MISSION AND GOVERNMENT IN OVAMBOLAND 1870-1940: A SURVEY OF THE FORCES FOR CHANGE IN A SOUTH WEST AFRICAN RESERVE

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ABSTRACT

MISSION AND GOVERNMENT IN OVAMBOLAND
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This paper attempts to trace the relations of the three Missions in Ovamboland--Anglican, Finnish Lutheran, and Roman Catholic--with the South West African Government, and the relations of both of these groups with the organs of Ambo tribal society. It is drawn largely from published English language sources, chiefly the South West Africa Administrator Reports (1919-1940) and the publications of the Anglican Mission (1929-1940), supplemented with interviews of Mission personnel.

The paper deals with: the nature of Ambo society, a matrilinear pastoral and farming system with feudal land tenure and (formerly) a divine kingship; the work of the Finnish Lutheran (1870) and Rhenish Lutheran (1890-1915) Missions prior to the South African Mandate; the setting up in Ovamboland of a South African Administration and the operation of the policy of indirect rule; the early history, policies, methods, and effect of St. Mary's Anglican Mission; the Administration's Mission policy, in particular the dispute over the effects and the regulation of Mission education; finally, a short survey of developments 1940-1964.

The paper concludes that, while the Lutheran Mission adopted a largely negative attitude toward African culture, and the Anglican Mission and the Administration had an express policy of preserving those aspects of African culture not contrary to their respective principles,

both of the latter groups in fact contributed to the decline of tribal society. The Administration, by requiring African leaders to implement Government policy, gradually worked a considerable change in the tribal government, while the Mission, principally by its condemnation of polygyny, tended to create a schism between pagan and Christian society. After the dispute of the 1930's was resolved by Administration subsidy and regulation of education, both Missions and tribal leaders were in effect co-ordinated with the Government policy of maintaining order, promoting slow, controlled Europeanization, and ensuring an adequate labor supply for the European area of South West Africa.

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Introduction

This paper is not intended to be an exhaustive history of Ovamboland, but, as the title indicates, is an attempt to discern the general outlines of Mission-Government relations in Ovamboland before 1940, and the relationship of both institutions to Ambo tribal society. My source material has necessarily been largely limited to published materials in English, principally the annual Reports of the South West Africa Administration (which cease regular publication in 1940, hence the terminal date) and the publications of the Anglican Mission, supplemented by interviews with Mission personnel.

THE BACKGROUND OF AMBO HISTORY

1. The Environment

"Ovamboland is a flat, sandy country intersected by a network of broad, shallow watercourses known as oshanas. In the north it is covered by thick belts of sub-tropical vegetation while in the south large open grass plains, fringed with bush, are met with. It is bounded on the north by Angola, on the south by the Etosha Pan Game Reserve, on the east by the thickly-wooded Oshimpoveld, and on the west by the Kaokoveld. The average annual rainfall is about 77 inches. During good rainy seasons the oshanas become flooded from the north submerging at times as much as three-fifths of the country. In the dry season, on the other hand, the large grass-covered stretches formed by them offer good grazing for stock. In them also are dug the waterholes and storage reservoirs for rain water. On the raised ground between the oshanas the inhabitants make their fields and build their kraals."[1]

The above description, written by longtime Ovamboland native commissioner C. H. Hahn, gives a good outline of the physical environment which forms the stage for the culture and history of Ovamboland. Seasonal rains, varying widely from year to year (Hahn's estimate of 77 inches per annum is probably high; other guesses go as low as 20 inches), and fertile, stoneless soil provide for an uncertain alternation of plenty and famine. The saline soil of the southern portion, suitable chiefly for agriculture, becomes increasingly fertile as one proceeds northward, and hence can also provide grazing land for larger herds of cattle than is true in the south.[2] The present area of the Ovamboland reserve is 4,201,000 hectares (27).

