Review of Elizabeth E. Prevost, *The Communion of Women: Missions and Gender in Colonial Africa and the British Metropole* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

In 1874, the "Ladies' Association" of the Society for Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), a high-church Anglican mission, sent a woman named Emily Lawrence to Madagascar. In 1895, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a low-church Anglican mission, sent five British females to Uganda. Drawing on a wealth of letters and other records from mission archives, Elizabeth E. Prevost connects these stories. She succeeds in showing how professional, single, British women missionaries initiated schools and other social enterprises that incorporated Malagasy and Ugandan women into an Anglican "communion" that nevertheless was – and remained – fractious.

Above all, this book sets out to consider "the impact of the mission encounter on British women, and…the role of missionaries and mission Christianity in forging a global Christian feminist movement" (p. 22). Yet while British Anglican women

missionaries may have aspired to the promotion of "spiritual sorority" (p. 288), they manifested what Prevost calls their "missionary feminism" (p. 2) in quite different ways, as their experiences in Uganda, Madagascar, and Britain show. Moreover, like all missionaries of this period, they found themselves forced to revise goals and attitudes in light of local cultural values and the political circumstances of their imperial age.

In Madagascar, for example, the SPG missionary Emily Lawrence described her schools as part of a "rescue effort" (p. 39): saving Malagasy girls from sexual liaisons with rum-traders and later, after France annexed the island in 1895, with French soldiers. In Uganda, CMS women missionaries arrived at a time when Protestant Christianity already enjoyed prestige among Ganda elites; local women were clamoring not only to join churches but also to learn to read (the Bible). Meanwhile, after 1900 in both Madagascar and Uganda, British women missionaries imported another British Anglican organization: this was the "Mother's Union" (MU), which organized local branches and screened members for inclusion in their club. The MU became extremely popular among Malagasy and Ugandan women, Prevost suggests, because it gave them new quasi-official roles of authority as enforcers of Christian morality at home and in public.

How exactly was the Mother's Union feminist? Prevost points out that in Madagascar, "The devotional character and female autonomy of MU gatherings effectively established a mode of female Christian authority which imitated an ecclesiastical body while remaining apart from male control" (p. 142). In Uganda,

she suggests, the MU kept local patriarchy in check, particularly after the African church became independent in 1907 as the Church of Uganda. In 1895, shortly before the MU reached Uganda, a CMS missionary had reported that in a place called Ngogwe, "a poor woman had her arm smashed [by her husband] for learning how to read" (p. 98); other, similar incidents occurred around this time. But once the MU became established, its African women applied pressure on husbands and chiefs, insisting on women's right to pursue Christian devotion or roles in church-community life.

As for British women missionaries, conditions on the ground in places like Uganda and Madagascar led them to play many more roles than their jobs officially prescribed. "…[U]nlike in Britain, where women were barred from preaching or becoming ordained, in the African mission field their evangelism assumed an almost clerical capacity" (p. 18): they did everything except administer sacraments. Prevost traces out one indirect consequence of such experiences for British feminism by devoting Chapter 6 to the Church League for Women's Suffrage (later known as the League of the Church Militant), an organization that operated from 1909 and 1928 and advocated women's suffrage and women's ordination. While the League may not have been "representative of broader Anglican sentiment" (p. 227), its advocacy was a natural extension of women's work in mission fields.

The Communion of Women will appeal to scholars who are interested in the intersecting histories of British imperialism, British feminism, and the Protestant missionary movement. While the book steadily acknowledges the agency of

Malagasy and Ugandan women in finding manifold (albeit officially non-clerical roles) within Anglican communities, its focus on missionary narratives makes it primarily a history of Britons. One of the most interesting issues that Prevost considers is the tension that arose between single British women missionaries ("professionals") and British and African full members of the Mother's Union ("family women"), who had very different ideas about women's empowerment.

Readers interested in the fraught political history of modern Anglicanism will also appreciate this book. Alluding to the crisis that has loomed in the Anglican Communion over sexuality and the clergy, Prevost reminds readers in her preface that, "the Anglican world has always been a site of contested spiritual and moral authority, and those contests have complex histories" (p. vi). This book admirably draws out these tensions, and shows how rich, diverse, and complicated Anglican history has been, among Britons as among Africans.

Heather J. Sharkey

University of Pennsylvania