

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSION IN LADAKH, 1888-1898

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English and Dutch priests from the Mill Hill Mission lived and worked in Ladakh from 1888 until 1895. They founded a mission station known as 'St Peter's', studied the local languages, travelled widely, and engaged in medical and educational work. The missionaries wrote detailed accounts of their travels, their encounters with local Buddhists and their observations on Ladakhi life and culture. However, most of their writings are hidden either in unpublished archives or in specialist missionary periodicals. Thus, unlike the Moravian Church which maintains a congregation in Leh, the Roman Catholic mission is now largely forgotten in Ladakh. This paper, which is based on the Mill Hill Mission archives in London¹, aims to restore the mission's work to the historical record.

The founding of the mission

In 1866 Fr Herbert Vaughan founded St Joseph's Society of Foreign Missions, the first and only English Roman Catholic missionary society. Its initial centre was in a villa in Mill Hill, north London, and it later moved a short distance to its present, specially-built premises at St Joseph's College. The society subsequently founded training centres in the Netherlands and in Austria, but it is generally known as the Mill Hill Mission because of the site of its English headquarters. Its founder went on to become one of the most prominent figures of nineteenth century English Catholicism: he was consecrated Bishop of Salford in 1872, became Archbishop of Westminster in 1892, and Cardinal in 1893.

In 1887 the Mill Hill Mission assumed responsibility for the Prefecture Apostolic of Kashmir and Kafirstan, which had been carved out of the Diocese of Lahore and had its headquarters in Rawalpindi². The Prefecture's name reflected the missionary aspirations of its

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1. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Fr W.J. Mol, the St Joseph's College archivist.
 2. Rooney, John, *On Rocky Ground. The Catholic Church in the North-West Territories* (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1987), p. 34.

founders who hoped to extend their work to the furthest frontiers of British India. However, the missionaries were never able to establish a foothold in Kafirstan, and therefore concentrated their attention on northern Punjab, Kashmir and, at first, Ladakh.

Ladakh had been an independent Himalayan kingdom until 1842, and was now part of the 'native state' of Jammu and Kashmir. The Maharaja of Kashmir owed allegiance to the British empire, and the British controlled most matters of foreign policy. However, the Maharaja exercised a considerable degree of independence over the state's internal affairs, and Europeans were not normally allowed to own land or buildings anywhere in Jammu and Kashmir.

The majority of Ladakhis were, and are, followers of Tibetan Buddhism, although there was also a large Muslim minority. Leh, the capital of Ladakh, was some two weeks' march from the Kashmir valley, and the road there was closed completely during the winter months because of snow on the mountain passes. However, it had obvious strategic advantages because it lay on one of the main Central Asian trade routes to Tibet and Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang), and this meant that the mission would have access to travellers from far beyond the immediate locality.

Jesuit priests had travelled through Ladakh in 1631 and 1715³, but the first missionaries to found a permanent station there belonged to the Moravian church (Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine) which is Protestant. The two Moravian pioneers, August Wilhelm Heyde and Eduard Pagell, passed through Leh in 1855 hoping to travel on to Mongolia. However, they were forbidden to cross the Tibetan frontier and therefore founded a mission station in Kyelang (now more commonly known as 'Keylong') in Lahul, a fortnight's journey to the south. Heyde visited Ladakh almost every year. In 1885, his colleague Friedrich Adolf Redslob opened a permanent mission station in Leh. He and his colleagues soon established the nucleus of an indigenous Christian community and set up a church, a school and a dispensary which was sponsored by the British government⁴.

The first Mill Hill missionary to travel to Ladakh was Fr Daniel Kilty, who had been born in Liverpool in 1855 and had

3. These were Frs Francisco de Azevedo and John de Oliveira in 1615 and Ippolito Desideri and Manuel Freyre in 1715. See: Wessels, C., *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia* (The Hague: Martins Nijhoff, 1924); Desideri, Ippolito, *The Travels of Ippolito of Pistoia S.J. 1712-1727*, Edited by Filippo de Filippi (London: Routledge, 1937).

