

Want a Nation to Embrace Democracy? Send in Protestant Missionaries

Over the past 500 years, some countries have proven to be more receptive to democracy than others. What accounts for the disparity? What causes some countries to be more likely to embrace democratic forms of governance? As empirical evidence shows, one strong predictor is the presence of Protestant missionaries. “Protestant missionaries played an integral role in spreading democracy throughout the world,” says Greg Scandlen. “We could preserve our own if we learn from their ways.”

Today we may think of missions as mere footnotes in the historical sweep of economics and ideology, but Woodberry argues that prior to the mid-twentieth century, “missionaries were the main source of information about life in the colonies.” They were well educated and dwarfed the presence of other organizations such as labor unions and NGOs. They had financial resources that were greater than all but the largest commercial banks. Their interest in printing and distributing Bibles and other religious tracts largely drove the growth of printing throughout the Western world. In the 19th century, for instance, Bible societies were among the largest corporations of any kind. The American Bible Society printed and distributed over one million Bibles between 1829 and 1831, at a time when the total number of households in the United States was only about three million.

*Read more . . . This blog entry is reprinted with permission from the **Acton Institute**.*