

## **“The Wilderness Will Rejoice and Blossom Like the Crocus”: Bishop David Anderson’s Perceptions of Wilderness and Civilization in Rupert’s Land**

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Bishop David Anderson, appointed the first Anglican bishop of Rupert’s Land in 1849, saw a stark dichotomy between his conceptions of wilderness and civilization. His writings reveal that he perceived a tension between civilization, which he considered to be good, and the wilderness, which he thought to be evil. These conceptions rested in the nineteenth-century British culture that had nurtured him, but they also leaned on his contemporary Christian theology. His correspondence, published sermons, and books, articulated the principles that underpinned his attitude towards the landscape of Rupert’s Land and that informed his perspective on its aboriginal inhabitants. Moreover, they expose his belief in a battle between civilization and the wilderness, an abstraction that formed a vital part of his missionary mandate.<sup>1</sup>

Born 10 February 1814 in Scotland, David Anderson was educated at the Edinburgh Academy, the University of Edinburgh, and Exeter College, Oxford. Originally a Presbyterian, he became an Anglican and in April 1837, was ordained a deacon and the following July a priest. He served parishes in and near Liverpool and in 1842 joined the faculty of St. Bees. In 1845, he became vice-principal but left the college a year later for St. Paul’s in Kilburn, London. In 1848, he was named Perpetual Curate of All Saints’ Church, Derby, and in the spring of 1849 accepted the Bishopric of Rupert’s Land.<sup>2</sup>

Anderson's appointment undoubtedly stemmed from his commitment to the evangelical movement, a reaction against the formality and casual Christianity of High Church Anglicanism. Believing that faith in Christ must be a transforming power in personal and social lives, evangelicals stressed the heart over the mind, active over intellectual Christianity, the infallibility of the Bible over doubt and critical inquiry. Seeing life as a battle against the temptations of evil, they preferred an ascetic lifestyle and admitted few pleasures. They viewed overseas missions as an essential campaign in the fight against the forces of Satan.

Anderson's evangelicalism was sharpened by his connection with descendants of the Clapham Sect, an informal association of prominent and wealthy evangelicals, many of them conservative politicians, who combined their individualistic evangelical concerns with a lively preoccupation with social reform and justice. Apart from their successful anti-slavery movement, the Claphams laboured for prison reform, religious instruction in Sunday Schools, self-improvement training for the poor, dissemination of the Bible, as well as domestic and foreign missions. In 1799, they founded the Society for Missions in Africa, renamed the Church Missionary Society (hereafter CMS) in 1812.<sup>3</sup> Although the group had lost its prominence by the middle of the nineteenth century, its legacy remained. Henry Venn, son of the sect's founder, was secretary of the CMS and transformed it into a large organization, spreading the Christian gospel to several continents, including North America.<sup>4</sup> In 1849, the society expanded to Rupert's Land and established a diocese there. It named David Anderson its first bishop, an appointment in keeping with his long and deep concern for missions and his interest in education.

After being consecrated in May 1849, Anderson and his family left for Rupert's Land on the Hudson's Bay Company vessel. They arrived at York Factory in mid-August and two weeks later commenced the three-week journey to Red River, arriving there in September.<sup>5</sup> Anderson busied himself with the routine administrative affairs of this missionary diocese, concerning himself especially with the education of native children for the ministry, the translation of various religious publications into indigenous languages, and the visitation of outlying missionary stations. Toward the end of his tenure, he occupied himself with the expansion of the Anglican mission to the north in fierce competition with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup> Never entirely at home in pioneer Red River society, Anderson resigned from his post in 1865 and returned to England with his family. He served at St. Andrew's in

Clifton, a suburb of Bristol for the remainder of his career. He also accepted the post of Chancellor of St. Paul's cathedral in London and remained an active speaker and supporter of missions. He retired from St. Andrew's in 1881 and died in November 1885.<sup>7</sup>

Anderson's reaction to Rupert's Land's environment was ambiguous and his attitude changed over his sojourn there. While he admired the obvious natural beauty of the territories, he deplored the seemingly empty land, devoid of people, farms, towns and cities. Aesthetically, he saw the wilderness both as sublime and mundane, picturesque and drab. Had he been pressed to define his concept of wilderness, however, he likely would have said what it lacked rather than what it possessed. And, no matter how long he remained in the northwest, he never felt fully at home in the wilderness. Although he sometimes wavered in his conviction, he continued to believe that the wild, uncultivated landscape would yield to civilization. Driven by an evangelical theology that equated wilderness with breaking and civilization with keeping faith with God, he was convinced that the outcome of the battle to redeem the wasteland would succeed.