4. For the beginnings of the Moravian mission see: Bray, John. 'The Moravian Church in Ladakh: the First Forty Years 1885-1925'. *Recent Research on Ladakh*, Edited by Detlef Kantowsky and Reinhard Sander (Munich: Weltforum Verlag, 1983), pp. 81-91.

previously served in north Borneo and Madras. Access to Ladakh was restricted, and Kilty first applied to the British Indian Foreign Department in Simla and then to the British Resident in Kashmir. In August 1888, the Resident issued Kilty with a permit to stay in Ladakh until 31 August 1890 'in order to learn the language'⁵. He arrived in Leh later that month.

At first Kilty stayed in the dak bungalow (resthouse) while waiting for a permanent residence to become available. Since the mission was not allowed to own land in Ladakh, he arranged for a building to be erected at government expense. The building cost Rs 800, and the mission was to pay the government an annual rent equivalent to 12% of its value⁶.

Kilty was clearly a man of considerable zeal, and quickly embarked on a period of intensive language study with the help of a local assistant: he remarked that his work amounted to 'making a new dictionary'⁷. While studying, he shut himself away for days and weeks in the cold resthouse and paid little attention to material comfort, arguing that he needed to try to 'harden himself a little'⁸.

However, Kilty's austerity contributed to a collapse of his health. In late April 1889 his superior, Fr Ignatius Brouwer in Rawalpindi, wrote back to London that he was concerned at the lack of news from Leh⁹. Four days later he received a letter from Captain H. Ramsay, the British Joint Commissioner in Ladakh, saying that Kilty was sick. Brouwer decided to set out for Ladakh, but on 6 May received a telegram stating that Kilty had already died. He apparently had suffered from a liver abscess which he had at first neglected. He had eventually reported to Dr Karl Marx at the Moravian mission hospital - but by this time it was already too late. He was buried in a small cemetery for Europeans in Leh¹⁰.

The next Mill Hill missionaries to travel to Ladakh were Frs Ignatius Brouwer, Joseph Cunningham, Henry Hanlon and Michel Donsen. They set out from Srinagar in August 1890, and their first act

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5. Letter from C. Plowden (Resident in Kashmir) 1 August 1888. British Library Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC): R/2/1061.
 6. H. Ramsay to C. Plowden. 24 September 1888. OIOC R/2/1061.
 7. Letter from Kilty. *St Joseph's Foreign Missionary Advocate* (hereafter cited as SJFMA) 2 (1888-89), no. 1, p. 13.
 8. SJFMA 2 (1890), p. 141.
 9. Brouwer to Benoit. 29 April 1889. Mill Hill Mission archives.
 10. The cemetery is in the Karzu district of Leh behind the army's 'Alpha mess', which used to be the British Joint Commissioner's residence. Kilty's grave is close to an obelisk commemorating Ferdinand Stoliczka, the Czech explorer who died in 1874.

on arriving in Leh early the following month was to kneel at Kilty's grave and recite the *De profundis*. They then proceeded to occupy the property which the mission was to rent from the Jammu and Kashmir government. The future 'St Peters' consisted of a three-room 'barn-like shanty' and some land in a plantation below the main bazaar¹¹. Brouwer and Cunningham soon returned to Kashmir, but Hanlon and Donsen stayed on.

Hanlon and Donsen were the two missionaries who lived longest in Ladakh and who left the most detailed accounts of their work. Hanlon was born in Manchester in 1862 and ordained priest in 1889. He stayed in Ladakh from 1890 until 1893. Donsen was four years younger than his colleague, and came from Vlissingen in the Netherlands. He worked in Ladakh, with intervals in Kashmir, from 1890 until 1895.

Research on Ladakhi language and culture

The two missionaries' immediate priority was to learn the language. Kilty's notes proved insufficiently organised to be of much value and they therefore had to start afresh. They started with colloquial Ladakhi - which they called 'Butti' - but found it necessary to combine this with the study of classical Tibetan as well. Kilty had acquired Tibetan catechisms prepared by the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris, which had a mission near the Bhutanese border, but Hanlon and Donsen had to have these translated 'into proper Ladakh patois because...they were written in a language which is a mixture of Buthan patois, Lhasa patois, and book language'¹². Their decision to translate the catechism into Ladakhi colloquial contrasted with the then Moravian policy which was to use a simplified form of classical Tibetan.

