

**BRETHREN AND THE SAO TOMÉ  
COCOA SLAVERY CONTROVERSY:  
THE ROLE OF CHARLES A. SWAN (1861-1934)<sup>1</sup>**

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It is a commonplace of Brethren historiography that their missionaries sought to stand apart from matters to do with local politics and colonial administration, focusing on the proclamation of the gospel. However, such a view has been challenged by a few writers, and it is fair to say that it has been more of a reflection of attitudes at home than of the situation ‘on the field’. This is strikingly demonstrated by the involvement of the Brethren missionary Charles A. Swan (1861-1934) in anti-slavery campaigning, and the way in which his career has been treated by later writers on Brethren mission.

Swan was born and brought up in Sunderland, becoming a clerk on leaving school. Around the age of nineteen Swan was converted, mainly through the preaching of A.A. Rees (1815-84) at Bethesda Chapel. Rees was one of a number of pastors of independent evangelical causes who were to a considerable extent fellow-travellers with Brethren,<sup>2</sup> and so it was a relatively easy step for Swan to begin attending a Brethren assembly, where he began to be exercised about becoming a missionary. Even before his conversion, he had been interested in things African, and after it he devoured Livingstone’s books as well as keeping up with reports of Fred Arnot’s work in Central Africa (Arnot had gone out in 1881).<sup>3</sup> When he went abroad in 1886, it was in fellowship with the editors of *Echoes of Service*,

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1. I would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by Jennifer Milligan and other staff at the Library of the Society of Friends, London, in researching this article.

2. On Rees, see Timothy C.F. Stunt, ‘The Early Development of Arthur Augustus Rees and his relations with the Brethren’, *BAHNR*, 4.1 (2006), pp. 22-35.

3. Swan, in Anon. (ed.), *A Central African Jubilee: or fifty years with the gospel in “the Beloved Strip”* (London [1931]), p. 97; Arthur G. Ingleby, *Pioneer Days in Darkest Africa: A Record of the Life and Work of Chas. A. Swan ...* (London, 1946), pp. 15-20.

and he served in what are now the Congo and Angola. Health reasons forced a return to Europe in 1903, but Swan and his wife served in Lisbon, Portugal until his death. This article focuses on his involvement in the controversy concerning the use of cocoa sourced from plantations in the Portuguese island territories of Sao Tomé and Príncipe worked by what amounted to slave labour, which came to a climax in 1909.

### **The controversy unfolds**

From 1901, the Birmingham-based firm of Cadburys began to receive reports from missionary sources that the cocoa plantations which supplied them were being worked by what amounted to slave labour. Although termed 'contract labour', it relied on brutal forced recruitment of Angolan villagers, and the contracts which they had to sign were not properly explained to them, nor were the promises of repatriation at the end of the term of service honoured, although some efforts were made by plantation owners and managers in such matters as provision of medical care. As Quakers, the Cadbury family found this unacceptable, and on several occasions from 1903 William Cadbury went to Lisbon to interrogate the planters. They denied the charges but encouraged him to make his own inquiries. Through the medium of two individuals (Joseph Burt and William Claude Horton) who visited Sao Tomé, Príncipe and Angola, he did so. They completed their investigations in April 1907, but the Foreign Office asked the firm to maintain silence until their report had been presented formally to the Portuguese government, which was not done until November. Meanwhile, the African section of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce passed and published (in Portugal as well as England) a resolution calling on British cocoa producers to act, as a result of which the Foreign Office allowed Cadburys to break their silence. The report produced verbal promises of amendment but no action, and so from March 1909 Cadburys and the other European

firms supporting the investigation ceased to use cocoa from Sao Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>4</sup>

That year William Cadbury made three trips to Lisbon as well as visiting Angola, Sao Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>5</sup> By 1910 repatriation began in earnest; evidently the terms under which workers were acquired did change, though the system of labour remained fairly much the same.<sup>6</sup> By 1913 the Portuguese had liberated about two thousand slaves, and about thirty-seven thousand remained.<sup>7</sup> Revolution in 1910 had brought in a government which was prepared to take action; several of its members had received copies of Swan's book on the matter, which we shall examine shortly.<sup>8</sup>