At times Anderson could be fulsome in his praise of nature. In a published account of his 1852 trip to Moose Factory he created some vivid and positive images of the landscape. He wrote rhapsodically about the stillness of the countryside with no melody "except the scanty music of the birds."<sup>8</sup> He described the forests, the species of trees, fruits, flowers, and birds. He delighted in roaring waterfalls and narrow channels as well as peaceful islands. While Métis voyageurs carried the canoes and provisions across one long portage on the White River early in July, Anderson pushed his way through a tangle of wild roses, peas, raspberries, and strawberries to admire the large waterfall. "The scenery is here very noble," he proclaimed, "the river broad, and only in places contracted."<sup>9</sup> The following day was Sunday and the party of ten men stopped for a day of rest and worship. Anderson described in detail the natural amphitheatre in which he conducted services. Backed by a bowl of sheer rock crowned with tall trees and fronted by the still water of a lake, the little group prayed and sang hymns. In his sermon, Anderson felt compelled to remark that faith in God could grow by hearing the sounds of nature as well the words of the Bible.

Anderson's suggestion that the stillness of the wilderness turned the mind inward and to God, reflected a familiar strand of thought in the Bible. In many passages, the Bible pictures the wilderness, or the desert, as a place of contemplation, worship, and renewal. Elijah fled into the desert to escape

murderous Queen Jezebel and met God in the gentle whisper of wind. John the Baptist, "a voice of one calling in the desert," preached in the wilderness and many came to hear him. And Christ himself went into the desert for forty days and nights to be tested by Satan (1 Kings 19:1-18; Matthew 3:1-4; and Matthew 4:1-11). In keeping with his evangelical notion of deprivation, the theme of the wilderness as a place of ascetic withdrawal surfaced in Anderson's sermons and he often evoked the notion that the hardships that his missionaries faced in their daily struggle to survive ennobled them, made them morally superior to their colleagues in the civilized world.<sup>10</sup>

As in the Bible, Anderson's positive view of the wilderness was a minor theme, however: more prominent was the perception of the surrounding prairies and forests as a wasteland, a hostile, lonely expanse. Its climate was destructive. It stunted vegetation and killed wildlife. It brought privation to its human inhabitants and destroyed morale, even among Europeans. "The tendency of the climate is to lead to a degree of apathy uncongenial with spiritual growth,"<sup>11</sup> he complained and observed that beyond the river valley lay a "dark land," a "mighty wilderness" where "an almost unbroken sameness prevails." That land, he lamented "has been long desolate and waste."<sup>12</sup>

To one as familiar with the Bible as Anderson, the notion of the wilderness as a hostile rather than friendly environment was commonplace.<sup>13</sup> "In a desert land," Deuteronomy recalled, God found Jacob, "in a barren and howling waste." For forty years, the Israelites wandered through "a vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions."<sup>14</sup> Throughout, the biblical writers modify the desert or wilderness with adjectives like arid, barren, desolate, dreadful, hot, and vast and associates it with death, fatigue, hunger, plagues, thorns, and wild animals.

Even more fundamental to Anderson's perceptions was the biblical identification of wilderness with the actions of humans and the reactions of God. After the fall, God ejected Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden and told them:

Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.  
It will produce thorns and thistles for you  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

The theme, that wilderness is the result of sin, courses through the remainder of the Old Testament. The Psalmist's warning is but one example:

He turned rivers into a desert,  
flowing springs into thirsty ground,  
and fruitful land into a salt waste,  
because of the wickedness of those  
who lived there (Psalm 107:33-34).

The prophet Isaiah admonished:

Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard [Israel and Judah]: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there, I will command the clouds not to rain on it (Isaiah 5:6-7).

If God punished disobedient nations by cursing their fields, the obverse, that He blessed the lands of faithful people, is also true. Again, the Bible is replete with teachings on this. Leviticus bluntly stated: "Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety" (Leviticus 25:18-19). Later, the Psalmist exalted Jehovah for favouring his faithful people:

He turned the desert into pools of water  
and the parched ground into flowing springs;  
there he brought the hungry to live,  
and they founded a city where they could settle.  
They sowed fields and planted vineyards  
that yielded a fruitful harvest;  
he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased,  
and he did not let their herds diminish (Psalm 107:35-38).

Or, as Isaiah put it,

The Lord will surely comfort Zion  
and will look with compassion on all her ruins;  
he will make her deserts like Eden,

her wastelands like the garden of the Lord,  
Joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the sound of singing (Isaiah 51:3).

In other words, read literally, the Bible make a direct connection with faithfulness to God and the fertility of the land.