2. The People

The land is inhabited (with the exception of scattered Bushmen and a few Ovahimbo and Omushaka in the extreme west and east respectively) by the Ambo, a Bantu-speaking people thought by anthropologists to be of mixed Negroid and Mediterranean Caucausoid ancestry.[3] There are eight Ambo tribes: the Kuanyama, Ndonga, Kuambi, Mbalantu, Kualuthi, Ngandjera, Nkolonkathi and Eunda. Of these, the Kuanyama and Ndonga are by far the largest, constituting over half of the total population and a similar proportion of the area; the Nkolonbathi and Eunda tribes are extremely small, and grouped together for administrative purposes. The total population of Ovamboland was estimated variously between 117,000 and 85,000 in the 1920's, was recorded as 107,861 in the first rough census in 1934, and is given as 239,363 for 1960.[4] The Kuanyama and Ndonga were estimated to number 25-45,000 and 40-45,000 respectively before the census, recorded as 41,215 and 34,195 respectively in 1934, and are now given as 87,511 and 68,601 respectively.[5]

3. The Economy

Economically the Ambo are dependent upon both stock-raising and agriculture. Cattle culture is primarily the province of the men and boys, who keep the cattle, thought to be a mixture of Zebu, Hamitic, and (very recently) Afrikander strains, at grazing outposts to the east and (formerly) north for most of the year. Aside from cattle, the livestock include goats, pigs and domestic fowl with some mules; a few horses and sheep have been introduced recently.[6] The crops cultivated by the women consist largely of millet, supplemented by sorghum, beans and various fruits and nuts. Crops are planted in the Southern Hemisphere spring (November-December) at the beginning of the summer rains, and

harvested in April-May.[7] Aside from agriculture and stock-raising, the Ambo are skilled at a number of crafts, and have generally impressed outsiders as being intelligent and competent.

4. Ambo Society

The basic economic and social unit of the Ambo is the individual family kraal (eumbo) consisting of the owner, his wife or wives, children (which may include married children),[8] and visiting young relatives or friends. The traditional kraal itself is a large, circular palisade of sticks containing a maze of passageways leading to the various huts and areas, the whole occupying about an acre; today, however, smaller kraals are sometimes in evidence as are a few European-style rectangular houses.

The land for the kraaland its surrounding gardens is granted to the kraal head by the local sub-headman, who in turn holds it from the headman; in former times the headmen held land from the chief of the particular tribe, who in theory owned the whole country and in fact did exercise a large degree of control over the possession of land. The land itself is not inherited but reverts to the lessee; personal property and cattle, according to the Ambo matrilineal system, pass to the sister's sons and maternal relatives of a deceased man, or to the children and relatives of a deceased woman.

In the individual family, the kraal head exercises the same patriarchal authority that the chief did over the country as a whole. In pagan kraals (now a minority) he usually has several wives, polygyny having been, with some exceptions in the northwest and among the poor, overwhelmingly the rule.[9] Of these the first wife has considerably higher status than the rest. The status of women generally, because of

their importance as agriculturists, is fairly high, and a wife, subject to certain payments, has the right to leave her husband if mistreated.[10] Children are the property of the wife rather than the husband, and in fact often have considerable independence themselves, sometimes choosing to live with relatives rather than their parents.

Young people of both sexes formerly had initiation rites. The circumcision of boys was discontinued among the Kuanyama during the reign of Musipandeka (1861-1881) and before that among the Ndonga. The efundula rite for girls, a series of rituals including tests for pregnancy and a ceremony symbolizing the chief's ownership of all women, still is common among the non-Christian Kuanyama; there exists a similar rite, the Ohango, among the pagan Ndonga and western tribes. After efundula girls become the wives of their fiancees with a feast and procession; pregnancy before the efundula is a scandal and was formerly punished by death for both the girl and her lover. In addition to the above ceremonies, there is also a second marriage ceremony, the ehombolo, marking the husband's acquisition of his own kraal; this rite is now dying out, and the anthropologist Loeb believes it to have been of fairly recent (19th century) origin.[11]

On a larger scale, the Ambo tribes are divided into matrilineal, exogamous clans; Loeb lists 29 of these for the Kuanyama and 27 for the Ndonga. Traditionally many clans are associated with specific occupations, such as wood-carving, pottery-making, or doctoring, but in practice these are not confined to the respective clans. Both the Ndonga and Kuanyama have a royal and a semi-royal noble clan, although again, since the late 19th century, useful individuals of other clans were given noble status. Although some clans have the reputation of being poor and low

in status, there was never a slave clan, as captured slaves (as opposed to hired servants, who are still common) were before the abolition of slavery adopted into the clan of their masters. The two generally respected professions, witchcraft and blacksmithing, are likewise not limited to a particular clan. While clan membership is an important contributing factor to social status, wealth, age and, more recently, education, are also important, and the clan system seems to be in the process of disintegration.[12]

