, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 29 November 1876, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/8.

save the world is come”.¹⁹ A couple of months before Oudi Azzam’s death he had even made a will in favour of his wife and of the Protestant poor in Jerusalem.²⁰

From Jamal’s story it appears that Oudi Azzam came to feel a spiritual need as a result of reading the Bible. In accordance with typical Evangelical conversion accounts, he prayed to God, and although nowhere a moment of complete surrender is mentioned his full-life story tells us that he finally accepted Christ as his Saviour and as the only intercessor. The period before his conversion and his conversion crisis make up the main part of the story, which contains hardly any references to Azzam’s life after his conversion and his deathbed. Nevertheless, Jamal’s account makes it clear that Oudi Azzam felt a need to spread the faith after his conversion. His last words before dying ‘completed’ the story; he died in peace meeting his Saviour.²¹

The story about Elias Essafourih focuses on his life before conversion. Apart from his inward struggle, hardly any information is given about his actual conversion, his life afterwards and his deathbed. In the stories about both Elias Essafourih and Oudi Azzam, reading the Bible is a central element in their ‘awakening process’ towards conversion. Their ‘religious crisis’ concerns the doctrines and traditions of their former church. The fact that both narratives focus on their doubts about the ‘errors’ of their former church rather than their anxiety about their own sinfulness is striking. In this way the missionaries stressed the errors of the traditions and religious beliefs of both men’s former church, and presented Protestantism as the ‘true religion’ as opposed to these churches.

¹⁹ Jamal to the secretary of the CMS, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 29 November 1876, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/8.

²⁰ As to the money for the Protestants, an annual amount was given to the Native Evangelical Society, which was established on 8 July 1875 with Klein as its president and Jamal as its secretary. Furthermore, money was given to the orphans and Protestant widows in Jerusalem. The relatives of Oudi Azzam tried to annul the will, as they were excluded from it. Annual Letters from Jamal to the CMS, Jerusalem, 17 November 1875, C M/O 36/7 and 29 November 1876, C M/O 36/8. Both: Birmingham/UL. Gobat to Tait, Jerusalem, 12 April 1877, London/LPL, TP, 234, ff. 276-277.

²¹ The story about Oudi Azzam is reminiscent of the ‘full-life stories’ written by missionaries of the ABCFM about their Assyrian converts, which they published in the volume *Nestorian Biography: Being Sketches of Pious Nestorians who have Died at Oroomiah, Persia, by missionaries of the A.B.C.F.M.*, Boston, 1857. All stories in this book consist of four parts: life before conversion, conversion, life after conversion, sickbed and deathbed. The stories focus on this last part; the sickbed was an especially effective gauge of one’s piety. See H.L. Murre-van den Berg, “Full many a flower... Conversion and Revival in the Church of the East”, paper presented at the Boston NAMP Symposium, 24 June 1998 (unpublished).

Deathbed narratives

The CMS missionaries also sought to display the mission's success by discussing the deathbeds of members of their flock. In contrast to the 'full-life stories' which focused on people's pre-conversion lives and their becoming Protestants, these particular narratives were restricted to a sketch of people's last moments. The missionaries wanted to show the dying person's piety and faith at the moment of death. In general, these accounts offer hardly any background information about the persons in question. The missionaries cared for the dying by reading the Bible, praying and often administering the Lord's Supper.

In their letters the missionaries emphasized that the members of their congregation had died 'exceedingly happy' and had been at peace; they had not been afraid of death but had trusted in Jesus. For the missionaries it was of the utmost importance that their congregation members died as pious and faithful persons, since the moment of death was considered the time that people would meet their Saviour.²² For instance, when a member of the Protestant congregation of Shefa Amer had died, the catechist of the place, Nicola Dabbak, stressed that the dying man's "faith was strong and he was trusting upon Christ and not fearing from death".²³ As was customary in pietistic circles, the missionaries were keen on describing people's last words. They wanted to illustrate a peaceful death and wrote about people who died with the name of Jesus on their lips or reciting Bible texts. In some cases the last words of the dying person were mentioned. Kawar, for instance, described the deathbed of Abd Allah Essafoureh [sic.], a Protestant from Kafr Kana.²⁴ Before his death, the dying man had asked his brother to read the Bible to him and to pray with him. Until "his spirit departed from his body", Abd Allah Essafoureh kept repeating the words of Psalm 119, 132: "look upon me, and be merciful to me, because I love thy name".²⁵

²² This view was in line with the Evangelical line of thought. Murre-van den Berg also mentions the importance of people's 'happy death' in the 'full-life stories' from the ABCFM missionaries about the Assyrian converts in Urmia. For these missionaries, death set the crown on the conversion stories. They saw dying as reaching the final goal, as the converts would meet their Saviour then. Murre-van den Berg, "Full many a flower".

²³ Dabbak to Wright, Shefa Amer, 30 December 1878, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 20/1.

²⁴ Most probably Abd Allah Essafoureh was related to the abovementioned Elias Essafourih from Kafr Kana.

²⁵ "Translation of the Report of Revd. Michael Kawar of the Quarter ending March 31st 1874" (original in Arabic), Nazareth, 31 March 1874, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 40/4.

Sometimes people were baptized on their deathbed. This was the case with Azizah, a woman from the Jerusalem congregation. Azizah, a Muslim by birth, had been sold as a slave to a Greek Catholic family when she was young. When she became very ill, the family took her to the Deaconesses’ hospital, where the Bible was read to her. Although at first she did not want to have anything to do with it, she finally started to listen and became a regular attendant at the Protestant church services. She received “instruction” in the Bible and wanted to be baptized. However, her former illness returned. When it appeared that she would not recover, the missionary Klein decided to baptise her on her deathbed. She did not fear death and died in peace, Klein tells us.²⁶ The deathbed stories imply that the dying persons, who almost all belonged to the Protestant congregation, had died as ‘true Christians’. However, if this were true we might expect to find many more of the typical conversion stories in the missionary correspondence, but, as already stated, such stories are generally lacking in the CMS documents.

