

Robert Morrison's Spiritual Roots

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Abstract

While we can never know a person's heart nor everything going on in his/her mind, we can deduce from the person's life context, the underlying roots, what seems to motivate the action of a person. This paper explores these matters for the life of Robert Morrison, early Nineteenth Century Protestant Missionary to China. Considering the religious background of Morrison through the lens of Charles Taylor's work "Sources of the Self" leads to a view of how Morrison's early years motivated his life's work. Exploring his religious and spiritual experiences in the home, Christian/Church of Scotland community, and educational context reveals motivating factors leading Morrison to the Far East and a lifetime of missionary service.

Keywords: *Robert Morrison, Church of Scotland, Priesthood of the Believer, Missionary Motivation, Education*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to observe how the youth shadowed forth the man; and how the gracious Spirit of God, who “divideth to all men severally as he will,” did thus from the beginning prepare him for the work to which he was destined.¹ — Eliza A. Morrison

To speak of spiritual roots is to describe a particular aspect of a person’s background with a view to how he/she experienced their family culture, church and religious practices, even how their educational process may have influenced their future behavior. It is helpful to know for instance that while the Morrison Memorial Chapel in Macau is maintained by the Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong, Robert Morrison (1782-1834) himself was a devout member of the Church of Scotland (the Scottish Presbyterian). Not only was he trained and shaped by the Church of Scotland, it was this particular sect of the Presbyterian church that influenced his understanding of Christianity and the missionary task.

To explore a person’s spiritual roots can also assist in finding motivation for the actions and attitudes held by the person. For instance, why would a person of skill, intellect, and potential leave the comforts of home to travel half-way around the world to a place never visited and live with a people quite unlike those in his home culture? While we can never know a person’s heart nor everything going on in his/her mind, we can deduce from the person’s life context, the underlying roots, what seems to motivate the action of a person. This can easily be seen in our own lives. I leave my home, walk up the street and enter a small cafe. I order a bowl of noodles and a tea. Having consumed my meal, I pay the bill and leave the restaurant. From these actions, is it reasonable to think I acted out of hunger? Certainly. I contend that the same conclusion can be drawn from the actions and context of a person such as Morrison. Exploring his spiritual roots should shed some light on his motivation and eventual actions regarding his work in Macau and Guangdong Province.

A person’s spiritual roots often dig down deeper than merely touching his family of origin. None of us spring forth from nothing as we all come from a context of intricate relationships and cultural networks. These issues shape the way a person sees the world around himself/herself and often can be formative in his or her thinking. One person is born in poverty and determines to become wealthy in order to acquire resources to be able to help others to escape poverty. Another person in the same city is born into wealth and determines to give away wealth and influence in the cause of alleviating the poverty of others. Different starting points may lead to the same end point, yet it is easy to see that each person is motivated by different experiences, emotions, thoughts, and concepts about life. The same can be said about those who serve in the Christian Church. The person’s early life experiences and training often shape their understanding and desire later in life. The particular teachings of some churches can lead a person to be more active or more passive in their expression of faith.

¹ Eliza A. Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, and Longmans, 1839) 14, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://hdl.handle.net/2144/1069>.

This perspective is based in part on Charles Taylor’s concepts elaborated in his seminal work *Sources of the Self*. Taylor emphasizes, ‘To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary’.² If this is true, then to know who another person is we need to understand how that person came to consider one course of action as being good and another bad, or less good. The spiritual roots of Morrison provided the moral space for his understanding of his own self and his fundamental choices for what good in his life. According to Warren G. Frisian, Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* ‘promotes the view that our description of the self should be radically revised so as to take seriously the interdependent claims that values have objective reality and that our moral sensibilities play a central role in determining who we are and what it means to be a self’.³ The meaning of this for an exploration of Morrison’s spiritual roots is that we must explore these roots to find the wellspring of what Morrison valued. When we know better what he valued, we can understand the person more carefully. To dismiss the values that have been nourished and developed from his spiritual roots is to turn Morrison into a caricature and miss the reality behind his work accomplished in Macau and China.