The controversy generated by the issue was due to the fact that whilst it was generally agreed in Britain that the use of such labour was wrong and that steps must be taken to put a stop to it, there were divergent opinions about how that goal might be achieved and divergent assessments of the morality of the course of action taken by Cadbury's in particular (although they were not the only firm involved). Three groups in particular were concerned with the slavery issue: the Anti-Slavery Society, strongly supported by Quakers, which attacked the Portuguese government and planters; the Foreign Office, which took a cautious approach as it wished to preserve the contract labour supply for South Africa; and the English cocoa manufacturers, all Quakers, who were hostile to slavery but needed proof before a boycott could be justified. The Foreign Office had urged that the matter be settled by diplomacy (though George Cadbury had wanted them to authorize the use of a gunboat in collecting evidence!), but a former reporter on the staff of the *Daily News* (which was part-owned

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4. William Adlington Cadbury, *Labour in Portuguese West Africa*, 2nd ed. (London, 1910), *passim*. The firm had already reduced the proportion of its cocoa sourced from West Africa from 60% in 1903 to 32% in 1908 (David J. Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians* (Oxford, 1990), p. 146).

5. A.G. Gardiner, *Life of George Cadbury* (London, 1923), p. 249.

6. James Duffy, *A Question of Slavery: labour policies in Portuguese Africa and the British protest movement* (Oxford, 1966), p. 210-11.

7. John H. Harris, *Portuguese Slavery: Britain's dilemma* (London, 1913), pp. 52n, 121.

8. Ingleby, *Pioneer Days in Darkest Africa*, p. 144.

by George Cadbury), H.W. Nevinson, made hasty arrangements to visit Angola and published a report on his visit in *Harper's Magazine* from August 1905 to February 1906; this appeared in book form as *A Modern Slavery* (1906) but failed to make the headlines. George Cadbury and the other directors of the firm instructed the editor of the *Daily News* not to mention the Sao Tomé affair lest the publicity wreck what they were trying to do. However, once the Liverpool resolution was published there was no reason to maintain silence, and a few days later Cadbury's statement to that body appeared in the *Daily News*.

On 26 September 1908, however, a rival newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, accused the firm of knowingly profiting from the slave trade.<sup>9</sup> George Cadbury brought a libel action against the *Evening Standard*, which was heard in Birmingham at the beginning of December 1909.<sup>10</sup> The paper's counsel, Edward Carson (later famous for his involvement in Unionist unrest in Northern Ireland) alleged that Cadbury's had acted to enable them to continue buying slave-grown cocoa without the public knowing. In reply, the firm demonstrated they had sought the truth from the start, but that Portuguese unresponsiveness had lengthened this process considerably.<sup>11</sup> The firm had been reducing dependence on Sao Tomé since 1903, and had nothing to gain or lose by a change in policy; furthermore, it had been advised by the Foreign Office to leave investigation of the issue to diplomats on the ground that it was too big an issue for one firm as a state matter. The moral issues were complex, as George Cadbury had been concerned not to hurt native labourers by moving trade away; profits on the Sao Tomé cocoa trade for the years 1902-8 had gone to benevolent purposes. The judge, in his summing up, stated that the fundamental issue was whether the defendants tried to delay the matter going public in order to keep

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9. Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, pp. 146-8, 187-8.

10. For accounts of the trial and of events surrounding it, see Lowell J. Satre, *Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics and the Ethics of Business* (Athens OH, and London, 2005), pp. 145-8; Gillian Wagner, *The Chocolate Conscience* (London, 1987), pp. 90-102.

11. Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians*, p. 150.

buying slave-grown cocoa. As for the question of damages, Cadbury's had not claimed that any loss of business had resulted. This may explain why, although the jury quickly found in favour of Cadbury's, beyond costs they awarded only the token sum of a farthing damages.<sup>12</sup>

### **Swan's visit to Angola**

We now turn to examine Swan's role in events. Brethren, who already had a strong missionary presence in the area along the border of Angola and Congo later known as the 'Beloved Strip', were well aware of what was going on; in *Echoes of Service* F.S. Arnot reported on Sao Tomé, describing the contract labour system: 'Quite a storm of words is blowing round it just now, connected with what has been termed "modern slavery."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, they had been the first missionaries in the part of Congo known as Katanga.<sup>14</sup> Swan himself had spent the period from December 1887 to June 1891 at the capital, Bunkeya, in virtual attendance on a local ruler, Mushidi (also spelt Msidi or Msiri), allowing Arnot to go on furlough. Here, while his freedom to engage in direct missionary work was limited by his subordinate position in the court as what amounted to a civil servant, he managed to incur the disapproval of a British envoy, Alfred Sharp, who arrived late in 1890 with a treaty acknowledging British rule which he wished the local ruler to sign. Swan acted as intermediary and to Sharp's annoyance insisted on reading the treaty to Msidi in full and explaining its significance, whereupon the latter refused to sign; in any case, his territory lay within the Congo and was therefore under Belgian jurisdiction. Brethren wanted to see Katanga benefit from civilized government, a designation which they believed Msidi's rule failed to measure up to in significant respects, but thought that more likely under the rule of Leopold than under that of Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company, who were paying Sharpe.

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12. 'Cadbury Libel Case', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 7 December 1909, Friends' Library, Vol. MM/29, fos. 79-80; Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians*, p. 151.

13. *Echoes of Service*, 36 (1907), p. 75.

14. Cf. Robert I. Rotberg, 'Plymouth Brethren and the occupation of Katanga', *Journal of African History*, 5 (1964), pp. 285-97.

However, their belief in the separation of church and state kept them from taking any action in favour of either power.<sup>15</sup> Swan had thus already faced some of the dilemmas common to Brethren missionaries seeking to walk the tightrope between failing to demonstrate care for those whom they sought to reach and getting mixed up in what they believed was not their business.

In July 1908 William Cadbury, who had most likely met Swan during one of his visits to Lisbon, asked him to undertake an investigation into the use of slave labour, guaranteeing to fund his expenses.<sup>16</sup> His knowledge of the language and independence of the government would enable him to access testimony which consular officials could not, and to move about the country without his presence alerting slave-traders to take evasive or retaliatory action.

It seems likely that Cadbury was already aware of Swan's deep concern about the slavery issue. In 1901 a letter in the Anti-Slavery Society's *Reporter*, presumed to have been written by Swan, concluded a description of what he had seen with the invocation 'The Lord of Sabaoth avenge!' Swan and another missionary, M.Z. Stober, were the main missionary sources for British investigators and officials.<sup>17</sup> On furlough in 1903, Swan had provided the Anti-Slavery Society with fuller information, which the *Reporter* said tallied with what it had already published.<sup>18</sup> Whilst humanitarianism was part of his motivation, Swan was probably primarily, concerned about the impact of the slave trade on mission: in a report published in *Echoes of Service* during 1902, after outlining some test cases relating to the fate of freed slaves, he asserted: 'We have evidence that the white traders are combining against us to hinder the gospel.'<sup>19</sup>

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15. Ruth Slade, *English-Speaking Missions in the Congo Independent State (1878-1908)* (Brussels, 1959) (*Mémoires / Verhandelingen*, Tme 16, fasc. 2), pp. 116-20; Swan, in Anon. (ed.), *African Jubilee*, pp. 107-9.

16. As an aside, this is an interesting variant on the normal Brethren missionary practice of 'living by faith'.

17. Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, p.172, citing the *Reporter*, January-February 1901, pp. 18-19.

18. Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, p. 185, citing the *Reporter*, August-October 1903, p. 117.

19. *Echoes of Service* 31 (1902), p. 273.