Language study led naturally to research on Ladakhi customs and religious beliefs, an area of knowledge which was of obvious importance for mission work. Thus, in the course of his language studies, Hanlon asked his *munshi* (clerk) to write out examples of conversations among the people. The *munshi* then brought a manuscript history of Leh¹³. Having digested this, Hanlon asked about folksongs, and requested the *munshi* to write them down:

The collecting of these Ladakhi ballads was curious; they had never been written before; in many cases the writer

11. The building can be seen in the foreground of the picture of Leh in: E.F. Knight, *Where Three Empires Meet* (London: Longman, 1893), p. 168.

12. SJFMA 2 (1891), No. 12, p. 191.

13. Hanlon to Vaughan, 20 June 1892, MHM archives.

had to hire the native musicians to play the tunes as the only means of recalling the words. These ballads number 130; and with the help of a native I have translated half of them. Religion in some degree enters into most I have read. They are in praise of the king, the queen and their court, of the head men of their villages; of the villages themselves; songs of their affections for weddings etc.¹⁴.

Hanlon sent a paper on these songs to a Dr Casartelli in England; he in turn edited and presented the paper to the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists. A summary of Hanlon's contribution was published in the Congress proceedings¹⁵, but it does not include any of the Ladakhi texts of the songs, and it is as yet uncertain whether the originals survive in any archive.

Hanlon wrote a substantial description of 'Ladak, the Ladakis and their popular Buddhism'. This was published in monthly excerpts by the *Illustrated Catholic Missions* magazine between October 1893 and April 1895¹⁶. Hanlon intended his work to:

stand as an account of the Ladakis as they are in 1893, useful, when hereafter education, civilisation, and as we hope, conversions to our holy Faith will have obliterated many of their present customs and beliefs.

Hanlon drew on previous publications by Alexander Cunningham, Frederic Drew and H. Ramsay¹⁷, but most of his work was original and, if brought together into a single publication, would have made a respectable book in its own right. His account has four parts: Land and People; Buddhist Public Festivals; Domestic Festivities; and Religion and Sacred Objects of Buddhism. Each part has up to nine chapters. Among other subjects, Hanlon gives a detailed description of Ladakhi wedding ceremonies and the negotiations which precede them. He was the first European to do so, and in this respect

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14. *Illustrated Catholic Missions* (hereafter cited as ICM), 7, No. 75 (July 1892), p. 33.
 15. 'The Folksongs of Ladakh and Baltistan', *Transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists*, pp. 613-615. 1895. 'The Wedding Customs and Songs of Ladakh'. *Actes du dixième congrès international des orientalistes, session de Genève*, 1894. pp. 183-184. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1897.
 16. ICM 8 (1893-94), pp. 81-83, 97-98, 113-116, 129-131, 113-116, 129-131, 145-147, 161-162; ICM 9 (1894-95), pp. 7-8, 21-24, 38-39, 54-56, 68-70, 86-88, 102-104, 119-120, 132-134, 146-148, 150-152, 167-168, 179-182.
 17. Cunningham, Alexander, *Ladak*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1854); Drew, Frederic, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories, a Geographical Account* (London: Edward Stanford, 1875); Ramsay, H., *Western Tibet* (Lahore: W. Ball, 1890).

his work anticipates later research by the Moravian missionary A.H. Francke and more recent scholars.

Hanlon also wrote a shorter note for the *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*¹⁸. In the note he comments that the work of English officials in the Kashmir government had ensured that his countrymen were seen as 'men of fairness, uprightness, tolerance and good will' and gives hints on how to avoid mountain sickness when crossing high passes.

In addition to his more scholarly publications, Hanlon wrote regular letters and reports on his mission activities, and many of these were published in *Illustrated Catholic Missions* and the Mill Hill magazine, *St. Joseph's Foreign Missionary Advocate*. Hanlon's description of his adventures in travelling in the Nubra valey in northern Ladakh proved particularly popular. This was first published in the *Advocate* and then translated into Dutch for *De Annalen van het Missiehuis te Rozendaal*¹⁹.

Donsen's most important publication on Ladakh was a 46-page article published in the *Tijdschrift van het koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* in 1901²⁰. This describes the geography of Ladakh; its political status; the characteristics of the local population; and Buddhist beliefs and rituals including birth festivals, marriage ceremonies and funeral rites. In addition to this article, Donsen wrote a series of letters on Ladakh which were published in *De Annalen van het Missiehuis te Rozendaal* between 1891 and 1896. Many of these contain ethnographic information as well as mission news. For example, in a letter dated 6th March 1892 Donsen gives a description of the King of Ladakh's participation in New Year ceremonies in Leh²¹.