5. Political Structure

Originally, all of the large Ambo tribes had chiefs similar to the Kuanyama chiefs described by Loeb.[13] He was a "divine king" i.e., considered to possess the spirit of the high god Kalunga, and his power was, in theory, absolute. In practice he was limited by custom and was expected to rely on his advisers drawn from the headmen and his relatives, especially his mother. This is illustrated by the form for notifying an Ambo chief of his accession, given by C. H. Hahn:

> Our chief has gone. All the good and great deeds achieved by him were gained through the good advice and guidance of his councillors and elders. You will follow him and keep his tribe alive.[14]

Matters of state such as war and missionary relations were particularly subject to consultation.[15]

The chief was the final court of appeal in all disputes, cases being handled first by local headmen. The chief's revenues included judicial fees, offerings in connection with land grants and other royal prerogatives, and his share of the spoils of war, from both the frequent raids on other tribes and expeditions against recalcitrant subjects.

The campaigns were conducted by others, as the chiefs were forbidden by custom from either fighting in person or leaving their own territory. In general the chiefs were both venerated and feared, respect for their divinity being reinforced by the cruelty with which they often punished offenders and rivals.

Succession to the chieftainship was, like normal inheritance, matrilinear; the chief was succeeded either by his brother or by his sister's son. The chief's sons, while noble during his lifetime, had no claim to the throne. There was frequently competition by rival claimants during the chief's lifetime and open warfare after his death.

As will be related in detail below, the advent of European government has brought about some changes in the working of Ambo politics. Today only the Ndonga, [illegible], Ongandjera, and Kualuthi have chiefs, the other tribes being governed by councils of headmen.

6. Religion

The traditional Ovambo religious world view is that of a "three-decker universe." The upper world is the realm of the high god, Kalunga, a pleasant place with plentiful rain and rich harvests, where dwell the souls of noblemen. In the middle is the world of the living, where rich and poor dwell together and there is only such rain as filters through from above. In the lower world the souls of the poor lead a shadow existence in a land of drought and poverty.[16] Although acknowledged as Supreme Being, Kalunga is a remote figure and, according to most accounts, more importance is attached to worship and invocation of ancestral spirits, and to assorted magic aimed at thwarting the efforts of malicious ghosts. The Anglican missionary Dymond saw in the mediatorial

role of ancestral spirits a reflection of the importance of mediation in Ambo social relations.[17] Kalunga, however, was thought of as having a special connection with the royal house, and it was from him that the sacred fire, guarded in the kraal of the chiefs and distributed thence to nobles and all other kraals, was thought to stem.

Both in dealing with the spirit world to obtain prosperity, and in detecting the "witches" thought to be the cause of disease, the doctors played an important role in Ambo society. Loeb distinguished four grades of doctors among the Kuanyama: herbalists of both sexes, doctors qualified to sacrifice, exorcise, and detect witches, doctors qualified in addition for some special rite, like the opening of kraals, and "doctor-teachers" qualified to initiate others; all homosexuals are classes as doctors, and all doctors have some contact with homosexuals.[18] Some accounts of the missionaries place great stress on the doctors' use of their influence for extortion of wealth and influence.[19] However, the Roman Catholic missionary Estermann, probably rightly, maintained their integrity:

> Un mot encore sur la sincéreté des féticheurs. Par la force des choses je suis arrivé - du reste Tönjes était déjà parvenu plus ou moins à la même conclusion - que la grande majorité parmi eux est absolument de bonne foi, quand elle affirme remplir une vocation sacrée, imposée par l'esprit, et qu'il faut la suivre sans défaillir, sous pecue de subir la vengeance de l'esprit irrité. Qu'il y ait des imposteurs parmi eux, comme dans toutes les professions, personne ne voudra le contester.[20]

In any case, the doctors enjoyed great respect among the Ambo themselves, and often exercised considerable power in war and matters of state. They are still often respected, but decreasing in numbers with growth of Christianity.