Swan's published account states that he left Lisbon that October 'with the object of visiting and seeing as much as possible of the Missionaries and their praise-worthy work in the Province of Angola', having also been asked to find out as much as he could about the contract labour system. In particular, he was asked to obtain a statement from local missionaries of their convictions about it, as well as 'native' testimony to what was going on.<sup>20</sup> Cadbury had been one of the earliest critics of the missionaries' silence in this matter and, according to Swan, what had been said and written about their failure to speak out decided the latter to go and consult with the missionaries for himself.<sup>21</sup> Very probably uppermost in Swan's mind was the attack by the journalist E.D. Morel on the silence of missionaries in the neighbouring territory of the Congo. This was ruled by King Leopold II of Belgium as a personal dominion from 1884 to 1908 and thereafter by the Belgian colonial authorities. Official policy tended to favour Catholic missions (especially Belgian ones) at the expense of Protestant ones, in spite of the provisions of the 1885 Treaty of Berlin dividing up much of Africa between the European colonial powers. The Baptist Missionary Society therefore enjoined silence on their missionaries in order to avoid provoking problems with the authorities, but the existence of strong Baptist support at home for action was demonstrated by the response to Morel's campaign for action. Although not a missionary (indeed, he appears to have thought Islam a more suitable religion than Christianity for Africans), Morel had formed a working alliance with Harry Guinness (son of Henry Grattan Guinness) of the Congo and Balolo Mission (later the Regions Beyond Missionary Union). Guinness had been lobbying the authorities intermittently since 1895, and through public meetings from 1904 onwards he and Morel secured support

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20. Ingleby, *Pioneer Days in Darkest Africa*, p. 128; Charles A. Swan, *The Slavery of To-Day or, The Present Position of The Open Sore of Africa* (Glasgow [1909]), pp. 17, 19.

21 Swan to Cadbury, 5 July 1909 (Birmingham University Library Special Collections, Cadbury Papers, 180/926). Permission to quote from these letters is gratefully acknowledged.

especially from Baptists and Quakers.<sup>22</sup> Morel had alleged that although Protestant mission stations had been accumulating evidence since 1892, home societies had taken no public action, and for many years only a few missionaries had been willing to confront Leopold and his African agents, and to present material in a form accessible to the public.<sup>23</sup>

The trip was announced by *Echoes of Service* in the following way:

Visit to Central Africa by Mr Swan.

Some friends in England have requested Mr. Swan to pay a short visit to Central Africa to obtain information on certain special matters, the character of which it is desirable not to state *till his return*. Those who desire him to go offer to meet all his expenses, so that nothing given for work in Lisbon will be used in this journey. As the visit will afford valuable opportunities for service amongst both Portuguese and natives, and will also give our brother the joy of seeing and conferring with those with whom he was associated in service for many years, he regards the proposition as of the Lord, and will (D.V.) leave Lisbon for Lobito on October 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>24</sup>

The motive behind Swan's expedition was thus kept secret: reports of his activities in *Echoes of Service* give no indication that he was doing anything other than returning to former scenes of service, preaching and baptizing. (However, once he arrived in Bihé the object of his visit was, not surprisingly, quickly suspected; the locals knew that he had always sought to help the victims of the slave trade.<sup>25</sup>) Similarly, Cadbury and Swan communicated only through the office of *Echoes*

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22. Andrew Porter, *Religion versus empire: British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester, 2004), p. 310; Michele Guinness, *The Guinness Spirit: brewers and bankers, ministers and missionaries* (London, 1999), pp. 293-301, 310-15, 395-8. Morel's campaign was stimulated by the British Consul, Roger Casement (1864-1916), later to be condemned to death for his part in the Easter Rising in Dublin.

23. E.D. Morel, *Red Rubber: The story of the Rubber Slave Trade which flourished on the Congo for twenty years, 1890-1910*, rev. edn (Manchester, 1919) (first published November 1906), pp. 5-6. Curiously, Morel appears to minimize Guinness's role, and does not even mention him by name.