In some rare cases the deathbed narratives mention a person’s conversion during the process of dying. Such an exception concerns a member of the Protestant congregation in Jerusalem. Although he already was a member of the Protestant community, his deathbed was the moment of his actual conversion. During his life there was “hardly anything promising in him”, although “his character was not bad”.²⁷ However, at death’s door, he had a conversion experience. He confided to his minister, Chalil Jamal, that he was afraid to die; he considered himself “a great sinner”, because he had not loved Jesus during his life. Jamal told him that Jesus would forgive all his sins if he believed in Him; he read out some passages from the Bible about trust in Jesus and the remission of sins.²⁸ In reaction, the dying man repented, saying: “Yes I am a sinner, a great sinner, but now I believe, yes I believe that He [Jesus] accepts repenting sinners”. Then he exclaimed: “Lord Jesus pardon my sins, wash me with thy precious blood”. After administering the Lord’s Supper Jamal left. When he returned a couple of hours later, the man’s fear of death had completely disappeared and had been replaced by trust in Jesus and by faith. The “penitent sinner” felt Jesus’ presence and was convinced that he was going to

²⁶ Klein to the CMS, Annual Report 1857-1858, Jerusalem, 23 February 1858, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 41/283.

²⁷ Jamal, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 11 January 1878, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/9.

²⁸ Ibid. He read 1 John 2, 1-2: “Jesus is the remedy for the defilement of the sins of all the world”; 1 John 1, 7-9: “if we walk in the light, we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus and if we confess our sins, God is just and may be trusted to forgive our sins”; Acts 16, 31: “Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”; Isa. 1, 18: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool”.

heaven, saying: “Tomorrow I shall be at rest from this trouble, for I shall go to heaven... Jesus, there is rest, there is rest”. When Jamal prayed with him, he repeated these words until he attained a delirious state. Two hours later he died.²⁹

With this story, which contained all characteristics of a typical Evangelical conversion crisis (spiritual suffering, praying, feeling Jesus’ presence and a moment of complete surrender), Jamal wanted to illustrate the mission’s success. Although he observed that the “spiritual growth” of the congregations in Jerusalem and its out-stations in general was “feeble and slow”, in his eyes this deathbed narrative “proved” that the Holy Spirit was working in the dying man’s heart. Jamal considered it the missionaries’ task to “sow the seed of the Word in the ground of their [i.e., people’s] hearts, and wait patiently for the quickening water and the life-giving warmth of the sun”. He considered Bible and prayer meetings instruments for ‘sowing’. Other CMS missionaries cherished similar views; although ‘true’ converts were rather an exception, “the way for the Lord Jesus Christ” was being prepared through Protestant missionary labour.³⁰

Group conversion stories

In the deathbed stories it is unclear whether the main characters had experienced a genuine Evangelical ‘true’ conversion before dying. However, it is clear that the majority of them were members of the Protestant congregation when they died. This tension between already belonging to the Protestant church and being a ‘truly’ converted Christian, that is, an Evangelical Protestant, is also reflected in stories about ‘group conversions’. One of the group conversion stories comes from Girgis, who worked for the CMS as a catechist. In 1864 he wrote to the CMS about “a number of brethren” in Ramallah, whose hearts had changed. A year earlier, these people had asked him to open a school and to pray with them daily. They wanted to leave “the name of Greeks and to take upon them the name of Evangelical, Protestant Christians”. Their wishes were recorded down in a petition which was sent to Jerusalem. As Gobat was on a journey at the time, it was Frederick Klein who replied to the petition instead. He sent Joseph Jahu Abu Girgis to work in Ramallah for three months; after that time, they would see whether the members would “remain firm” as they had promised. The

²⁹ Jamal, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 11 January 1878, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/9.

³⁰ Ibid.

catechist settled in Ramallah on 15 March 1863. When he wrote his account one year later he stated that the community was still progressing.³¹ Except for their ‘change of heart’, no complete conversion experiences for individual persons from these Ramallah people was mentioned. On the contrary, Klein expressed his doubts regarding their sincerity in wishing to become Protestants, telling Joseph Jahu Abu Girgis to first wait to see if the people of Ramallah would stick to their decision.

Similar ‘group conversion stories’ stem mainly from Gobat. The Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox families in Nazareth mentioned earlier, for instance, which had separated from their churches, had declared themselves Protestants and had formed a Protestant congregation.³² Although in his reports Gobat regularly says that people’s eyes were opened as a result of reading the Bible, nothing is mentioned about individual conversions. Rather than focussing on conversions of the group members, Gobat discusses the process of their separation from their former churches and their desire to form a Protestant congregation. His accounts of groups willing to join the Protestants regularly served his plea for permission to receive Christians from other denominations into the Protestant church.³³ In addition, such stories reflect Gobat’s and the CMS missionaries’ ambivalence towards forming Protestant communities and making ‘true’ converts. There was a tension between their ideas on ‘true Christianity’ and the desire of both the Protestant missionaries and local Christians to form Protestant communities. On the one hand, if the Protestant mission was dependent on ‘true’ converts to establish Protestant congregations, hardly any Protestant church would be established. On the other hand, by admitting whole families and groups to the Protestant community, it was unlikely for the groups’ individual members to have experienced a characteristic Evangelical conversion. In this way, however, it would be more likely that Protestant communities could be established, with some ‘true Christians’ among them but mainly consisting of people who were merely interested in Protestantism.

It seems that Gobat and the CMS missionaries were inclined to choose the second option: they showed an openness to admitting groups into the Protestant church, with the idea that it was the first step towards changing the groups’ individual members into

³¹ Joseph Jahu Abu Girgis to the CMS, Journal extracts (in English and Arabic), 1864 (received on 17 September 1864), Birmingham/UL, C M/O 27/1.