Reflecting his Victorian theology, David Anderson in one of his sermons clearly transposed the Biblical disobedience-wilderness and obedience-fertility theme directly to Rupert's Land. Seeking to boost the morale of his clergy, Anderson admitted that missionary labour was often discouraging and progress slow. The end, he encouraged, however, was certain. "We are still only clearing the waste land, and likely to find it true, that such as the country is such will be the religious state of its inhabitants."<sup>15</sup> Continuing on, he claimed that,

Nowhere is man's power over nature more forcibly seen than in a newly reclaimed country . . . Take the banks of the Red River, with the forest unfelled, and view them now with productive fields, and studded with the abodes of happiness and comfort, and the two clauses of the verse are seen fulfilled, if anywhere, "the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, gives His blessing."<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, Anderson was not alone in connecting the fecundity of the land with Christianity. In fact, in his sermon he made a passing reference to Richard Trench's *Lessons in Proverbs*. In this book, Trench, a clergyman and prolific linguist, quoted the French proverb, "As the man is worth, his land is worth," and then explained it by suggesting that "Man is lord of his outward condition to a far greater extent than is commonly assumed; even climate which seems at first sight so completely out of his reach, it is his immensely to modify; and if Nature stamps herself on him, he stamps himself yet more powerfully on Nature."<sup>17</sup> Psalm 107 was not merely a figure of speech, according to Trench, but a sign that God made land barren because of human sloth, indolence, and shortsightedness. In other words, the condition of the land reflected the moral and spiritual state of its cultivators.

Not surprising, then, Anderson implicitly defined wilderness as the absence of civilization, that is, the lack of British and western European culture, economy, and especially Christianity. Camped on the Winnipeg River, on his way to Moose in 1852, he reflected on the scene before him. He

found the river very beautiful but also dangerous and concluded that the country was not poetical. While certain spots on the river rivalled the Rhine in beauty, it lacked Europe's poetry. Why would that be so, he wondered. Was it the absence of the human element? Must nature have human society and culture, ruins and castles to make poetry? Even the full moon that softly lit the campsite, adding warmth to its charm, failed to impress him fully. While the romantic setting reminded him of an evening in Baden, he felt it lacked the music.<sup>18</sup>

The Red River, even if not fully civilized, had villages with churches and houses, it had farms and fences, and it had the thriving Indian settlement. It was, according to Anderson, "the centre of light, the little oasis in the wilderness" with "all darkness around."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the small mission at The Pas was an outpost in a barren land and to see the church spire from a distance was a pretty sight and its name, Christ Church, was appropriate for "the last[est] of the Church of Christ in the Wilderness. May it be a bright light there – it must attract every eye from its conspicuous position – may many hearts be attracted by the proclamation of a Saviour's love therein."<sup>20</sup> And on a small hill near Fairford he recalled:

The view from the slight rising ground down on the River is very much that of an English village, the school tower as seen through the Trees adding much to the effect. How great in this and many other instances the power of association! I feel convinced that without the Tower I should never have experienced half the amount of pleasure from the situation of the place. With the tower, imagination carried me at once to England and passed on to anticipate the time when our Church might be firmly established in this country, and the Church Tower no such uncommon spectacle on the banks of the Lake or River.<sup>21</sup>

The few families, that spent the summers in the mission, formed, he believed "a nucleus for civilization: they are a centre from which the light of divine truth and the power of a Christian example may be diffused."

Clearly, then, Anderson believed that church towers and Christians parishes were beacons of British civilization in the wilderness. In other words, he would argue, Christianity was the vanguard, preparing for the redemption of a land kept waste and barren by a heathen people. Interpreted literally, the bishop's favourite text, one he repeated over and over again, was Isaiah 35:1-2.

The desert and the parched land will be glad;  
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.  
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;  
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

Here, then, was a powerful codicil to Anderson's missionary mandate. Not only must he concern himself with saving the souls of the natives of Rupert's Land, but in doing so he would also redeem the land. He would turn the wilderness into a garden. "Apart from . . . [the Holy Spirit] the earth lies in desolation," he wrote, "and sin and Satan hold an undisputed sway, "until the Spirit be poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness be fruitful fields."<sup>22</sup> Although his language was spiritual, even mystical, his perspective of the environment as a barren wasteland in need of civilization was temporal and physical. And, that viewpoint informed his attitude toward the aboriginal peoples of Rupert's Land. While surveying the progress of the Anglican mission in the territories, he remarked that growth, while slow, was steady. "The desert begins to smile," he noted because people who only a few years had no knowledge of Christianity worshipped in its church.

The land has been long desolate and waste. She is now beginning to enjoy her Sabbaths: prayer and praise echo through her bounds, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. The Indian, whose heart was long cold and cheerless as his own long winter, is now warmed by the promises of God and rejoicing in the light.<sup>23</sup>

For the bishop, the links between wilderness and heathendom, civilization and Christianity, were crystal clear.