Mission work

Language study might have been a full-time occupation in itself but, as the two priests became more confident, they began to engage in various kinds of humanitarian work. For example in 1892, Hanlon wrote that six boys were coming to the mission school to study

18. 'Two Notes on Ladakh', JMGS 11 (1895), p. 183.

19. SJFMA 2(1892-93), No. 17, pp. 312-319; 334-346, 347-350, 390-397, 415-416, 430-431. AMR 4 (1893-94), No. 9, pp. 264-265; No. 10, pp. 270-272; No. 11, pp. 277-280; No. 12, pp. 283-286. The editor of AMR evidently had little idea of what Ladakh looked like: on page 271 he illustrates Hanlon's account with a picture of the pyramids.

20. TKNAG 18 (1901), pp. 416-462. I am grateful to Dr Wim van Spengen for bringing this article to my attention.

21. AMR 3 (1892-93), No. 2, pp. 110-112.

English, Tibetan and Hindustani. The missionaries did not teach Christianity at the school, which appears to have been short-lived, but regarded it as a form of service which was also a valuable point of contact with the local population. Similarly, the missionaries distributed sheep-skins to the poor during the winter, and did small-scale medical work such as smallpox vaccinations.

However, they would always have considered such activities to be a sideline to their main activity which was to preach the Christian message both in Leh and further afield: Hanlon made three evangelistic journeys to the Nubra valley. In order to get there he had to cross either the Khardong pass (c.18,500 ft) or the Sabu pass (18,200 ft) and, in addition to the problems caused by lack of oxygen at high altitude, he had to cope with snow and ice. On one occasion he was forced to turn back just after crossing the Kardong pass because he was suffering from frostbite.

On these journeys Hanlon would preach to local villagers using visual aids to help explain his message. He travelled with '40 large coloured prints of religious studies, covering the history of the world to the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles'²². He began his sermon by showing a map of Ladakh, and then other maps to show his listeners their place in the world. In the course of his travels to Nubra, Hanlon also visited the Deskit and Tangyar monasteries but, not understanding the symbolism of Buddhist art, was repelled by the horrific pictures of deities which he found there.

Donsen wrote of his own travels in a series of letters published in the *Annalen van het Missiehuis te Rozendaal* between 1891 and 1896. For example, in August and September 1893, he marched via Lamayuru to the Zanskar valley, where he managed to preach to audiences of some 20 to 30 people in several villages. Donsen commented on the special difficulties of camping in a hostile environment some 4000 metres higher than his native Netherlands²³.

Buddhist reactions to Christianity

Hanlon wrote several accounts of his discussions with local Buddhists both in his letters and, in particular, in a series of articles entitled 'Buddhist dialogues' in *Illustrated Catholic Missions*²⁴. In their first year in Ladakh, Hanlon and Donsen were pleased to find that people listened to their preaching with apparent appreciation, and

22. SJFMA 2(1892-93), No. 17, p. 318.

23. AMR 5 (1894-95), No.2, pp. 303-304; No. 3, pp. 307-312; No.4, pp. 314-319.

24. ICM 7 (1892-93), pp. 151-152; p. 165; pp. 179-180; Vol. 8 (1893-94), pp. 34-35; p 67.

they hoped that they might soon be able to establish an indigenous congregation. However, after two years it became obvious that the obstacles were much greater than they had originally supposed.

In Hanlon's view, there were major intellectual obstacles to conversion. The fundamental problem was that Buddhists had no concept of God the creator, and it was difficult to find an appropriate Tibetan word which matched the Christian understanding of the Deity. In the eighteenth century the Jesuit missionary Ippolitio Desideri, who had lived in Lhasa between 1715 and 1722, had coined the term *rang.drub.dkon.mchog*, which means the 'self-existent precious one'²⁵. The Moravian Bible translator Heinrich August Jäschke also had used the word *dkon.mchog* for God. However, as Jäschke acknowledged, *dkon.mchog* had powerful Buddhist nuances because the term *dkon.mchog.gsum* is used to stand for the 'three precious gems' - the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha (monastic community)²⁶. For this reason, French Roman Catholic missionaries working on the eastern and southern Tibetan borders favoured the term *gnam.gyi.bdag.po*, the 'Lord of Heaven'²⁷, and the Mill Hill fathers in Ladakh followed their example.