24. *Echoes of Service*, 37 (1908), p. 340.

25. Swan, *The Slavery of To-Day*, pp.56-7.



*of Service* at Bath: Cadbury secretly paid Swan's expenses (which amounted to £400) through this channel, and asked him to destroy all correspondence on his return in order to make it impossible for the *Evening Standard* to say that Cadbury had seen or influenced Swan's report and action; this was no paranoid action but a wise precaution, for in July the paper's lawyers contacted Swan.<sup>26</sup> Even years later, Cadbury's biography referred to Swan's visit to Angola as 'an independent investigation', making no mention of Cadbury's financing the trip.<sup>27</sup>

Swan returned to Lisbon on 11 April 1909, and was due to leave for Britain on 5 May.<sup>28</sup> Only then were the editors able to disclose the hidden purpose behind Swan's trip. In a paragraph headed 'Mr. Swan's Visit to Central Africa', they wrote:

... We are now free to say that our brother went to Africa, not only to visit his old sphere of labour; but more especially, in response to the request of some Christian friends, *to gather missionary and native testimony concerning the slave trade*, which has for some time been prominently before the public. ... Mr. Swan was able to collect testimonies which officials would never have obtained, and we may well pray that his efforts will bear fruit. To have given any intimation of his object before he went would have been calculated to hinder him and expose him to greater danger.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the need to protect the investigation, Swan's reticence concerning his activities doubtless owed something to a desire not to fall foul of traditional Brethren thinking about separation from worldly affairs. Baptist Missionary Society supporters continually asked why it discouraged missionaries from making their grievances public and refused to appeal to the British government to interfere in the Congo, but Brethren took a different line: in 1904, the Brethren missionary Dugald Campbell, serving at Mambilima (in present-day Zambia), had sent home for publication accounts of raids carried out

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26. Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, p. 145; Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians*, p. 149; Satre, *Chocolate on Trial*, p. 144.

27 Gardiner, *George Cadbury*, p. 246; an earlier edition of this work had made no mention of Swan at all.

28. *Echoes of Service*, 38 (1909), pp. 71-3, 173-5, 182.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

in connection with the trade in ivory, along with the associated burning of villages, mutilations and deaths. Lacking the tradition of social critique epitomized by the late-nineteenth century Nonconformist Conscience, Campbell's supporters at home objected to his action 'on the grounds that such interference lay outside the legitimate sphere of the missionary of the Gospel'.<sup>30</sup>

### What did Swan find?

Much of what Swan saw and heard was presented as a report to the Foreign Office on 2 June, in the hope that the government would put pressure on Portugal to honour its own laws. On 22 June he wrote to the *Times* enclosing the statement signed by all the male Protestant missionaries he had been able to reach in Angola; in Duffy's opinion, 'For the foreign Protestant missionaries in Angola, subject as they were to official reprisals and unofficial harassments, the letter was nothing less than a statement of conscience.'<sup>31</sup> It offered a clear summary of the evils of the contract labour system as practised in Portuguese colonies, based on the experience of the signatories.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Slade, *English-Speaking Missions*, pp. 291-2. Cf. Campbell to H. Fox-Bourne [Secretary, Aborigines' Protection Society], 25 July 1905, Rhodes House, MSS.Brit.Emp.S.22, G.261: 'Our friends at home and one or two of our missionaries in the field have been so annoyed at our mixing up in the "Congo controversy" that misunderstandings have been created and our work has suffered ... As you doubtless know we are a very conservative people and averse to politics and public controversy and my speaking out has led to a lot of petty quibble amongst ourselves' (*Ibid.* p. 292n). On Campbell's work, see D. Campbell, *Blazing Trails in Bantuland* (London, n.d.)

31. Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, p. 208.