So, what can we know of Morrison’s spiritual roots and how do those roots influence his dedicated life of service and missionary activities in Macau? This essay will examine his early years as well as his training before leaving England for Macau. As such, there will be an exploration of his family life and relationships, a discussion of Morrison’s particular branch of Christian worship and practice (the Church of Scotland), and his educational experience. In the end, only God knows the totality of a person’s heart and mind. Still, it is fair for us to read through the actions and writings of a person to learn how their roots influenced the fruits of their lives.

Regarding the use of the memoirs as collected by Morrison’s widow, Eliza A. Morrison: There is some concern about the hagiographic nature of such source materials. This concern has been raised and addressed at length by Christopher A. Daily in his book *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China*.⁴ While the present essay covers some ground in common with Daily, the attempt here is rather to reframe the material in order to avoid a hagiographic telling. At the same time the desire is to provide a less clinical or sterile view of Morrison’s early years in view of a more integrated and comprehensive understanding. We can consider how those early influences shaped the person who would commit his whole adult life to service among the Chinese.

Social philosopher Charles Taylor challenges our modern view of the self as he makes, ‘a connection between four terms: not just (a) our notions of the good and (b) our understandings of the self, but also (c) the kinds of narrative in which we make sense of our lives, and (d) conceptions of society, i.e., conceptions of what it is to be a human agent among human agents’.⁵ ‘Charles Taylor views the self as emerging from within the context of a moral/aesthetic framework (and is) best understood through

² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 28, accessed September 12, 2023, https://archive.org/details/Taylor_SourcesOfTheSelf

³ Warren G. Frisina, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: Toward a Nonrepresentational Theory of Knowledge*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002. 13.

⁴ Christopher A. Daily, *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 4–6.

⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 105.

narrativity and metaphors such as the quest for the good'.⁶ Understanding the desire to avoid hagiography, we can still find interest in the heartfelt and spiritual experiences of someone such as Morrison. Do we see in Morrison a genuine quest for good and does that quest shape the way he sees his life? Certainly. A critical look at the context and conditions he experienced prior to leaving for China in no way demands that we view him through the jaundiced eye of cynicism. His spirituality provided the deeper motivation and the sustaining root for his work until his death. For many people, the spiritual realities of their lives are every bit as much or more of a motivator as the material or cultural contexts. Thus, we seek to understand the spiritual roots of the man Robert Morrison.

II. THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Before apprehending the religious context of Robert Morrison's early years, it will be helpful to know something of the background and teaching of the Church he will find himself within. The Church of Scotland is a Presbyterian church with Scottish characteristics, established in large part through the efforts of John Knox (1513–1572) following his time in Geneva, Switzerland under the teaching of John Calvin. In 1560 the Church of Scotland held an assembly and presented the Scottish Confession of Faith⁷. This proclamation followed the rejection of the Catholic Pope and celebration of mass.⁸ This early confession would later be replaced by the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647. These confessions offer the basic framework of the belief and eventual practice of the church. These commitments led to conflict with other Scottish Christians as well as with other church leaders throughout England. The Reformation process on the British Isles was marked by violence and turmoil for centuries. The determination and some might say stubborn nature of the Scotch reformers can be seen in these conflicts right through the nineteenth century. This hard-fought struggle drew strong willed and determined people into the church ranks.

Considering the story of John Knox provides a sense of the Reformation roots that will eventually nourish and nurture Morrison. Knox was an early convert to the Reformation and served as chaplain to King Edward VI from 1549 to 1553. He fled England for Geneva upon the ascent of Mary Tudor in order to avoid persecution due to his Protestant affiliation. While in Geneva, Knox studied under John Calvin (1509-1564), and developed the liturgy that would eventually be adopted as the Scottish Church liturgy.⁹ The Scottish church continued to face conflicts throughout the next 300 years. Schism and war left its mark on the people committed to the Church of Scotland. That hard-fought determination to stand firm in their personal convictions provided the context for the disciplines and practices of the church.