In expressing Christian ideas about God, Hanlon tried to draw on what Ladakhis already knew:

In speaking of God to the people about Leh we had often found it difficult to give them the right conception. They would insist on their notion of Konchok [*dkon.mchog*]. Their idea of Konchok as the Supreme Being always seemed too vague to build upon. While in Nubra I overheard a Bot saying to his companion "nye mi shes; Konchok shes [*ngas.mi.shes, Dkon.mchog.shes*] - I don't know. Konchok knows (God knows)". In my next instruction, I made use of this telling them they already know who Namkai dakpo [*gnam.gyi.bdag.po*] (our word for God) was. I told them that if they were asked anything they didn't know they'd answer, "I don't know. God knows". If asked who has made anything very wonderful beyond the power of man, they'd answer, "God

25. Sherburne, Richard, 'A Christian-Buddhist Dialogue? Some Notes on Desideri's Tibetan Manuscripts'. *Reflections on Tibetan Culture*, pp. 295-306, Edited by Lawrence Epstein and Richard Sherburne (New York: Edwin Meller Press).

26. See: Bray, John, 'Language, Tradition and the Tibetan Bible'. *The Tibet Journal* 16 (1991), No.4, pp. 22-28.

27. *Dictionnaire thibétain-latin-français par les missionnaires Catholiques du Thibet* (Hong Kong: Imprimerie de la Société des Missions Étrangères, 1899. For the history of French Catholic mission see: Launay, Adrien, *Histoire de la Mission du Thibet*, (Lille/Paris: Desclée, De Brouwer, c. 1901).

The Roman Catholic Mission in Ladakh

must have made it". No matter where they were if in great trouble they would pray, thereby showing that they believed God was everywhere. To the truth of this they assented, and I had the base to work upon of the omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence of God²⁸.

Hanlon's listeners often responded sympathetically to some aspects of his teaching. For example, when Hanlon spoke of the example of martyrs who had followed the example of patience and goodness which Jesus Christ had given, the response might be:

Ah yes; patience and gentleness! I don't wonder at the spread of the Christian religion; our holy books say that wherever these two virtues are, they will always do good²⁹.

However, Hanlon also found that other aspects of Christian teaching seemed quite alien to the Ladakhis:

I shall always remember the expressions of horror with which they received the picture of the 'crucifixion'. Their horror was all for the atrocity of the act, and not at all for its origin - our sins. I made every effort to explain and repeat why Christ, God and man, suffered these things for our salvation. They appeared to comprehend what I would say, but hardly to apprehend it as applying to themselves.³⁰

On occasion Hanlon drew on Western science to challenge the traditional Buddhist conception of the universe. Ladakhis would tell him that rain came from 'the Lhu yul, or lower regions of the earth and that the Lhu spirits live under the sea, and under the earth which floats on the sea'. The missionary responded by explaining:

the true formation of the earth and its rotation; the known substance of sun, moon and planets; the causes of lightning and thunder; the formation of clouds and rising of winds, showing illustrations from Geikie's and Lockyer's large elementary books on these issues³¹.

According to Hanlon the typical hearer's response was:

Perhaps there is no Lhu country. But no - I must not say that; our holy books say there is a Lhu country.

28. Hanlon, Henry. *Diary of Nubra trip* (Mss). MHM archives.

29. ICM 7 (1892-93), p. 165.

30. SJFMA 1892-93, p. 348.

31. ICM 7 (1892-93), p. 180.

More educated listeners challenged Hanlon's exposition by comparing his ideas with Buddhist beliefs:

I remember once, in the course of a quiet instruction which I was giving to a Buddhist at Leh, when speaking of the joys of Heaven, being interrupted by him. He calmly told me that our Heaven was but the inferior heaven of the Buddhist, whose supreme happiness is nirvana or extinction of all desires. When this stage is reached, there is no more joy or sorrow, heat or cold, hunger or thirst, or any other sensible feeling³².

Even where Ladakhis proved sympathetic to Christian ideas, they showed no desire to foresake their own tradition. Hanlon writes of one listener:

He had admitted the beauty of Christ's teaching; had expressed his delight with the prayers and doctrines of Christianity; and had frequently praised it; but generally concluded by repeating the Buddhist formularies '*rang rang gi chos*' - 'each one to the religion of his birth' and 'your religion is good enough for you, but Buddhism is the best religion'³³.