³² See Chapter 4.

³³ Gobat discussed group conversions in various types of writing such as annual reports, and letters to the CMS administrators, Rose, and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

'true Christians'. This view is confirmed by a letter from Klein of February 1855, in which he remarked that "*personal* religion, personal responsibility is yet little known" among the Palestinian people. Many considered religion "an heredity thing; but if one or two of the chief members of the family 'change their religion' or 'turn Protestant' as they call it; then all the other members of the family and relations are expected to turn that way too". The Protestant congregation frequently received members by this route. Klein realised that if the Protestant mission "strived to have a pure Church, a community consisting solely of converted individuals" [i.e. 'true' converts], they had to reject such members. Nevertheless, he wanted the mission to receive these people, even though they had not been converted, as in this way they might "have the means of having the Word of God, of searching the Scriptures and receiving light on the most important subject of Salvation through Christ's merits, by *faith* alone". Klein added that he was against rules and regulations concerning converts and the reception of new members into the Protestant congregation. This may imply that there had been discussion within the Protestant mission about the admission of people to the Protestant Church. Apparently, Klein supported a more pragmatic approach that seems to be shared by Gobat and the majority of his colleagues in the mission field.³⁴

Such a shift in expectations regarding the acceptance of people in the Protestant Church and making 'true' converts was not restricted to the CMS Palestine mission. The ABCFM missionaries in Lebanon and Syria also adapted their expectations. According to Habib Badr, they had at first been unable to report any progress of their mission, because they only wanted to accept individuals or groups into the church if there was "credible evidence of piety", viz. a recognizable conversion experience, and a "visible outer change in their moral and social behaviour". After pressure from the Board's Prudential Committee, the missionaries saw themselves forced to adjust their expectations of possible converts in order to be able to found a church "of some sort".³⁵

With the 'full-life stories', deathbed narratives and group conversion accounts, it seems that the Protestant missionaries not only wanted to stress the mission's progress and necessity. By emphasizing their church members' improvement in faith, their piety at death's door, and the like, they may also have wanted to legitimize their decision to

³⁴ Klein to Venn, Annual Letter, Nazareth, 11 February 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 41/282.

³⁵ In a report about the first people received into the communion of the church, no mention was made of a conversion experience. Badr, "American Protestant Missionary Beginnings", 234-236.

admit to their congregation people not yet truly converted. Accepting these people into the Protestant Church offered the missionaries the opportunity to work on faith and behaviour and to turn them into ‘true Christians’ in the end. The missionary reports and letters to the home front contain numerous stories about congregation members showing signs of improved behaviour and progress in faith.³⁶

Some missionaries openly admitted that although people were making progress they could hardly be considered ‘true Christians’. One of them was Christian Fallscheer, who was in the service of the CMS in Nablus. He wrote in 1877 that many Christians in the country had “left the superstition and bigotry of these Eastern Churches”, but that they [i.e. the Protestant missionaries] wanted “real conversions [...] men who saw the heavenly light with their Spiritual eyes”.³⁷ More than twenty years earlier Gobat had expressed a similar thought about some parents in Nablus, who had decided to send their children to the Protestant instead of the Greek Orthodox school. Gobat stated that he did “not pretend to say that these Protestant people are really inwardly converted”, but emphasized that he firmly believed some of them to be “under the influence of the grace of God”.³⁸ According to John Zeller from the CMS Nazareth mission, the Arab Christians should not be compared to the true Evangelical Protestants at home: “it would be unjust to measure them [i.e., Arab Christians] with the same standard which we must apply to the life of a truly converted man at home. It would not be just to expect from these Arabs the same *deep* conviction of sin which becomes the turning-point to a new independent life in Christ”.³⁹

³⁶ For instance, Joseph Jahu Abu Girgis’s story about Moses Elkuri, who was a member of the Protestant congregation in Ramle. From his youth Moses had stolen, lied, drank, cursed and quarrelled. Since he had “received the true lessons of the Gospel”, Moses repented of his former sins. He even advised his old companions to leave their bad ways. Joseph Jahu Abu Girgis to the CMS, Journal extracts, 1864, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 27/1.

³⁷ Fallscheer to the CMS, “Report of the quarter ending June 30th 1877”, Nablus, 22 June 1877, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 24/3.

³⁸ Gobat to Venn, Jerusalem, 16 June 1854, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 28/73.

³⁹ Zeller to Fenn, Annual Letter, Nazareth, December 1872, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 72/277. According to Christian Fallscheer the Arab Christians should be taught in the same way as the heathen in India and Africa. Fallscheer to the committee of the CMS, Annual Letter, Nablus, 18 December 1877, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 24/4.

Reaching the people: mission methods

In order to spread the Gospel the CMS missionaries used the usual methods. In their accounts they describe in detail their efforts in all sorts of Bible and prayer meetings, church services, special tours to distribute the Bible, educational activities and conversations with people. As the missionaries often mentioned the Bible as an important element in the ‘awakening process’ towards conversion, it logically held a central position in all Protestant missionary activities. In this section I will provide an overview of the ways in which the Protestant missionaries commonly tried to spread the faith.