⁶ Warren G. Frisina, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: Toward a Nonrepresentational Theory of Knowledge* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 14.

⁷ Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, *The Scots Confession*. Accessed September 12, 2023. <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-scots-confession-1560/>

⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Church of Scotland," accessed June 5, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Church-of-Scotland>.

⁹ *Musée virtuel du protestantisme*, "John Knox (1513–1572)," accessed August 19, 2023, <https://museeprotestant.org/en/notice/john-knox-1513-1572-2/>

The Church of Scotland continues to be shaped by characteristics first brought to bear upon the church through the work of John Knox. The ‘emphasis on the Bible and preaching, the simplicity of its worship, and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers - stem from the influence of John Knox and others upon the development of the Church in the years following the Reformation’.¹⁰ The concept of ‘priesthood of all believers’ is key to understanding the culture and context for Morrison’s early years. While a key teaching of Luther and other Reformation leaders, this is a concept rooted in the New Testament. (See Galatians 3:26-28 and 1 Peter 2:9.) Accordingly,

each person has a God-given competence to know and follow God’s will. A decision to follow Christ as Lord and Savior is an individual decision; no one can make it for another. Being a believer priest is a gift from God, not a human achievement; it comes with salvation. Each believer priest is responsible for his or her own actions. Individual believers can go directly to God without the aid of any intermediary. Individuals can and should read and interpret the Bible for themselves without religious officials dictating to them what to believe.¹¹

This teaching results in a Protestant ethic of personal and family devotional practices. The Bible is to be studied and read in the home and each person is responsible for her own growth and knowledge of the written Word of God. Is it any wonder that the future signature task of Morrison was a translation of the Bible? Knowing this hard-won commitment by the Church of Scotland, as with other Reformation groups, helps us understand Morrison’s commitment to the translation work that will so occupy his time in Macau.

In addition to the emphasis on the personal devotional life, the Church of Scotland under the guidance of Knox laid out a system of education with the goal that all people would have access to the truths of Scripture. This was especially true for young males.

Fathers especially were to be compelled ‘to bring up their children in learning and virtue’. ‘The rich ... may not be permitted to suffer their children to spend their youth in vain idleness as heretofore they have done. But they must be exhorted and by the censure of the Kirk compelled to dedicate their sons by good exercises (studies) to the profit of the Kirk and Commonwealth...’ The rich were to pay for their own sons’ education but the children of the poor were to be ‘supported and sustained of (by) the charge of the Kirk’.¹²

This, we see in Morrison’s memoirs, is the exact condition of Morrison’s early years at home. Morrison’s father, even though not considered to be wealthy, was commended for his dedication to teaching at home such that his children were brought up in ‘learning and virtue’.

¹⁰ Crown Court Church of Scotland, “The Church of Scotland,” accessed August 28, 2023, <https://www.crowncourtchurch.org.uk/about/the-kirk/>

#:~:text=Many%20characteristics%20associated%20with%20the,the%20years%20following%20the%20Reformation.
¹¹ Baptist Distinctives, “Baptists: The Priesthood of the Believer or of Believers?,” accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.baptistdistinctives.org/resources/articles/the-priesthood-of-the-believer-or-of-believers/>.

¹² Maurice Roberts, “John Knox and Education in Scotland,” Christian Library, accessed September 3, 2023, <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/john-knox-and-education-scotland>.

It was not just true of Morrison as these tenets of the Church of Scotland were instrumental in shaping the Great Awakenings that swept through Protestantism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The emphasis on personal responsibility and the need for a transformation mediated by God's grace motivated an evangelistic zeal in Protestantism from Europe to North America. With the break from the Catholic (and State controlled Church of England) need for religious practices to be mediated by a priest, the Church of Scotland expected its members to build their faith through home-based Bible reading and devotional practices. This is a key to understanding the development of Morrison's spiritual roots. Additionally, in order for the Bible to be read and taught at home, it becomes paramount that the Bible be available in the local vernacular. Not only does Morrison experience a home-based spirituality, he also gains an appreciation for the personal use of the Bible for the training of church members and the health of the church.

