



A Church Missionary Society school, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. In the nineteenth century, European-based missionary societies established residential schools around the world in an effort to spread the Christian gospel and civilize the 'heathen.' Mary Evans Picture Library, 10825826.

race, whether in Great Britain, or the United States, or the Colonies, or wherever it may be, that rest the highest hopes of those who try to penetrate the dark future, or who seek to raise and better the patient masses of mankind."⁶⁵ Residential schools were established in the shadow of these ideas. In the year that Rosebery gave this speech, the Canadian government opened its first industrial residential school for Aboriginal people at Battleford on the Canadian Prairies.⁶⁶

The Christian churches not only provided the moral justification for the colonization of other peoples' lands, but they also dispatched missionaries to the colonized nations in order to convert 'the heathen.' From the fifteenth century on, the Indigenous peoples of the world were the objects of a strategy of spiritual and cultural conquest that had its origins in Europe. While they often worked in isolation and under difficult conditions, missionaries were representatives of worldwide organizations that enjoyed the backing of influential individuals in some of the most powerful nations of the world, and which came to amass considerable experience in transforming different cultures.⁶⁷ Residential schools figured prominently in missionary work, not only in Canada, but also around the world.

Christian missionaries played a complex but central role in the European colonial project. Their presence helped justify the extension of empires, since they were visibly spreading the word of God to the heathen. If their efforts were unsuccessful, the missionaries might conclude that those who refused to accept the Christian message could not expect the protection of the church or the law, thus clearing the way for their destruction.⁶⁸ Although missionaries often attempted to soften the impact of imperialism, they were also