Bishop Anderson's theology, which underpinned his perceptions of the wilderness, also inspired his judgment of the aboriginal peoples of Rupert's Land and like his impressions of the environment, they were ambivalent. With some condescension, he found the natives at York Factory and in Red River were more intelligent and knowledgeable about the Christian religion than he had expected. He understood that at Fort Pelly the aboriginal people were "very tractable and docile."<sup>24</sup> In fact, he generalized that the mind and attitude of the natives presented no obstacles to evangelization. As with the landscape, the inhabitants had attractive characteristics, that is, as long as they were receptive to Christianity.

Indigenous people who resisted or had not yet accepted the Christian gospel, he viewed with a complex mixture of displeasure, sadness, and pity. He could not comprehend that without belief in Christ there could be happiness in the physical world or a joyous place in the heavenly realm. A visit to a native, who was ill, grieved him deeply. "Cut off from the pursuits of the chase, without the power of gaining a livelihood for himself and family he soon becomes a prey to melancholy and pines away in secret anguish."<sup>25</sup> Individuals, who appeared to be struggling with the Christian message, he admired but anyone, who actively opposed the missionaries, earned his angry scorn. Such a person was, according to the bishop, a "child of the devil," an "enemy of righteousness," who still lived in a world of "mist and darkness."<sup>26</sup> He drew a clear distinction, then, between those who had accepted and those who had rejected the Christian religion, those living in a position of grace or mired in a state of nature. Meeting two aboriginal men on one of his journeys, he noted that one of them had two brothers, one who "is civilized and intelligent," and the other who "is still in the darkness of nature."<sup>27</sup>

With his evangelical concern for the souls of those who had not yet heard the gospel a heavy burden on his mind, the mandate to proclaim Christ was extremely urgent for Bishop Anderson.

May God then enable us to occupy and possess the land, and to do so steadily and securely. Much will depend upon the next three years, if during that period God shall graciously guide us in the selection of spots and bless us with men after his own heart, and give us souls among the Indians, then a Christian character and an aspect of civilization may be imparted of this poor country. Its condition weighs heavily on my mind, so many are its wants so selfish the poor Indian's natural heart, and yet the spirit of God is all sufficient to soften and guide as in days of old.<sup>28</sup>

Although Anderson's concern for the spiritual and material welfare of the natives was genuine and heartfelt, his belief in a civilization/wilderness dichotomy, produced a paternalistic attitude. Operating from the assumption that the learning of civilization was better than that of the wilderness, he and his fellow missionaries took all the initiatives in teaching the doctrines of Christianity, the knowledge of Europe, and the techniques of a settled existence. Although they never coerced, neither did they understand their missionary mandate in terms of a partnership. Instead an attitude of

economic, spiritual, and intellectual superiority dismissed any contributions native culture might contribute to the new northwestern society. Anderson often referred to the natives as my “poor Indians,”<sup>29</sup> intending that in a spiritual as well as economic sense. Fairford mission, for example, enjoyed the most tangible progress of any settlement outside Red River. Yet poverty was still common and native converts repeatedly asked for houses, tools, cattle, and clothing. They required continual care and attention. That dependence, whether it was of Christians or non-Christians was a problem. “You will learn,” he wrote London, “that the Indian here is far more dependent upon us than we ever imagined.”<sup>30</sup> Like his fellow missionaries, Anderson had discovered that teaching aboriginal hunters to become farmers was more difficult than he had imagined. But he had not yet realized that nineteenth-century agricultural technology could not cope with the climate and soils of Rupert’s Land. Instead, he blamed the inexperienced native rather than the environment. “He is a child in temporal matters as in spiritual,” he maintained, “and has to be led by the hand ere he can walk alone.”<sup>31</sup> Continuing in this benevolent paternalistic vein, he observed that natives “require to be taught to think, to look beyond the present hour; they have to be guided by the hand in each step, as they emerge from a state of nature and barbarism, into the very lowest rudiments of civilization.”<sup>32</sup>

Especially paternalistic was the practice of giving English names to converts at their baptism. Anderson, obviously not totally at ease with the custom, defended it by saying that many of the native names, such as those that labelled handicaps or deformities, were demeaning. More to the point, perhaps, was Anderson’s argument that an English name connected the convert with believers in the old country. And, implicitly, it recognized the end of a wild, pagan existence and the beginning of a new civilized, Christian life.