Bible classes were generally held several times a week. During these meetings the Bible was read and discussed. Sometimes the participants were asked to memorize a text from the Bible, which they had to recite at the next meeting. In Nazareth the attendants of the ‘nightly meetings’ had to learn a “verse from the word of our salvation” by heart and recite it the following week.⁴⁰ Some missionaries organized Bible meetings every evening. According to the Dutch lay evangelist George Nyland, who worked for the CMS in Ramallah, every evening about twenty or thirty men came to his house to discuss the Bible. They started the meeting with “general conversations to allow time for sipping a cup of coffee and making a pipe”. After that, Nyland read a chapter from the Bible, which was “subject of conversation for the rest of the evening”. The evening was concluded with prayer. On two evenings a week, these meetings had the character of a “regular Bible class”, at which the Old and New Testaments were read alternately.⁴¹

Prayer meetings were dedicated to all kinds of subjects, such as the “invocation of the Holy Spirit”, the “spread of God’s Kingdom” in the country, “the increase of love; and for Christian union”.⁴² Hymn-singing evenings were also organized, together with meetings in which other books than the Bible were read, such as John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s progress*.⁴³ For women “Mothers’ meetings” and sewing circles were set up,

⁴⁰ Boutaji to the CMS, Annual Letter, Nazareth, 7 December 1878 (most probably a translation from Arabic), Birmingham/UL, C M/O 16/20.

⁴¹ Nyland to the CMS, Annual Letter, Ramallah, December 1877 (translation from German), Birmingham/UL, C M/O 57/3.

⁴² Macgowan to the LJS, (Jerusalem?), 3 March 1859, Oxford/BL, Dep. C.M.J. c.110; “Translation of the Revd. Michael Kwar’s letter, Nazareth, 30 November 1874” (translation from Arabic), Birmingham/UL, C M/O 40/7.

⁴³ For instance in Salt, where two nights a week were dedicated to reading *The Pilgrim’s progress*. Jamal to the secretaries of the CMS, Annual Letter, Salt, 29 November 1879, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/11.

usually by the missionaries’ wives. George Nyland and his wife organized one sewing meeting a week, during which they told the women “about our Lord and Saviour”, read Christian books to them and prayed with them.⁴⁴ According to the missionaries, these various meetings were attended not only by members of the Protestant Church, but also by people from the other churches, which made them a perfect instrument of conversion.

Bible classes, sewing circles, hymn singing and prayer meetings were all means to reach adults and teach them the Word of God. Besides these classes, however, much of the mission’s time and money was spent on the education of children in the Protestant mission schools. Gobat and the CMS missionaries considered the schools a central instrument in making converts. Through the children the missionaries were able to reach the parents and families. The schools held a central position in the missionary work; for a discussion of the educational activities and principles of Gobat and the CMS missionaries, see the next chapter.

Obviously, church services were another way to reach the people and to teach them the Bible. From the missionaries’ letters we may conclude that sermons served to make listeners familiar with central Evangelical doctrines: salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and Christ’s atoning death at the cross.⁴⁵ Their sermons also pointed out the importance of a ‘conversion by heart’, or inward conversion. William Krusé from the CMS Jaffa mission, for example, proclaimed that in the Christian Church there were “true Christians” and “Christians by name only”.⁴⁶ He incited his listeners to ask themselves to which class they belonged, as it was of great importance “to know the real state of our hearts”. He linked this thought to the “final day of account [...] when the great separation shall take place”; on that day one person would go to the right, and the other to the left. The latter would “go away into everlasting punishment, but the

⁴⁴ Nyland to the CMS, “Report about the outstations near Jerusalem”, Ramallah, 25 March 1880, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 57/1.

⁴⁵ See for example Huber to Chapman, “Journal extracts for the Quarter ending September 30th 1858”, Nazareth, 9 October 1858, C M/O 34/74; Zeller to Fenn, Annual Letter, Nazareth, December 1872, C M/O 72/277; Huber, “Report of the quarter ending September 30th 1875”, Nazareth, 30 October 1875. All Birmingham/UL.

⁴⁶ This differs from the ABCFM missionaries in Lebanon, who used the term ‘nominal Christians’ for people who were not ‘true Christians’. The CMS missionaries did not use this phrase, but instead wrote about ‘Christians in name only’ or people who were not ‘true Christians’.

righteous into life eternal”.⁴⁷ The Protestant church services were also attended by members of other denominations. The missionaries assumed that not all of these ‘guests’ had sincere intentions. According to Huber, the church services of the Nazareth congregation were generally attended by several “strangers of the other denominations”, some of whom only came to see whether they could find “any faults” in the service.⁴⁸

With the church services, Bible classes and prayer meetings, the Protestant missionaries reached especially those people who were already interested in Protestantism, who were involved with the Protestant missionary activities, or who had already become members of the Protestant community. Therefore, the missionaries sought other ways to spread the Gospel among those people who did not visit the Protestant services and meetings. They made special tours to read and explain the Bible to the people and to distribute it. John Gruhler, catechist in Ramle, was convinced that the distribution of the Bible was “the most effectual means of missionary work in the country”; it was the mission’s duty to “use every means for that purpose”.⁴⁹ In 1860 he went on a Bible distribution tour together with Samuel Muller and Frederick Klein. One of the villages they visited was Beir Zeit. They entered a mosque, where a crowd assembled. The missionaries asked a man to read a chapter of the Bible, which he did; after that they had a long conversation with those present. According to Gruhler, everybody listened eagerly and one man even said: “Your words are better than money, and sweeter than honey”. The missionaries sold one Bible. When an old man asked for one, he was disappointed; Gruhler explicitly says that they had decided not to give Bibles away for free.⁵⁰

The decision not to distribute Bibles for free was in line with the missionaries’ conviction that people had to be genuinely interested in the Bible. The ‘Word of God’ should not be taken for granted and people had to show themselves willing to make an effort to receive it. This view sometimes confronted the missionaries with a dilemma. Michael Kawar once complained that on a tour he had distributed some tracts and one

⁴⁷ Krusé to the CMS, “Journal of the Jaffa Station for the month of August”, Jaffa, 4 September 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 45/169.

⁴⁸ Huber, “Report of the Quarter ending September 1856. To the Committee of the Church Missionary Society London”, Nazareth, 22 September 1856, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 34/73.

⁴⁹ Gruhler to Sandreczki, Annual Letter, Ramle, 18 January 1861, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 29/17.

⁵⁰ Gruhler to Sandreczki, Quarterly Report, Ramle, 1 February 1860, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 29/9.