32. Reproduced in Cadbury, *Labour*, pp. viii-x; cf. Swan to Cadbury, 3 April 1909 (Birmingham University Library Special Collections, Cadbury Papers, 180/914). Swan had asked Cadbury to vet his material and decide upon its use. In his reply, Cadbury asked him to come to England to discuss these matters, and explained that he did not think that he could publish Swan's report himself (Cadbury to Swan, 20 April 1909; 180/916). Swan evidently preferred not to work through any of the anti-slavery societies, but to present his report directly to the Foreign Office and the missionaries' statement to the *Times*, a course which Cadbury strongly approved. As already noted, the impending libel action against the *Standard* meant that Cadbury felt it wiser for them to act independently, so that he could not be accused of having influenced Swan

Swan wrote up his report for publication by the Brethren firm of Pickering & Inglis under the title *The Slavery of To-Day* (the similarity to Nevinson's title is noteworthy). It is not clear what motivated the firm to publish this work, though it seems probable that their prime concern would have been the impact of the continuing slave trade on missionary work in the area. A publication announcement on the front cover of the August 1909 issue of *The Witness* indicated that the book described the current position and its impact on missionary work. This interpretation of the book's appearance is confirmed by the fact that its introduction was provided by W.H. Bennet, one of the Editors of *Echoes of Service*. With an eye on his Brethren readers, Bennet explained that what Swan had done was not anti-government agitation, for Portuguese law was opposed to slavery, but protesting against law-breaking and connivance at it. Such opposition to the slave trade amounted to nothing more than helping the Portuguese government to enforce its own laws, to which Protestant missionaries naturally wished to be subject.<sup>33</sup> Bennet's introduction amounted to an implicit seal of approval on what would have been for many Brethren a controversial course of action: their attitude towards government was summed up in the watchword 'Pray, Pay, and Obey', and it did not generally extend to political involvement. Indeed, there was a longstanding tradition of criticism of nineteenth-century 'political Dissent', which was seen as mixing the church up with the world.<sup>34</sup>

In the published version, Swan asserted that all, especially Christians, 'should rise up and say that slavery, no matter by what name it is called, must be put down at any cost'. He assured his readers that he was not motivated by anti-Portuguese sentiment, pointing to his labour in giving them the gospel which had done so much for Protestant nations (evidently he was more of a patriot than

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(Cadbury to Swan, 21 May 1909; Birmingham University Library Special Collections, Cadbury Papers, 180/924). Cadbury's own report was first published in May 1909.

33. Swan, *The Slavery of To-Day*, pp. xv-xvi.

34. For more on British Brethren and politics, see Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Carlisle, 2006), *passim*.

some Brethren).<sup>35</sup> He was convinced that if the Portuguese nation could only see that slavery existed in its colonies, its people 'led on by the brave and devoted men now in the front of the political fight for freedom' would demand justice.<sup>36</sup> For him, the heart of the matter was the failure of officials on the coast to do their duty in ensuring that those entering into labour contracts did so voluntarily and in the full knowledge of what they were committing themselves to.<sup>37</sup> As Bennet had testified, he made clear that he was not an anti-government agitator: 'The missionaries and other foreigners in the country are expected to obey the Portuguese laws, and they have no desire to do otherwise. All they ask in connection with this question is that the Portuguese obey their own laws.'<sup>38</sup> One factor underlying this protestation was the tendency of Portuguese officials, plantation-owners, and even Christian believers to dismiss British criticism of the system as motivated by commercial or political considerations: some even claimed that the whole slavery issue was a British fabrication intended to provide them with an excuse to deprive Portugal of its colonial possessions.<sup>39</sup>

What were missionaries to do? Swan was aware that constant exposure meant that they could become hardened to the magnitude of the evils involved. As for redemption of slaves by missionaries, he recognized that this was well meant but criticized it as counter-productive: it merely provided slave traders with the financial resources to build up their trade.<sup>40</sup> He favoured a bolder course of action: on many occasions he had simply taken slaves and refused to surrender them when approached by traders, always appealing to the Portuguese authorities.<sup>41</sup>

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35. Swan, *The Slavery of To-Day*, p. ix.

36. *Ibid.* p. x.

37. *Ibid.* p. 198.

38. *Ibid.* p. 199.