Anderson’s renaming of converts reflected the standards by which he measured progress. At the top of his scale was the English rural village. The closer a mission resembled the countryside of his homeland, the less it appeared as wilderness. In the late 1850s, Anderson felt that The Pas and Fairford had made significant strides towards this ideal. “Fairford is more and more the Christian, the Missionary village,” Anderson proudly related, “the School Chapel, opened during my visit, the Mission House, the Wind Mill, the Indian cottages – the marriages of the young Christians – the fenced farms, the nice large Mission farm – all this has a settled air.”<sup>33</sup> On a visit to the community, he asked the congregation to look around the settlement and

then memorize his beloved Isaiah 35: 1. "Did they not think that these words were being fulfilled in Fairford?" he asked. "Surely there was something of a partial fulfilment of its prophetic words," he replied for them. "The desert and the parched land will be glad, the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus." Were they not happier than before, he recalled also asking them. Was there "not more melody to the ear in the sound of the bell which summoned them to the House of God than in the discordant noise of the Indian drum – more music in kids singing hymns than in howls of tribal chants?" The tower pointing to God, the stillness of the Sabbath, the best clothes to church, he said, were all signs of a better life. "Here were glad sights and sounds in one remote corner of the wilderness."<sup>34</sup>

In the end, then, Anderson not only sought to convert Rupert's Land's aboriginal people to Christianity, but he also sought to civilize, or as he called it, to "raise" them. This involved two aspects, literacy and farming. In the latter, Anderson took little personal interest. He left the instructing of agricultural techniques to the clergy in the field.<sup>35</sup> He did, however, become intimately concerned with the education of indigenous clergy and teachers as well as the translation of religious materials into native languages. For Anderson, the written word was fundamental to spurring religious, moral, as well as social change among the natives. Literacy was central to Protestant missions.<sup>36</sup> Education, he believed, would become the most powerful means by which to dispel the "darkness" of the wilderness and admit the "light" of civilization.

Immediately upon his arrival in Red River, Anderson purchased the Red River Academy. The purpose of the college, he suggested, would be to train aboriginal boys to be clergy among their people in Rupert's Land. "I wanted a hold upon the young, a nucleus for my College School, he confided."<sup>37</sup> In light of the hardships missionaries faced at remote stations, he believed it very important to create a body of native priests who would have an indigenous mentality and network as well as the ability to survive in, as he would put it, the little oasis in the desert. Anderson also nurtured a Model or Training school for young women at St Andrew's. These establishments brought him joy because he believed that the education of aboriginal children was extremely important.

Anderson also favoured the translation of Christian religious materials into local native languages. Although he approved of the syllabic system developed by James Evans, a Wesleyan missionary stationed at Norway House,<sup>38</sup> in keeping with the civilizing mandate, he preferred to teach his

charges English. Accordingly all missionaries and schoolmasters taught English to the aboriginal children at the missions' day schools.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, as a temporary expedient for the adults, the bishop pressed his subordinates to translate the important church documents into the local indigenous languages.

Apart from education and translation, Anderson also took an interest in northern expansion. In the late 1850s, he approved plans to set up missions along the Mackenzie River. This campaign, phrased in military language, gained great urgency because the Roman Catholic Church was also moving into the region. The bishop despised the Catholic priests, a dislike that went beyond mere denominational rivalry and embodied the belief that the other church was leading the natives to eternal damnation. Like many Protestants, he equated Roman Catholicism with an idolatry that hardly differed from native shamanism.<sup>40</sup> Thus, he carried the feuds and quarrels of old world civilization into the new, a mutual hostility that seriously damaged the Christian message of love and peace.<sup>41</sup>

The successful expansion into the north capped Anderson's tenure. He had reasons to be satisfied with his work. Under his direction, the diocese had expanded from a fledgling, relatively small mission field to a maturing establishment. From the day he arrived to when he left, it had grown from five clergy to eighteen. From its base of the three churches in Red River and the missions at The Pas and Fairford, it had established itself on the Mackenzie River and the shore of Hudson Bay.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, he had competently administered the diocese, established a solid educational system in Red River, and supervised the translation of important manuscripts. As the first bishop of the diocese, he had laid a solid foundation for the future.<sup>43</sup>

If Anderson took any comfort in his accomplishment, he also expressed serious doubts about his achievements. The task of evangelizing and civilizing the wilderness of Rupert's Land seemed at times insurmountable. The mission could not possibly minister adequately to a population scattered over enormously vast territories. He had hoped, for example, to visit the Mackenzie district and British Columbia but he could not spare the time nor the money.<sup>44</sup> He was also concerned about the lack of deep spirituality among the converts and was disappointed many of them fell into apathy after the initial euphoria of conversion. "At all events the Indian is less hopeful and more difficult to act upon than he was found to be five years ago," he lamented.<sup>45</sup> Visits to Christ Church and English River did not cheer him; they were still only small spots in a "bleak and barren portion of the

earth.” He pitied the missionaries, “who labour, and labour alone – who look out, from week to week, on the same scene – the snowy waste, the ice-bound river or bay in winter, and the unvaried landscape in summer, and on a very few souls, and those, it may be, very dead and dry, like the bones in the valley of vision.”<sup>46</sup> In a decade and a half, the gains the diocese had made seemed insignificant compared to the work that remained to be done.