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III. FAMILY

Although Morrison was born in England¹³, his roots go back to Scotland through his father James Morrison. James Morrison was born in an area south of Edinburgh, Scotland, and later moved into Northumberland where he worked in several professions. According to the Morrison memoirs, James 'was a truly pious man, and trained up his family in the fear of God; maintaining family worship, and instructing his children in the duty of a strict observance of the Sabbath day'.¹⁴This being true highlights the degree to which the desire of John Knox that fathers raise their children, particularly sons, in the way of learning and virtue according to the Kirk (Church of Scotland) was brought to bear in Morrison's life. James Morrison is recorded as being an Elder of a Scottish church¹⁵at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. This is possibly the High Bridge Meeting House under the pastoral leadership of the Reverend John Hutton. According to the Morrison Memoirs, Hutton provided catechetical instruction to Morrison and his parents were members of the church. Later Morrison will himself become a member of the church.¹⁶ Again, this style of education was a way many people accessed education in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century England.

There are two incidents providing insight into Morrison's family relationships that are helpful in our exploration of his roots. The first regards his relationship with his mother. Morrison was the youngest

¹³ Robert Morrison, son of James and Hannah Morrison, was born January 5, 1782, at Buller's Green, Morpeth, in the County of Northumberland, whence he was removed with his parents, in 1785, to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where his early life was spent; cf. Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵ According to an Elder Handbook of the Church of Scotland, an Elder is one of the leaders (councillors) of the Kirk (church). While this is an administrative position, it carries the import of ordination and a spiritual component as well. To be ordained as an elder requires testing for correct knowledge and personal character. "The Eldership is a "spiritual office". It is a commitment to share the "rule" or government of the Church and that includes rule in spiritual matters as well as temporal," (Pathhead Parish Church, "The Church of Scotland: The Elder's Handbook," accessed September 6, 2023, 5.

¹⁶ This footnote is found in a note regarding the High Bridge Meeting House.

"The celebrated Chinese linguist and missionary, Dr. Robert Morrison, was a member of this congregation, amongst whom he received his religious education. See a memoir of this extraordinary man in the History of Northumberland, vol. ii. p. 185." Eneas Mackenzie. "Protestant Dissent: Chapels and Meeting-Houses," in *Historical Account of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Including the Borough of Gateshead* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Mackenzie and Dent, 1827), 370-414. British History Online, accessed September 6, 2023, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/newcastle-historical-account/pp370-414>.

of eight children. According to his widowed wife, the compiler of his memoirs, Morrison was his mother's favorite child. Prior to his mother's death, he had promised her that he would not depart their home while she was still living.¹⁷ Morrison's mother died in 1802 with him in attendance at her side. This commitment is instructive when compared to a later letter written to his father while at Hoxton Academy as he prepared for mission work. In early 1803, scarcely a month after arriving at Hoxton Academy, Morrison received word from his siblings that he was needed back home to help with the family shoe business and attend to his father who was in poor health. His response is from a letter dated February 5, 1803:

HONOURED FATHER, BROTHER, AND SISTERS,

I received your letter of the 19th ult. The account of my father's leg growing worse and worse concerns me: but what can I do? I look to my God, and my father's God. 'He doeth all things well,' and he will make all things work together for good to those who love him. My father, my brother, my sisters, I resign you all, and myself, to his care, who I trust careth for us. Are not our days few? yet I desire, if the Lord will, that he may grant you wherewithal to provide things honest in the sight of all men during the few days of your pilgrimage. I trust he will; and may the Lord bless you with rich communications of saving grace and knowledge. You advise me to return home. I thank you for your kind intentions: may the Lord bless you for them. But I have no inclination to do so; having set my hand to the plough, I would not look back. It hath pleased the Lord to prosper me so far, and grant me favour in the eyes of this people.¹⁸