39. *Ibid.* pp. 22-23.

40. Cf. Slade, *English-Speaking Missions*, p. 168-70, with reference to the Baptist Missionary Society.

41. Swan, *The Slavery of To-Day*, pp. 23, 50-1.

Swan came down as heavily as Morel on the culpability of white, supposedly Christian, nations. Slavery was not nearly as harsh when practised by blacks as when white traders were involved. He highlighted the role of rum in slave trading, putting Portuguese efforts to secure an extension to the rum trade down to the fact that it was easier to take advantage of the locals when they were drunk. Ultimately, the continuance of the slave trade hindered the civilization and education of the native population.<sup>42</sup> Not only did Swan succeed in gathering ample local testimony and a statement of missionary conviction regarding the slave trade, but he also obtained many photographs; those included in his book provided as telling an indictment as his words did. Some of them were published in a Portuguese paper, *O século*, on 16 December 1909.<sup>43</sup>

#### **Evaluation**

Satre, in a note surveying recent interpretations of Cadbury's strategy, seems to lean to the idea that it was influenced by commercial considerations,<sup>44</sup> and Jeremy even goes so far as to describe the use of Swan as 'industrial espionage'.<sup>45</sup> Be that as it may, commercial matters were certainly not Swan's concern. His earlier activity and explanations make it far more likely that his primary concern was the impact of this trade on the freedom for the spread of the gospel. He thus stands in a tradition of evangelical missionaries who found themselves impelled to 'political' activity by their passion to see all obstacles to the acceptance of the gospel removed; a prime example would be the Baptist missionary to Jamaica, William Knibb (1803-45), who in the early 1830s had been instructed to avoid preaching against slavery but who was led by the hostility of the plantation owners to campaign for the abolition of slavery as an obstacle to the

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42. *Ibid.* pp. 47, 54-5, 93n, 124.

43. Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, p. 207.

44. Satre, *Chocolate on Trial*, pp. 258-9.

45. Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians*, p. 152.

spread of the gospel.<sup>46</sup> However, Swan was relatively unusual in Brethren circles. Many Brethren missionaries expressed their horror at the slave trade;<sup>47</sup> some went so far as to condemn governments which connived at its continuance;<sup>48</sup> but Swan was almost the only one who became active in the campaign against it. Dan Crawford, also active in the Congo, might express himself forcibly regarding the culpability of governments in the matter, but his remedy was the proclamation of the gospel with no mention of any direct action against the evils of slavery.

The only biography of Swan was written by the Brethren missionary to Portugal, Arthur Ingleby, in 1946. Ingleby devotes Chapter 9 to Swan's visit to Angola, offering a fair account of his activities; he draws no morals about the rights or wrongs of such involvement, but seems content that the lobbying should be done by others, a stance which contrasts with that of Swan, who included two references to the need to open one's mouth on behalf of the oppressed who could not speak up for themselves (Proverbs 24.11-12, 31.8 (RV)).<sup>49</sup> A generation after Ingleby wrote, it is highly significant that neither the 1972 centenary history of *Echoes of Service* entitled *Turning the World Upside Down*, which the historian of British Brethren mission, Frederick Tatford, prepared for publication, nor Tatford's own Volume 6 of his monumental history of Brethren missions, *That the World May Know* (1973-82), made no mention of Swan's anti-slavery activity. It seems reasonable to assume that Tatford, whose theology, ecclesiology and ethics generally followed traditional Brethren patterns, either disapproved of such activity or else regarded it as irrelevant to Swan's 'missionary' labours. Assuming that his views were representative of those of the Brethren

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46. On Knibb, see Brian Stanley's article in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1999), and the literature there cited. This work includes articles on Arnot and Crawford but not on Swan.

47. E.g. Arnot; cf. his journal for 3 January 1886, quoted in Ernest Baker, *The Life & Explorations of Frederick Stanley Arnot*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1921), p. 174.

48. E.g. Dan Crawford, *Thinking Black: 22 Years without a Break in the long Grass of Central Africa* (London, 1902), p. 28.