By the end of his tenure in Rupert’s Land, however, many changes were advancing on its southern regions. In 1849, Bishop Anderson had trekked from York Factory to Red River in an open Yorkboat; in 1860, he made a trip to Canada by paddlewheeler most of the way to St. Paul, Minnesota, and by train the remainder of the way. At the beginning of his stay, Anderson’s mail had come irregularly and was months, sometimes a year old; in 1859, he received a letter mailed only thirty-two days earlier in England.<sup>47</sup> By the late 1850s, rumours abounded that the British government would soon declare Rupert’s Land a crown colony, appoint a governor, and station troops in Red River.<sup>48</sup> Anderson, and many of his British-born followers supported colonial status as the stability it promised would facilitate their endeavours: “While the British rule has been recently extended over the whole of India, we could wish that the same rule were also extended over the whole of this Territory,” the bishop hoped and piously added, “But after the country is thrown open, it is God alone who can open an effectual door for the proclamation of His own truth.”<sup>49</sup> Although his hopes for direct British control were not realized, the talk of it was a powerful indication that Red River and the southern prairies were on the cusp of a profound transformation from an isolated fur trading frontier to a connected agricultural settlement. “I only hope the rapid influx of strangers may not affect for the worse the simple piety of our people,” Anderson sighed, “We must pray for . . . the . . . outpouring of the Spirit . . . Oh that it might make the wilderness to smile.”<sup>50</sup>

Even though Anderson worried about the approach of settlement, in the end, he thought it desirable. He was, after all, a man of his times and defined civilization by the ethos of his era, a *mentalité* basking in the glory of an empire at its apex. To him, civilization was mid-nineteenth century Britain with its cities, towns, villages, and fenced farmlands, its universities, colleges, and schools, and, above all, its churches. His mental picture of the Britain he had left behind was that of a great agricultural and industrializing country where a Christian civilization had pushed back the edges of the wilderness. Those wild lands that still remained were no longer the dark and

bleak wastelands of the Old Testament but the retreats of the New. In sum, British civilization had tamed the wilderness and was assuming a mandate to develop the natural and human resources of the entire world. At the same time, Victorians believed that this civilizing task also included the mandate to disseminate around the world the knowledge that had produced this unprecedented wealth. Thus, Bishop David Anderson was only one of a host of civil servants, entrepreneurs, teachers, and missionaries scattering across the globe to bring the learning of their society to uneducated people everywhere. The whole world must be civilized, he and his peers assumed; that is, peoples everywhere must be raised to the level of enlightened, Christian, still largely agricultural, Victorian Britain.<sup>51</sup>

Although the need to spread British values, products, and technology across the globe were only implicit in the bishop's writings, he explicitly articulated his belief that it was his country's duty to spread the Christian teachings. Anderson often expressed the commonly held belief that Britain was "the especial instrument in the hands of God for the spread of the Gospel."<sup>52</sup> He was very conscious of the global reach of the Church Missionary Society, subscribed to its publications, and followed developments in New Zealand, China, India, and Africa. Thoughts of the more glamorous fields, with their teeming populations, made his own pasture seem rather insignificant and much more the lonely wilderness, an isolated outpost of British civilization.<sup>53</sup>

Evidently, Anderson never surrendered his negative feelings for the wilderness. Although he travelled much of it on foot, on horseback, in Yorkboats and in canoes, he never fully acclimatized to its vast expanses. The country encircling Red River and the remote missions was, in his estimation, bleak, lonely, hostile; it was undeveloped, savage, and a symbol of humanity's sin. The wilderness was a land under God's curse, waiting to be redeemed. And, its heathen inhabitants were similarly doomed. Destined to live a nomadic, marginal, and ignorant existence, aboriginal society and culture, like the land, was the bishop believed, primitive and unfinished, savage and crude. In sum, Anderson saw very little difference between the uncultivated wilderness and its indigenous peoples. Profoundly affected by his evangelical leanings, he always viewed the wilderness and its aboriginal inhabitants under the power of evil forces.

That dark view, however, was brightened at times with an appreciation for the details of nature. He saw God working in creation. He once preached how flowers, insects, the sea, and the heavens revealed God's power, while

the Bible and the complexity of the human spirit and soul, revealed His wisdom.<sup>54</sup> The veteran traveller of the territories, when trips still were extremely difficult and arduous, likened his expeditions to the desert wanderings of Israel and saw in them a metaphor of his own and other's personal faith journeys. Very conscious of his surroundings at a campsite at Eagle's Nest Lake, in the late fall of 1852, he referred to the providence of God, seeing a passage in Deuteronomy as an apt parable for him and his companions.