Gospel at his own expense, as the Protestant missionaries were “not allowed to give books gratis”. On the same tour, a certain dr. Parry, who was not restricted by this prohibition, had distributed many Bibles, as Kawar reported.⁵¹ In some cases the missionaries did give away a Bible for free when they thought the end justified the means. When on one of his tours Muller asked an old man to buy a Bible, the man asked for the Bible to be given to him for free. At first Muller did not want to give one away, but when the other people present convinced him that the old man would also read out the Bible to them, the missionary decided to give him a copy.⁵²

In addition to Bible distribution tours, an important instrument of evangelisation among non-Protestants were the conversations with people about religious topics in the streets, shops, the bazaar, and at home.⁵³ According to Zeller, the Word of God was often “preached through conversations” for which there were many “suitable opportunities”. Zeller exemplified such a ‘suitable’ occasion by describing his visit of condolence to a Catholic man, whose daughter-in-law had just died. Zeller felt the man’s grief and anger and apparently considered this the right moment to point out to those present “how the love we bore to our relatives could in a measure teach us the love of God towards us”. In reaction, the man said that death only impressed human-kind “with the awful wrath of God against us sinners”. This led Zeller to speak about Christ and the “necessity of faith in Christ”, who had “borne our guilt and regained us the full assurance of the divine goodwill”. This is one of many examples of the CMS missionaries’ sparing no trouble or expense to proclaim the Gospel and the central Evangelical doctrines.⁵⁴

In order to be able to teach the people in Bible classes, to preach to and to converse with them, it was important to know Arabic.⁵⁵ Gobat considered missionaries who did

⁵¹ “Translation of the Revd. Michael Kawar’s Annual Letter” (translation from Arabic), Nazareth, 25 November 1872, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 40/5. This dr. Parry might be the same as the William Parry mentioned in Chapter 4, n. 60.

⁵² Muller to the CMS, Annual Report, Bethlehem, 31 December 1859, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 54/4.

⁵³ The missionaries sometimes complained that it was difficult to meet the men at home, since many of them were employed outside the town or were busy with their work. See, among others, Paddon to the CMS, Annual Report, Nazareth, 28 December 1868, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 60/9.

⁵⁴ Zeller to the CMS, Annual Letter for 1874-1875, Nazareth, January 1875, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 72/278.

⁵⁵ Learning the languages of the mission field was part of the training in the Church Missionary College in Islington, see Chapter 4.

not know Arabic “scarcely [...] of any use”.⁵⁶ Learning Arabic was an issue in many of the missionaries’ letters. The CMS missionary William Paddon repeatedly wrote about his progress in Arabic. He thought that he could comprehend “the spiritual state of those who have already professed the pure religion” or of those who were “wavering”, until he could converse freely with the church members in Arabic.⁵⁷ Klein translated hymns from English and German into Arabic and adapted them to the “native tunes”. According to him, these hymns pleased the people exceedingly.⁵⁸ However, not all missionaries appreciated the Arabic tonality and preferred to stick to the way in which hymns were sung back home. When the CMS missionary Henry Johnson, for instance, visited a church service in Salt, he observed that the singing “marred what would otherwise have been a fi[n]e specimen of Evangelical worship”. According to him, the Arabs “exhibit but little skill in their musical performances”. Johnson described the cantor as having “hills, rocks, and villages in his voice which prevented the music from going straight”.⁵⁹

Proclaiming the Gospel: topics of conversation

The missionaries loved to describe their conversations with people from various religious and denominational backgrounds. In their letters they also reported on discussions started by their dragomans, schoolmasters, schoolchildren, and church members. The subjects of these discussions are interesting, as they reflect the Protestants’ central ideas and values. By stressing their own religious views, the missionaries often rejected the views of the people they were talking to. Descriptions of these conversations are often polemic in character and full of criticism of the other churches and religions.

⁵⁶ In some of his letters, for instance, Gobat expresses his worries about the missionary Franklin Bellamy, who he said made hardly any progress in Arabic. Gobat thought that Bellamy should apply himself to the regular study of Arabic, as otherwise he would not be of any use for the mission. Gobat to Wright, Jerusalem, 8 March 1877, C M/O 28/107; Gobat to Wright, Jerusalem, 28 April 1877, C M/O 28/108. Both: Birmingham/UL.

⁵⁷ Paddon to the CMS, Nazareth, August 1868, C M/O 60/2; Nazareth, 30 April 1868, C M/O 60/1; Nazareth, 16 March 1869, C M/O 60/5. All: Birmingham/UL. Cf. Johnson to Hutchinson, Jerusalem, 5 February 1874, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 38/1.

⁵⁸ Klein added that he often wished for a small organ. Klein to Venn, Annual Letter, Nazareth, 11 February 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 41/282.

⁵⁹ Johnson to Hutchinson, Jerusalem, 25 November 1875, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 38/9.

According to Krusé, “controversies” between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Jaffa occurred almost daily, and always on the same subjects: “the saints, the fasts, the traditions, transubstantiation etc. in short, the mother church with all her superstitions”.⁶⁰ These topics, the majority of which had already been discussed since the Reformation, often figured in the missionary reports. One of the main topics of discussion was the intercession by the Virgin Mary and the saints, which Protestants rejected, because this belief contradicted the Protestant dogma that there was only one mediator between God and mankind: Jesus Christ. When a Catholic asked Seraphim Boutaji, a catechist in the service of the CMS, why the Protestants did not pray for the intercession of Mary and the saints, Boutaji explained that “the love of Christ is greater than the love of Mary or saints”. Moreover, Mary and the saints did not hear people when they needed to. Christ was the only mediator between God and men and by asking the saints and Mary for intercession, Christians “set aside Christ’s office”.⁶¹

Another popular theme in the missionaries’ discussions with members of other churches was that of justification. Whereas Protestants believed that faith in Christ alone was sufficient for the salvation of sinners, for Roman Catholics acquiring justification could not be separated from doing good works. Gruhler, who called the subject “the old theme”, found it a “hard point”, as people did not want to “take salvation freely”, but wanted to deserve it.⁶²

Transubstantiation was also a classic theme in the polemics. Although the Protestant missionaries most probably did not have the same perception of the eucharist among themselves, as they came from different backgrounds, the CMS missionaries were united in their rejection of transubstantiation.⁶³ When people’s ‘eyes were opened’ to the Protestant faith, they particularly rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, as

⁶⁰ Krusé to the CMS, “Journal of the Jaffa Station for the month of August”, Jaffa, 4 September 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 45/169.