49. Swan, *The Slavery of To-Day*, p. 203.

missionary community of that time, we may suggest that its conception of the implications of the gospel for human life had narrowed from the time when Bennet had felt able to show support for Swan by writing a commendatory foreword to his book. Doubtless Bennet had more or less consciously imbibed something of the belief, widespread even among the evangelical missions fraternity and owing much to the imperialism of the late Victorian era, that civilization went hand-in-hand with Christianization, but what wider trends of thought had influenced Tatford?<sup>50</sup>

Brethren, like other free church missionaries, were forced to modify their belief in the separation of church and state in Central Africa.<sup>51</sup> Walter Fisher's political activity arose from the need to protect certain moral ideals in such matters as slavery.<sup>52</sup> Dan Crawford even accepted temporary military command from the state, to keep order among African soldiers left at a state fort while its Belgian officers were away. It was, he confessed, the last thing he would choose for himself, but he was convinced that the better day ahead (an expectation which was itself untypical among Brethren) would never come except through the establishment of government and the punishment of evildoers. 'If I were connected with a missionary society I should probably be scored off the books—as though a heart which the Lord has touched can be put out of employment so easily!'<sup>53</sup> Where there existed no effective mechanism of local government, the missionary was forced to fill the vacuum in a manner partially analogous to that of monks in Western Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire in 476. He eventually 'saw that complete separation between Church and State was practicable only

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50. Although Kevin Grant in *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926* (London, 2005) discusses the Cadbury scandal, and makes a brief reference (p. 118) to Swan's earlier work with Arnot he makes no reference to Swan's 1908-9 visit.

51. Slade, *English-Speaking Missions*, p. 147.

52. Pauline Summerton, *Fishers of Men: The missionary influence of an extended family in Central Africa* (n. pl., 2003), p. 77.

53. Slade, *English-Speaking Missions*, p. 151, citing G. Tilsley, *Dan Crawford of Central Africa* (London, 1929), p. 327. On Crawford, see the forthcoming article by Mark Sweetnam in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*.

where the State was sufficiently organised and sufficiently powerful to maintain law and order, and to provide those conditions in which the elect could live and multiply in peace. ... There could be no easy transference to Katanga of a theory of Church and State which was based on experience of European civilisation in the early nineteenth century, the period when the Plymouth Brethren movement had begun.<sup>54</sup> Crawford wrote that ‘Many a little Protestant Pope in the lonely bush is forced by his self-imposed isolation to be prophet, priest and king rolled into one—really a very big duck he, in his own private pond ... Quite seriously he is forced to be a bit of a policeman, muddled up in matters not even remotely in his sphere.’<sup>55</sup> Slade’s evaluation is that ‘although the Plymouth Brethren shrank from the responsibility of temporal authority, they found that when it was thrust upon them their message bore more fruit than before’.<sup>56</sup>

If we apply such an understanding to Swan’s work, we may suggest that Swan applied his experience of government to the Angolan situation, in that the Portuguese failure to govern effectively in suppressing the use of slave labour left what amounted to a political and ethical vacuum. On such a reading, his involvement represented a modification of Brethren withdrawal from the world as practised at home, but was not to be taken as providing a precedent for involvement at home, where effective government existed. In any case, his primary concern was for the spread of the gospel, and Brethren thinking was that one function of government was to create the conditions in which this could take place without hindrance. Swan went further than later Brethren would have done in his involvement in campaigning activity, but his prime motive was one which they would have understood and his compassion was something which they would have shared. It is all the more regrettable, therefore, that this aspect of his work has subsequently been overlooked, whether deliberately or otherwise. There are surely lessons to be drawn for contemporary Brethren missiology from Swan’s career, although it is not my place to draw them!

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54. Slade, *English-Speaking Missions*, p. 126.

55. *Ibid.* p. 164, quoting Dan Crawford, *Thinking Black*, p. 324-5.

56. *Ibid.* p. 167.