Hanlon tried to challenge this attachment to tradition by pointing out that the Ladakhis had accepted certain European ways of farming which were alien to their grandfathers: why should they not also accept new religious teachings? Similarly, he tried to challenge the pre-eminent position of the Buddhist monkhood by questioning the lamas' expertise as teachers and their faithfulness to their own moral precepts. He implies that this approach may have sown some doubt among his listeners, but adds that the response was generally to the effect that lamas 'could not sin'.

Hanlon believed that indigenous catechists would be better placed than Europeans to counter such arguments. With this in mind, the Mill Hill Mission opened negotiations with the French Roman Catholic mission on the borders of Bhutan to recruit 'native catechists' from there³⁴. However, the negotiations appear to have foundered.

Hanlon's attempts to secure additional help from Catholic nuns also proved unsuccessful. In October 1890, soon after his arrival, he applied to the Kashmir state for permission to erect a house for 'a

32. SJFMA 1892-93, pp. 430-431..

33. ICM 6 (1891-92), pp. 86-87.

34. Rooney, p. xii.

The Roman Catholic Mission in Ladakh

teaching and nursing body of nuns³⁵. He believed that low moral standards - as exemplified by the practice of polyandry - were among the main obstacles to Christianity, and he thought that nuns would be best able to address this problem because they would have more contact with women and children.

However, the Kashmir government twice rejected his application: the first time it stated that it had no funds. On the second occasion the mission offered to pay for the building directly, but was again turned down. In November 1893 the government at last agreed to allocate funds for the building the following summer³⁶, but by this time Hanlon had already left Ladakh, and it seems that the mission never took up the offer.

Mill Hill missionaries and Moravians

As noted above, Kilty turned to the Moravian mission doctor during his final illness but, apart from this episode, the relationship between the two missions was one of competition rather than co-operation. For example, in March 1894 Hanlon wrote:

An English-German Moravian was sent off in hot haste at our very heels when we went to Ladakh. He was to be a set-off and counteracting influence on our work. When they heard we were applying for nuns, they were in a great state of excitement and wrote to their board in Germany to have 'nursing sisters' forthwith³⁷.....

The 'English-German Moravian' was Becker Shawe, who came from Ockbrook in Derbyshire but had been educated in Germany. He served in Ladakh from 1890 until 1895. Shawe's assessment of Hanlon and Donsen was more generous: 'Personally, they are both well-educated and pleasant men'³⁸. However, he added that their pleasantness 'only makes their presence here more galling': the sense of rivalry between the missions was obviously mutual.

Hanlon was keen to ensure that the Ladakhis understood the difference between the two churches. While travelling in Nubra he met many villagers who remembered the 'Kelang Sahib' (a reference to the Moravians' station in Kyelang), and wondered whether he belonged to

35. Hanlon to Mr Kaye, Assistant Resident in Kashmir, 17 October 1893. OIOC. R/2 1063.

36. Raja Sir Amar Singh to S.H. Godfrey, 23 November 1893. Ibid

37. Hanlon to Casartelli, 5 March 1894. MHM archives.

38. Becker Shawe to Br Connor, 6 March 1891. Archiv der Brüder-Unität, Herrnhut, Germany.

the same religion:

I quickly brought forward the most striking of our differences, of which the youthfulness of Protestantism struck them most forcibly. A religion which counts itself by mere centuries seemed to them unworthy of serious consideration³⁹.

The Moravians themselves recorded that Ladakhis were more sympathetic to the Catholics in at least one respect:

A Buddhist told one of our Christians a few days ago that he thought the Catholic religion better than ours because they have 'Skundra' [*sku 'dra*] i.e. idols. The images in a Buddhist temple are called Skundra⁴⁰.

The Mill Hill missionaries differed to some extent in method from the Moravians. For example, Hanlon believed that the Moravians were mistaken to distribute Tibetan translations of the Gospels because Ladakhis were likely to misinterpret the scriptures unless they had proper guidance⁴¹.

However, in other respects the two missions had much in common. For example, both sets of missionaries believed in combining preaching with medical and educational work, and both undertook long evangelistic journeys outside Leh. Moreover, the Ladakhis' response was broadly similar. While often expressing polite interest, they tended to argue that all religions were the same, that the truths of Christianity were already expressed in Buddhism, or that Christianity was a religion for foreigners⁴². The social obstacles to conversion - especially pressure from the monastic community - applied equally to both churches.