⁶¹ “Report of the quarter ending June 30th 1866. By Seraphim Boutaji [translation from the Arabic]”, Shefamer, June 1866, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 16/10.

⁶² Gruhler to Sandreczki, Quarterly Report, Ramle, 1 February 1860, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 29/9.

⁶³ Most Prussian missionaries would have taken a Lutheran view of the eucharist, which means that they followed the doctrine of consubstantiation: Christ is present *together with* the substance of bread and wine. The Anglicans rejected transubstantiation on the basis of Article 28 of the 39 Articles of the Church of England, the gist of which is that “the body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner”.

the CMS missionaries tell us.⁶⁴ The Protestant missionaries loved to write about the ridiculous arguments by which clergymen of the other churches defended this doctrine. According to Zeller, a Catholic priest of Shefa Amer wanted to prove their doctrines by referring to Bible stories about Christ miraculously feeding the 5,000 and the Last Supper. The priest was said to have stated that when Christ fed the 5,000 he only *thanked*, but at the Last Supper Christ also *blessed* in breaking the bread. The priest considered this argumentation “undeniable proof” of the doctrine of transubstantiation, so Zeller.⁶⁵ Other popular topics of discussion were praying the rosary, the use of Latin in church, and the supremacy of the Pope.⁶⁶

In their conversations the Protestants loved to use Bible quotations. Although their opponents did sometimes quote from the Bible, the Protestants generally believed the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox clergy did not have sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures. In accordance with this view, the missionaries considered Catholic and Orthodox church members ‘ignorant’ as to Bible texts. Klein even claimed it was generally acknowledged that no one could “overcome the Protestants as long as they bring their hated proofs from Scripture.”⁶⁷ In various accounts the Protestants contrasted their own Scriptural knowledge with the so-called ignorance of clergy and members of other churches. According to the CMS documents, the Protestants’ knowledge of Bible texts and use of Bible quotations were not appreciated by their discussion partners. In Nazareth, Klein’s servant Farach regularly went to the barber shop to have discussions with the Greeks and Latins, as well as with a Maronite priest. He told Klein that “on several occasions when they disputed and he (Farach) [produced] proof from the Scriptures the proud but ignorant priest went away cursing and excommunicating him, while the assembled people laughed at the good priest’s dilemma”.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ The Greek families in Nablus mentioned earlier, for instance, rejected not only the worship of Mary and the saints, but especially the doctrine of transubstantiation, according to Gobat. Gobat to Venn, Jerusalem, 9 January 1850, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 28/69.

⁶⁵ Zeller, “Extracts from Journals”, Nazareth, August 1867, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 72/265.

⁶⁶ When Boutaji discussed the Pope’s supremacy with a Catholic and the latter wanted to prove it by referring to the traditional passage in Matthew 16, 18, Boutaji explained that Jesus’ words “were not spoken with regard to the superiority of S^r Peter above the others, because Christ himself had expressly forbidden all rivalry between his disciples and had commanded that none of them should be called ‘Father’ on earth, because one is our Father who is in heaven”. However, he did not succeed in convincing either this man or other Catholics present. “Report of the quarter ending June 30th 1866”, Shefa Amer, June 1866, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 16/10.

⁶⁷ Klein to Venn, Annual Letter, Nazareth, 11 February 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 41/ 282.

⁶⁸ Klein to Venn, Annual Letter, Nazareth, 11 February 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 41/282. The schoolmaster of Lydda, Hannah Damishky, wrote that when she visited a sick Greek Orthodox man, the

In their criticism of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches, the missionaries contrasted Protestantism with the other denominations, and were highly critical of the doctrines and traditions of the other churches. The Protestants’ negative attitude towards the other denominations was also reflected in their choice of words.⁶⁹ Protestants frequently used the traditional derogatory terms ‘popery’ and ‘popish’ for (Roman) Catholicism and (Roman) Catholics. For the Greek Orthodox Church and Greek Orthodox monks they used the terms ‘monkery’ and ‘monkish’. Klein, for instance, wrote about the Greek Orthodox Church that “the fruits of this monkish thralldom and religious police-supervision [...] are either a blind and slavish subjection to monkery and the monkish religion, awful bigotry and consequent bitter opposition and enmity to the pure religion of the Gospel”. He added, however, that he thought the Greek clergy in general less fiercely and openly opposed to the Protestant missionary efforts than the “Latin monks”.⁷⁰ The use of pejorative language contributed to the polarization between Protestants and the other denominations.

By describing their discussions about traditional theological themes, the missionaries not only created a negative image of the other churches, but also emphasized their own Evangelical Protestant views and identity: Christ as the only mediator instead of Mary and the saints, the usage of the vernacular instead of Latin in church, sound biblical knowledge versus ‘ignorance’, justification through faith only versus good works.⁷¹

patient told her about two Greek Orthodox priests who had come to see him the night before. The priests discussed a biblical topic on which they did not agree. When a third person asked them to take their Bibles to see who was right, they answered that they did not possess a Bible. On hearing this account, Damishky fetched her Bible and explained the matter. Damishky to the CMS, Lydda, 1 November 1879, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 22/5.