This is perhaps typical of many who have left their home for Christian service. Great love and affection for the family members, yet a deeper rooted commitment in the end to the missionary task. When Morrison comments on having set his hand to the plough and not being willing to look back, even at the expense of not being at home to care for his ailing father, he is referencing Luke 9:61-62. This is evidence of spiritual roots having dug deep into the teaching and practice of Christian community. Morrison himself recounts the struggle with leaving his father in a letter of application sent to the London Missionary Society dated May 27, 1804. In the letter he says, 'my father wept and prayed over me, unwilling to part with me, and, afraid lest he should be opposing the will of the Lord, he at last consented'.¹⁹ In the end, we are told via his wife's commentary in the memoirs, his father and family would come to recognize that Robert's commitment to missionary service was of the Lord and accepted his decision.²⁰ We do not know whether Morrison himself ever got to know that his family accepted his commitment to leave them. Still, he went on and served.

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¹⁷ Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁹ Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, 53.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

IV. EDUCATION

The educational environment Morrison would have encountered is far from the standardized public education of even the late nineteenth century. In Morrison's time, 'much of the elementary education available was provided not by scholars but by tutors, dames, tradesmen, and others in their homes and shops;²¹. We can add to this that for those of means or opportunity the teaching was done by the church and clergy. An emphasis was upon teaching people to read, so they could read and understand the Bible. In some cases, people had access to Charity Schools, schools established as an attempt to help the poor. An example of this type of school could be found in London in the eighteenth century. The function of these schools is defined as: 'They provided a particular kind of education for a particular class of children, financed in great part by a particular method, and, by so doing, they established the idea of elementary education not, as in earlier ages, as a stage preliminary to the grammar schools . . . but as a system complete in itself'.²² This educational development came along after Morrison had need for primary education.

According to the memoirs, Morrison 'received his elementary instruction from a maternal uncle, named James Nicholson, who was a respectable schoolmaster of Newcastle, and under whose care the young pupil evinced an extraordinary delight in the pursuits of learning, although his earliest advances were but slow'.²³ This season of education was most likely based on the grammar school model, teaching English grammar, Latin and perhaps Greek. There was perhaps instruction in writing as well as arithmetic. The overarching goal of such schools was the preparation for university studies. This type of educational process would have been heavily shaped for young Morrison by a Christian environment. In fact, the memoirs go on to highlight the greater religious training he received during this time.

While his uncle was teaching Morrison to read and write, Hutton of the High Bridge Meeting House was providing catechetical lessons. These instructions would have been based on the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as the Bible, and entailed a great deal of rote memorization. Through this process of education and training, it is said of Morrison in his memoirs,

By parental instruction his mind had been full early stored with the principles of scriptural truth; and his regular attendance on public worship, and especially on the catechetical exercises of Mr. Hutton, tended still farther to enlighten his mind, and prepare him for that course of serious reflection on the defects and inconsistencies of his own character, which first filled him with deep compunction on account of sin, and eventually led him to seek salvation and happiness by faith in Christ Jesus.²⁴

²¹ "The Education of the Working Classes to 1870," in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 1, Physique, Archaeology, Domesday, Ecclesiastical Organization, the Jews, Religious Houses, Education of Working Classes To 1870, Private Education from Sixteenth Century*, ed. J S Cockburn, H P F King and K G T McDonnell (London: Victoria County History, 1969), 213–240. British History Online, accessed September 5, 2023, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol1/pp213-240>.

²² H. C. Jennings, *Political theory of state-supported elementary educ. in Eng. 1750–1833*. 4–5.

²³ Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3

This was a sort of educational experience more akin to what modern day churches might refer to as discipleship training or catechism classes. The content was primarily scripture and would have done much to shape young Morrison's view of himself within the world.

