Protestant Missionaries: Cultural Imperialists or Agents of Democracy?

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Some contemporary scholars and activists suggest that the right of conversion is not a crucial element of religious liberty, and many criticize religious proselytism as a dangerous form of cultural imperialism. However, distinguished political scientist and historian of Protestant missions Robert Woodberry demonstrates historically and statistically that proselytizing or conversionary Protestant missionaries heavily influenced the rise and spread of stable democracy around the world. He argues that such missionaries were a crucial catalyst initiating the development and spread of religious liberty, mass education, mass printing, newspapers, voluntary organizations, and colonial reforms, thereby creating the conditions that made stable democracy more likely. Statistically, the historic prevalence of Protestant missionaries explains about half the variation in democracy in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania and removes the impact of most variables that dominate current statistical research about democracy.