⁶⁹ For the polemic between Protestants and Roman Catholics, see also Murre-van den Berg, “Simply by giving to them macaroni...”, 63-80. Murre-van den Berg discusses the anti-Roman Catholic language in Protestant missionary publications, for instance the use of the term ‘Jesuit’ for Roman Catholic missionaries whom the American Protestant missionaries encountered, also if from other orders. Murre-van den Berg, “Simply by giving to them macaroni”, 71-72. The CMS missionaries in Palestine, however, were better able to distinguish between the various Roman Catholic groups, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, the Latin patriarchate, and some French women’s missionary societies.

⁷⁰ Klein to the CMS, Annual Report 1857-1858, Jerusalem, 23 February 1858, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 41/283.

⁷¹ Although the majority of these disputes were about traditional theological themes, it seems that the Protestant missionaries and Greek and Latin priests sometimes had discussions simply to nag each other. In the streets of Shefa Amer, for instance, a Catholic priest accused the Protestant ministers to preach only “for the sake of their salary”. Zeller, “Extracts from Journals”, Nazareth, August 1867, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 72/265.

Material support: an obstacle to making true converts

When making converts to or members of the Protestant Church, the Protestants saw the material support offered by the Catholic and Orthodox convents as “a great [stumbling block] [...]: for they bind their congregations with golden bands, by giving them houses to live in, and bread to most of them [...] and this besides the doctors and medicines with which they supply them gratis”.⁷² Material support made people dependent on their churches. People risked losing their houses, jobs and social circle, not only when they converted to Protestantism, but even when they started to read the Bible, sent their children to the Protestant school, or attended Protestant Bible and prayer meetings, so the missionaries tell us. According to Gobat, as soon as people started “more or less earnestly seek the truth”, their Latin, Greek or Armenian priests immediately ordered them to desist. If they did not obey, they were driven out of their dwellings, in most cases the property of the convent. Gobat stated that people’s poverty made them particularly dependent on the convents.⁷³

Even when people were convinced of the ‘truth of Protestantism’ and wanted to enter the Protestant Church, the fear to lose so much could, according to the missionaries, be enough to stay in or return to the (former) church. This was the case in Jaffa; when two Greek Orthodox men had decided to join the Protestants “the Greeks made all efforts to bring them back again”, so Krusé. They threatened to take away both men’s employment and their daily bread. As a result, both “were obliged to stay away”. They declared themselves Protestants, but could not openly confess it. They would read their Bibles at home and would not go to the Greek Orthodox Church until times had improved.⁷⁴ Such stories seem to imply that more people would have become Protestants if there had been no hindrances. At the same time, the CMS missionaries were concerned that people who wanted to join the Protestants might expect the same support as they received from the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. They saw people

⁷² Jamal to the CMS, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 17 November 1875, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/7. Idem, Nyland to the CMS, Annual Letter, Ramallah, December 1877, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 57/3.

⁷³ “Extracts from an [encyclical] of Bishop Samuel Gobat, successor of the Late Bishop Michael Alexander” [printed in the Jewish Intelligencer of January, 1852], Jerusalem, 30 October 1851, London/BL, BP, vol. 13, Add. 34579 ff.446. These extracts derive from Gobat’s annual report for 1851, see Gobat, *Leben und Wirken*, 330-339.

⁷⁴ Krusé to the CMS, “Journal of the Jaffa Station for the month of August”, Jaffa, 4 September 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 45/169.

return to their former churches after finding that the Protestants did not offer this kind of support.⁷⁵

When people did return to their former church some missionaries blamed them for a lack of faith. When, for instance, in 1855 a Greek Catholic family in Nazareth returned because they did not receive the expected “worldly support and protection”, Klein considered it a “painful confirmation of the indifference of the Arab Christians to *truth*, even saving truth when some worldly advantage can be gained by denying it”.⁷⁶ Much later, in 1877, Boutaji made a similar comment, blaming the “love of this world and its vain glory” for holding the Catholics of Shefa Amer back from joining the Protestants.⁷⁷ However, once in a while some of the missionaries modified this view, expressing an understanding of the social realities the people lived in and referring to people’s poverty. According to Gobat, some people in Ramallah had begun to “give signs of spiritual life and energy; but their excessive poverty and difficulties of finding the means of earning their livelihood from the moment they disagree with their priests, prevent for a long time the development of the [...] seed which they have been able to understand and receive”.⁷⁸

The missionaries’ reports fully reflect their disapproval of this type of material support. Of course, these reports to the Home Board served to explain the lack of converts made by the Protestant mission and to stress the hindrances the missionaries experienced in their work. However, the criticism of Gobat and the missionaries went deeper than their concern about losing church members. In their eyes, the ‘material religion’ of members of other denominations was at odds with ‘true Christianity’. Whereas ‘material religion’ was connected with worldly motives and made people dependent on their churches, ‘true Christianity’ was not bound by such motives because it

⁷⁵ In Jaffa, for example, two Roman Catholics, both Italians, wanted to become Protestants. As the Protestants could not arrange employment for them, they decided not to join. Krusé to the CMS, “Journal of the Jaffa Station for the month of August”, Jaffa, 4 September 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 45/169.

⁷⁶ Klein to Venn, Annual Letter, Nazareth, 11 February 1855, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 41/282.

⁷⁷ “Translation of the Report of Serafim Boutagi, for the quarter ending, March 31st 1873. Shefamer”, Shefa Amer, 31 March 1873, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 16/13. Jamal explained people’s returning to their churches by stating that they had “no faith to resist this temptation [i.e., receiving material support]”, but also “no means to provide houses for themselves”. Jamal to the CMS, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 11 January 1878, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/9.