Thus, the roots of Morrison's spiritual life were nurtured and found room to grow down deep into a character marked by Christian teaching and Biblical instruction. Late in Morrison's fifteenth year, these spiritual roots produced the mystical experience of what is known in Protestant circles as a life conversion event, or being born again. This event is described in detail in Robert Morrison's application letter to Hoxton Academy from 1802. In general Morrison recounts the training he had received as a child and young person. That training is given credit for protecting him from the excesses of youth and ungodly living. However, following an incidence of intoxication, his sense of being a sinful person came to bear down on him as he developed a serious concern for his soul. Fearing eternal damnation, he cried out to Jesus Christ, was rewarded with the experience of rebirth as his personal commitment to the way of Christ. From that moment on, he committed himself to study, prayer, and Christian service. He joined the local church and never looked back with longing for any other life.

This testimonial of his 'new life in Christ' is the result of the spiritual roots having found room to grow and produce their fruit in the young Morrison. While some might be skeptical, this is an experience of great meaning and motivation to many people. These themes will go on to carry him on towards his missionary service. This sense of a general call to follow Jesus is not the end of his being rooted in the way of the Lord Jesus. This conversion experience gave rise to additional desires as it led him to read more specifically about service in the area of missions. This experience and additional training will be strong motivators for his upcoming dedicated work.

In Morrison's memoirs, there are mentions²⁵ of the *Missionary Magazine* published in Edinburg. This magazine was self-described as, 'The *Missionary Magazine*: a Periodical Monthly Publication, intended as a Repository of Discussion, and Intelligence respecting the Progress of the Gospel throughout the World'.²⁶ In the two years prior to entrance at Hoxton Academy, he would also spend his free time reading a wide range of books as they became available. This included the *Evangelical Magazine*, with his Memoirs noting 'the missionary intelligence which it supplied, in such a way as to show his strong predilection for missionary labour'.²⁷ His Memoirs continue to elaborate that the paucity of books during this season greatly shaped his future work. The Memoirs state,

²⁵ Ibid., 7.

²⁶ The magazine was begun in July 1796 and edited by Greville Ewing for its first three years. A contemporary of David Bogue, D.D. of the Gosport Academy, Ewing was appointed the first secretary of the Edinburgh Missionary Society in March 1796. The society was formed for the purpose of raising awareness of Jesus in foreign lands. *The Missionary Magazine*, with a circulation of 5–6,000 copies was a key element in promoting missions ideology and stirring up a passion in the churches for sending and supporting mission personnel. See: History of the Restoration Movement, "Greville Ewing: 1767–1841 — The Father of Modern Congregationalism in Scotland," accessed September 05, 2023, https://www.therestorationmovement.com/_international/scotland/ewing01.htm

²⁷ Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, 8.

he often referred to the loss which at this period he sustained through the want of books; and when the means of providing them were in his power, he would never allow himself, or his family, to suffer from this cause. He also lamented the scanty supply of books which missionaries in general possess, and deemed that deficiency to be greatly prejudicial to their usefulness, and destructive of their comfort.²⁸

It is not difficult to understand how the root of this sentiment would later impact and influence Morrison's work dealing with literature and the Bible.

Morrison's personal journal records that on June 19, 1801 he entered into study with a Mr. Laidler for the purpose of learning Latin. This course of study came at his own personal expense and was done with a view towards future missionary service. The result of this challenging season was 'when eighteen months afterwards he entered at Hoxton Academy, he had acquired not only an elementary acquaintance with the Latin language, but also the rudiments of Greek and Hebrew. His love of learning was great, and no difficulties could discourage him; but the love of souls was his grand motive'.²⁹ At this stage of his life, preparation for missionary service is the driving motivation in Morrison's life. The spiritual disciplines of study, service, and prayer formed deep roots in his life leading to a clear purpose. Morrison's memoirs state that he applied for admission to the Huxton Academy in 1802 at the age of twenty years. The intent behind his application was to access additional training in Christian ministry.³⁰

Hoxton Academy, founded in 1778 as the Evangelical Academy, was an intentional effort to train up Christian young men for Christian service. According to 'the leaflet of 1794 soliciting subscriptions, Plan of the Evangelical Academy, made the method of selection clear: students had to be 'of evangelical Sentiments, possessed of good natural Abilities', and to have 'experienced a divine Change'.³¹ 'Mr. Morrison arrived at Hoxton Academy on Friday, January 7, 1803, and commenced at once the regular course of studies, under his two tutors, the Rev. Dr. Simpson, and Rev. W. Atkinson'.³² According to Hoxton Academy records, Morrison attended Hoxton from 1803-04³³, prior to his participation in the London Missionary Society's training at the Gosport Academy. His roots by this point have already been established and these training experiences are simply building upon what has been planted in Morrison's heart and mind.

V. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, it is helpful to read the words of Robert Morrison himself as provided to Hoxton Academy in seeking admission. He writes,

²⁸ Ibid., 8.

²⁹ Morrison, *Memoirs of the life and labours Robert Morrison*, 21.

³⁰ Ibid., 3.

³¹ David Thompson, "Hoxton [Independent] Academy (1791-1826) and Highbury College (1826-1850)", *Dissenting Academies Online: Database and Encyclopedia*, Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies, March 2012, accessed August 18, 2023, <https://dissacad.english.qmul.ac.uk/sample1.php?parameter=academyretrieve&alpha=75>

³² Morrison, *Memoirs of the life and labours Robert Morrison*, 33.

³³ Dissenting Academies Online, "Hoxton Academy: Students," accessed July 12, 2023, <https://dissacad.english.qmul.ac.uk/sample1.php?parameter=academyretrieve&alpha=75>

“As the compass of one letter will not suffer me to enlarge with respect to my principles, it will perhaps be sufficient to observe that, being educated in the doctrines of the church of Scotland, as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, so far as I have been enabled to examine them as yet, I have espoused them from principle. Hence also my views with respect to the ordinance of Baptism will be known.”

“As to the motives that induce me to wish to be a minister, they are these, viz.: — An earnest desire of being instrumental (under the good hand of God) in turning sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God — of being instrumental in building up the church — being zealous of spiritual gifts, I seek that I may excel to the edifying of the church. I covet to prophesy, for he that prophesieth speaketh to men to edification, to exhortation, and to comfort; and I would moreover observe, that these passages not only express my motives, but also contain what I considered a warrant for my present undertaking, as they come from the apostle to the church at Corinth, in the form of an exhortation: ‘Seek that ye may excel.’ ‘Covet to prophesy.’

“However, I would willingly resign myself to the direction of my heavenly Father. He knows best, and will choose and use what instruments he seeth meet. His will be done.

“R. MORRISON.”

“Great Market, Newcastle,

“November 24, 1802.”³⁴

What motivates a person to leave the family they love, the country of their birth and a life of promise in their home culture? For some the motivating factor is fame, fortune, perhaps power. For others it is a motivation that springs forth from spiritual roots, a view of the world that speaks to something greater than themselves being at stake. For Morrison, like other people of his time, the earnest desire to be used by God in taking their understanding of the truth to other lands is a driving force. Books have been written about the strategy he used, the compromises he made in the course of his efforts. We may feel uncomfortable exploring something as untestable and vague as the “motivation” in one of such renown, yet it may be helpful to investigate and consider. Mystical experiences are by definition beyond explanation, but can be shared with and appreciated by others, even to the point of inspiring others. Our inability to quantify or explain a mystical experience in no way diminishes the import and power of such a personal experience on a person’s life and action. Gladly, Morrison’s motivation is not solely born from a mystical conversion experience, but rather from a deep spiritual rooting in the teachings and practices of his family and the Scottish Church. By the time he reaches Hoxton, Gosport and the Far East, his spiritual roots have established themselves as significant factors in the work he is going to do. To explore his early years and the roots of his adult life should not glorify the man or his work. Rather, this exploration makes him all the more human and approachable. Knowing his spiritual roots opens us to a deeper understanding of his actions in missionary service. Due to Morrison being the first Protestant missionary to Asia he is at times given outsized status and elevated beyond his true nature. Seeing his roots, brings him back down to

³⁴ Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, 30–31.

earth, assigning glory for his efforts more correctly and setting the stage for a more accurate appraisal of Robert Morrison the person.

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