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest  
and hovers over its young,  
that spreads its wings to catch them  
and carries them on its pinions (Deut. 32: 9-12).<sup>55</sup>

For Anderson then, the wilderness as a whole was a dark and frightening place but upon close examination it contained evidence of the Deity's work. Thus he remembered with nostalgia emotional worship services, yet, like most who venture into the wilds, denounced the mosquitoes and blackflies that had tormented him.

These competing visions of the meaning of the wilderness fed Anderson's optimism that in the end the Christian Gospel, enveloped in British civilization, would drive barbarism from the wilderness. Natives, enlightened by Christianity and British culture, living in permanent communities and cultivating the land, would uproot the expansive plains and dark forests. They would begin the process of civilizing the land. But more importantly, by adopting civilization, the native peoples would prepare themselves for the inevitable onslaught of European settlement.

For Anderson, the task of civilizing the wilderness and its peoples was enormous because the land was vast and its inhabitants scarce and the time so short. But, with the certainty of a man fully convinced of the rightness of his cause, he trustfully believed that in this spiritual war, Christianity would eventually triumph. The wilderness would bloom. On his return from his voyage to Moose, he preached on Isaiah 54:2-3, in which the Lord commanded the people.

Enlarge the place of your tent,  
stretch your tent curtains wide,  
do not hold back;

lengthen your cords,  
strengthen your stakes.  
For you will spread out to the right  
and to the left;  
your descendants will dispossess nations  
and settle in their desolate cities.

That passage, applied to Rupert's Land, embodied a measure of expansionist imperialism.<sup>56</sup> Without a doubt, Bishop David Anderson, and his fellow missionaries, hoped to destroy what they perceived to be a depraved wilderness, a barren wasteland, populated by a savage, wretched and pagan people. Inspired by his Old Testament theology and New Testament gospel, he hoped to establish in the northwest an idealized form of the British society he had left behind. That vision restored a romanticized rural society where the squire's benevolent paternalism ensured the welfare of his charges. That conception, nurtured by Anderson's interpretation of the Bible, lay in the background of his notions of wilderness and civilization. Sitting in his study, on a cold, snowy winter night, would he not remember the rolling landscape of his native England, with its stone fences, winding roads and footpaths, horses, cows and sheep grazing in its green pastures, the smell of newly plowed fields, the profusion of flowers in country gardens, warm barns and brick houses? And, central to pastoral scene, the church spire rising above the leafy canopy of the rural village. Cast in his understanding of the Bible, and glamorized by absence, that daydream no doubt influenced his perceptions of the wilderness as a bleak, lonely expanse. But, always elemental to the bleak wasteland image were its people. Despite his paternalism, his unsympathetic misunderstanding of native culture, his inability to understand that the indigenous inhabitants saw the wilderness as sacred and as home, and despite his feelings of superiority, Anderson's evangelistic faith and Clapham humanitarianism bequeathed him a deep and burdensome, but what would prove to be an insightful, concern for the natives. "By what shall they rise," he asked himself, "how shall they be supported, taught, civilized, and prepared for heaven?"

### *Endnotes*

1. Three useful books that help place Bishop Anderson's missionary perspectives in a broader context are Robert Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965); C.L. Higham, *Noble, Wretched, & Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000); and George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987).
2. Frank Peake, "David Anderson: The First Lord Bishop of Rupert's Land," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 24 (April 1982): 3-11.
3. Michael Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958); and Earnest Marshall Howse, *Saints in Politics: The "Clapham Sect" and the Growth of Freedom* (Toronto: Allen & Unwin, 1952).
4. T.E. Yates, *Venn and Victorian Bishops Abroad: The Missionary Politics of Henry Venn and the Repercussions upon the Anglican Episcopate of the Colonial Period 1841-1872* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1978).
5. Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 22 August 1849, Church Missionary Society Papers, University of Birmingham; Anderson to Committee of CMS, 29 August 1849; and Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 22 November 1849.
6. Bishop to Venn, 9 November 1857, CMS Papers.
7. Peake, "David Anderson," 39-41.
8. David Anderson, *The Net in the Bay, or Journal of a Visit to Moose and Albany* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1854), 12.
9. Anderson, *The Net in the Bay*, 13.
10. See for example, David Anderson, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of Rupert's Land, at his Primary Visitation* (London: T. Hatchard, 1851), 27.
11. Anderson, *Charge at Primary Visitation*.
12. David Anderson, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Rupert's Land at his Triennial Visitation* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1854), 1, 24.
13. Commentaries on the biblical concept of wilderness are plentiful. For an interpretation that most closely approximates that of Bishop Anderson see E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty and Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997). For a relatively similar

reading, but one that stresses human responsibility, particularly in a modern world, see Robert R. Gottfried, *Economics, Ecology, and the Roots of Western Faith: Perspectives from the Garden* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995). Most useful are Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); and *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