The two missions' mutual suspicions were of course typical of their time. Like their counterparts in Europe, each regarded the other as representing a distortion of the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, from a historical perspective, one is struck more by the similarities than by the differences between the two groups.

The closure of the Mill Hill mission in Ladakh

In 1893 Brouwer pulled Hanlon out of Ladakh to support him in Rawalpindi. Hanlon's posting to Rawalpindi was supposed to be temporary, but in August 1894 he received a letter calling him to the

39. SJFMA 1892-93, pp. 347-350.

40. *Periodical Accounts Relating to Moravian Missions* 1891, p. 340.

41. ICM 7 (1892-93), p. 165.

42. See Bray 1983 cited in Note 4 above.

The Roman Catholic Mission in Ladakh

African mission field: he was to be ordained titular Bishop of Teso and first Roman Catholic Bishop of Uganda. He worked in Uganda until his retirement in 1911, and died in 1937.

Donsen continued working in Ladakh after Hanlon's departure. However, Brouwer did not wish to risk leaving him alone in Leh during the winter in case he suffered the same fate as Kilty, and therefore withdrew him to Baramulla (Kashmir) until the spring of 1894. Donsen returned to Ladakh in the summers of 1894 and 1895, and evidently felt optimistic about the future of the mission for he wrote in August 1895:

I cannot mention as yet any conversions, but unless I read the signs wrong, I believe we are making a very good, favourable impression on the people to whom I have spoken. To bring things soon to a good issue, I have prepared an introduction to Catholicity for the Buddhists, and intend preparing one also for the Mahommedans....⁴³.

He concluded his letter by welcoming the news that new recruits were on their way to India - but regretting that they would not arrive before the snows closed the passes so that he would have to return to Kashmir for the winter. Evidently he had reason to hope that the newcomers would be sent to Ladakh.

It was not to be. In September 1895 Donsen was recalled to Rawalpindi, and he stayed in northern Punjab for the next four years. By this time Fr D.J. Reijnders had taken over from Brouwer as head of the mission, and he writes of Donsen with a mixture of admiration and exasperation: he was a man who worked with immense enthusiasm - but at the risk of damaging his health⁴⁴. Reijnder's fears may have been justified because Donsen had to return to Europe in 1899 for health reasons. In 1905 he was sent to the Belgian Congo (Zaire), and he died there two years later.

In May 1898 Reijnders wrote a detailed report summing up the problems and prospects of the whole Prefecture of Kashmir and Kafiristan⁴⁵. He believed that the main reasons why there were few converts included: a shortage of priests exacerbated by sickness and death; the fact that the mission's energies were diverted by chaplaincy work for the British army in Punjab and the North-West Frontier; difficulties of access; political instability on the frontier; and the poor moral example given by European Christians.

43. Donsen to Fr Henry. 8 August 1895. MHM archives.

44. Report by Reijnders, May 1898. MHM archives.

45. Ibid.

John Bray

In reviewing the mission's activities Reijnders concentrated on northern Punjab, the mission's headquarters, and Kashmir. The Baramulla mission in Kashmir had been founded after Leh, but was now more firmly established. Reijnder's comments on Ladakh were pessimistic:

Ladakh is for the present given up, not only on account of the fruitlessness of the labours spent there for more than four years, and of the unfavourable circumstances continuing, but also in consideration of the Bishop of Lahore's advice, supported by the Delegate Apostolic.

Till the laws of the country permit foreigners to hold large tracts of land there, it seems useless to attempt christianising Ladakh; but even when the present prohibitive laws should be changed for the better, it will be a tremendous task to christianise Ladakhis, viz. on account of their practice of polyandria, their devil worship, and other difficulties which will have to be encountered.

Reijnder's report makes it clear that by 1898 the Prefecture had made a formal decision to close the Ladakh mission. Shortage of manpower was one of the main reasons for this decision, but it would not have been decisive if the mission had thought that the social, religious and legal environment had been more favourable.

Thus, the grave of Fr. Kilty, the first Mill Hill priest to operate in Ladakh, is now the only physical memorial of the mission's work there. However, both Hanlon and Donsen left valuable accounts of the Ladakh of the 1890's, and their role in the region's history - short though it was - deserves to be better remembered.