⁷⁸ Gobat to Venn, Jerusalem, 21 March 1863, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 28/83. See also Gobat, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 30 October 1851, in Gobat, *Leben und Wirken*, 335; Jamal to the secretary of the CMS, Annual Letter, Jerusalem, 29 November 1876, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 36/8.

was purely 'spiritual' in character. This 'spiritual religion' was about freedom rather than dependency. It was about a free choice from the heart. Instead of 'worldly expectations', real piety should be people's motive to join the Protestants. The tension between 'spiritual' or 'true' Christianity and material religion was not characteristic of only the CMS missionaries. The ABCFM missionary William McClure Thomson (1806-1894) also thought the other religions at the time, Christian and otherwise, to be mainly characterized by their "intensely mercenary" character.⁷⁹ Although the CMS missionaries did not put it this way and chose a different terminology, the many examples, among which those mentioned above, show a similar attitude.⁸⁰

People's dependence on material support offered by the other churches, together with the fact that Protestant converts frequently returned to their former church, made the CMS missionaries doubt the sincerity and faith of their current and potential church members. The missionaries feared they might have entered the Protestant church for worldly motives or with worldly expectations rather than spiritual motives. These members might leave the Protestant congregation any time. The catechist of Salt, Francis Bourazan, even doubted the sincerity of *all* members of the Protestant congregation. He expected many to leave the Protestant Church as a result of the Protestants' lack of material support.⁸¹

The fact that the missionaries had toned down their ideal of founding a Protestant congregation with 'true' converts only, by also admitting those who were interested in Protestantism but were not 'truly' converted yet, must have fed the missionaries' insecurity and doubt. They adjusted their expectations about conversion, but at the same time wanted people to become Protestants for 'spiritual' reasons only, without any material expectations. Although they criticised the other churches for providing housing, food, and the like, the missionaries were not blind to the poverty of the

⁷⁹ For a discussion about Thomson's famous book *The Land and the Book* and the fundamental opposition Thomson created between the spiritual religion of the Protestants and the material religion of the other religions, see Murre-van den Berg, "William McClure Thomson", 43-63, esp. 51-54, 62-63.

⁸⁰ Fallscheer is one of few CMS missionaries who did use the same terminology, criticising the "mercenary spirit" of the Christians in Palestine. Fallscheer to the CMS, Nablus, 1 July 1878, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 24/1.

⁸¹ According to Bourazan, all people who were coming to prayer expected money from the Protestants. This statement was somewhat exaggerated as it was based on the fact that "already" two men had asked him for money in return for their coming to prayer. One of them asked money for his wedding, and the other wanted Bourazan to pay his debt. The latter promised he would always come to prayer if Bourazan did what he asked. Bourazan, Salt, 4 February 1874, Birmingham/UL, C M/O 8/96A.

people. The Protestant mission founded orphanages, provided medical care and education for free, and sometimes gave alms.⁸² The missionaries, however, probably saw their own help as different from the support the other churches offered, believing it to be some sort of diaconal work, which was generally accepted in Evangelical circles. This diaconal work helped people without making them dependent. That ultimately this was not very different from the backing the other denominations offered was not taken into consideration.

Concluding remarks

In their reports Gobat and the CMS missionaries only rarely described typical Evangelical conversions. Although the missionaries stressed the importance of being a so-called ‘true Christian’, this ideal collided with the reality of the mission field, which made them adjust their expectations about making converts. It seems that they chose a pragmatic approach; by admitting people into the Protestant congregation without demanding a ‘true’ conversion, the mission was able to establish Protestant communities and churches. Still, Gobat and the CMS missionaries did not abandon their Evangelical principles; they believed that in this way they could work on the faith and conduct of their church members, which in the end might lead to ‘true Christianity’. The CMS documents are full of stories about the improvement of people’s piety, faith and behaviour. These ‘success stories’ sent to the home front were intended to illustrate the Protestant mission’s advancements and necessity. Moreover, they had to secure financial support from the home public. In addition, the missionaries’ success stories may have served to legitimize their decision to admit people not yet ‘truly’ converted into the Protestant congregation.

However, Gobat’s and the CMS missionaries’ experiences in the mission field and their pragmatic approach also had a downside. By admitting people who were not yet completely converted into the Protestant church, the CMS missionaries became

⁸² For instance, from time to time the Protestants in Ramle received money from Gobat, though the missionaries’ means were very limited, as Gobat himself sometimes stressed. After Gobat’s death in 1879 there was no money to support these Protestants anymore. According to Odeh, many of them left the Protestant congregation and went back to their former priests. Odeh to Wright, Ramle, 1 November 1879, C M/O 58/2. Gobat to Lake, Jerusalem, 9 March 1876, C M/O 28/98; Gobat to Wright, Jerusalem, 29 June 1876, C M/O 28/100. All: Birmingham/UL.

insecure about the motives of their own church members to join the Protestants, not knowing whether they were 'spiritual' or 'material'. The missionaries criticised the material support offered by the other churches, because this made people dependent. They made a distinction between their own 'true' religion and the 'material' religion of the other denominations. In contrast to 'material' religion this 'true' or 'spiritual' religion was about a free choice from the heart and real piety.

Besides disapproving of the material support, Gobat and the CMS missionaries also criticised the doctrines and rituals of the other denominations. Discussion themes concerned topics that had been traditional subjects of dispute between Protestants and Roman Catholics since the Reformation. In their criticism the Protestants stressed their Evangelical Protestant identity. This is also reflected in their missionary efforts and views: their main aim of making 'true' converts, the position of the Bible, which they considered a central element in the process of conversion, the importance of the doctrine of justification by faith through Christ's atoning death on the cross, and their 'activism' in spreading the faith. All these aspects correspond to Bebbington's characteristics of Evangelicalism: conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism, and activism.⁸³

In the following chapter three of these characteristics, biblicism, conversionism and crucicentrism, will serve as the background for a discussion of the Protestants' central instrument of making 'true Christians': the Bible schools run by Gobat and the CMS missionaries.

⁸³ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2-17.