14. Deuteronomy 32:10 and 8:15. Admittedly, the Bible usually refers to desert rather than wilderness, but the desert was one type of wilderness. Moreover, in some cases the words are synonymous.
15. Anderson, *Charge at Triennial Visitation* (1854), 47-48.
16. Anderson *Charge at Triennial Visitation* (1854), 48. Anderson cited Psalm 67:6.
17. Richard Chenevix Trench, *Lessons in Proverbs: being the Substance of Lectures Delivered to Young Men's Societies at Portsmouth and Elsewhere* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Redfield, 1860), 135.
18. Anderson, *The Net in the Bay*, 11.
19. Anderson, *Charge at Primary Visitation*, 7.
20. Anderson to Venn, 9 August 1850, CMS Papers.
21. Anderson to Sir, 16 July 1851, CMS Papers.
22. David Anderson, *The Winner of Souls: A New-Year Ordination Sermon Preached at Saint John's Church, Red River, on Tuesday, January 1, 1856* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1856), 17-8.
23. Anderson, *Charge at Triennial Visitation* (1854), 24-25.
24. Anderson to Venn, 22 January 1850; Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 22 August 1849; and Anderson to Committee of CMS, 29 August 1849, CMS Papers.
25. Anderson to Sir, 16 July 1851, CMS Papers.
26. Anderson, *The Net in the Bay*, 261.
27. Anderson, *The Net in the Bay*, 215.
28. Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 22 March 1852 [original not in CC1/O2E], CMS Papers.

29. David Anderson, *The Seal of Apostleship: An Ordination Sermon Preached at St Andrew's Church, Red River, Sunday, 22 December 1850* (London: Hatchard, 1851), 13; and Anderson, *Charge at Primary Visitation*, 44.
30. Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 6 August 1851, CMS Papers.
31. Anderson to Sir, 16 July 1851, CMS Papers.
32. David Anderson, *A Charge at his Triennial Visitation, 29 May 1856* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1856), 25-26.
33. Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 22 June 1858, CMS Papers.
34. Anderson to Sir, 16 July 1851, CMS Papers.
35. David Anderson, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of Rupert's Land at his Triennial Visitation, 6 January 1860* (London: Hatchard, 1860), 11.
36. John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 112.
37. Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, n.d. (possibly 22 November 1849), CMS Papers.
38. Lorne Pierce, *James Evans* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1926); and Bruce Peel, *Rossville Mission Press: The Invention of the Cree Syllabic* (Montreal: Osiris Publications, 1974). Syllabics used characters to represent the sounds of syllables in the native language.
39. Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 27 November 1850, CMS Papers.
40. See, for example, Anderson, *Charge at Triennial Visitation* (1854), 9-17; and Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 229.
41. Bishop to Venn, 9 November 1857, CMS Papers. Robert Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest: Religions and Beliefs* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995), studies this topic using the military analogy.
42. File C C1, CMS Papers.
43. Peake takes a more jaundiced view of Anderson's accomplishments ("David Anderson").
44. Anderson, *Charge at Triennial Visitation* (1860), 10.
45. Anderson, *Charge at Triennial Visitation* (1860), 12.

46. Anderson, *Charge at Triennial Visitation* (1860), 42, 55.
47. Bishop of Rupert's to Lay Secretary, 12 August 1859, CMS Papers.
48. Frits Pannekoek, "The Flock Divided: Factions and Feuds at Red River," in *Readings in Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Harcourt and Brace, 1998), 422-423, discusses the religious implications of Crown status or its alternative, union with the Canadas.
49. Bishop of Rupert's Land to Venn, 11 February 1859, CMS Papers.
50. Bishop of Rupert's to Lay Secretary, 12 August 1859, CMS Papers.
51. Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 31-36.
52. Anderson to Venn, 22 January 1850, CMS Papers.
53. David Anderson, *Britain's Answer to the Nations: A Missionary Sermon Preached in Saint Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday, 3 May 1857* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1857).
54. Anderson, *The Net in the Bay*, 193-194.
55. Anderson, *The Net in the Bay*, 258-259.
56. Robert Coutts, "Anglican Missionaries as Agents of Acculturation: The Church Missionary Society at St Andrew's, Red River, 1830-1870," in *The Anglican Church and the World of Western Canada, 1820-1970*, ed. Barry Ferguson (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991) sees the role of the CMS in Red River as an example of European colonial imperialism.