The religious year of the Ambo was closely geared to the agricultural

cycle. As described by Loeb for the Kuanyama, it consists of a New Years festival during the heavy rains of January or February, involving the blessing of the new millet and heavy drinking of amarula wine; the cattle dances at the end of the rains in March or April when the cattle are brought back from the outposts for a short period; a series of harvest ceremonies when the millet and sorghum ripen in May and June; and the epena in August, which was preceded by a great hunt and marked the beginning of the dry season with beer drinking. The epena was the occasion for the efundula or circumcision if one was to be held. Of these, the cattle ceremony had the least overt religious significance and is hence still allowed to Christians; the epena has ceased with the disappearance of circumcised kings. Similar ceremonies are found in the other Ambo tribes; those of the Ndonga differ in the importance allowed to the queen mother as opposed to the role of the King or leading men among the Kuanyama, and the importance of the rain-making ceremony in the spring.[21]

Chapter 1 - Footnotes

[1]C. H. Hahn, "The Ovambo," The Native Tribes of South West Africa (Cape Town, 1928), p. 1.

[2]Edwin M. Loeb, In Feudal Africa (Bloomington, 1962), p. 3.

[3]Loeb, p. 4.

[4]Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West African Affairs (Odendaal Report) (Pretoria, 1964), p. 8.

[5]Report of the Administrator of South West Africa (Cape Town, 1925), (hereinafter cited as South West Africa Report), p. 30; (1935), p. 102; Odendaal Report, p. 35.

[6]Loeb, pp. 145, 146.

[7]Loeb, pp. 151, 154.

[8]Loeb, p. 253.

[9]G. Estermann, "La Tribu Kuanyama en face de la civilisation europeene," Africa, VII (1934), p. 436; Hahn, p. 24.

[10]Loeb, pp. 137, 257.

[11]Loeb, passim.

[12]Loeb, passim.

[13]pp. 22-65.

[14]p. 14.

[15]Loeb, p. 53.

[16]Heinrich Vedder, South West Africa in Early Times (London, 1938), pp. 74, 75; Loeb, p. 209.

[17]G. W. Dymond, Ovamboland Mission Quarterly (July 1945) (hereinafter cited as Quarterly).

[18]p. 122, 123.

[19]H. Kling, Onder die Kindere von Cham (Cape Town, 1932), pp. 209, 210.

[20]p. 441.

[21]Loeb, pp. 213-22, 276-9.

OVAMBOLAND BEFORE THE ANGLICAN MISSION

1. Early History

The chief source for the early history of the Ambo people is oral tradition. According to this, the tribe came originally from the region of the Great Lakes, and, after a long migration, arrived in their present land at a time usually estimated as the 15th-16th century. The Herero, whose tribal land has traditionally been the area south of Ovamboland, arrived in South West Africa at approximately the same time, and allusions in the traditional histories of both groups indicate a common origin. (The name Ovambo means "people with ehambo," cattle outposts, as distinct from the still nomadic Herero.)[1]

When they arrived in present-day Ovamboland, the Ambo were one tribe under the leadership of Sitehnu. However, a series of schisms and fusions gradually produced the eight tribes now extant. Kavangeko, the first in the Kuanyama list of chiefs, is estimated by Vedder to have lived around 1610; he, like Kuanyama chiefs until the 19th century, was subject to the ruler of Humbe to the north-west. More than half of Kuanyamaland was in what is now Angola, and the royal kraals of the 19th century chiefs, along with the sacred grove used for the burial of chiefs and rainmaking ceremonies, was near Odjiva, the present-day Pereira d'Eca.[2] The Ndonga tribe resulted from the fusion of the Osambi and Onibuenge peoples, and long displayed a tendency to split into its component parts.

The first white man to describe Ovamboland was Andrew Battels, an English deserter from the Portuguese army who passed through in the 16th century; the explorer Wikar in 1778 likewise published second-hand reports of the Ambo obtained from tribes further south.[3] Continued

contact with Europeans began, however, with the visit of the explorer Charles Andersson and the Cape diplomat Sir Francis Galton in 1851. They met the Ndonga chief Nangolo, but offended him by refusing to go through a customary ritual which involved being spat upon by the chief to signify purification from hostile intentions. They were forced to return without going beyond the Ndonga area.

They were followed in 1857 by the Rhenish Mission pioneer Hugo Hahn. Accompanied by another missionary, Rath, and the hunter Frederick Green, he likewise penetrated to the kraal of Nangolo. Even less willing to compromise with heathen custom than Andersson and Galton, Hahn succeeded in arousing yet more hostility and had to make a similarly speedy departure. As the party withdrew, they were attacked by a large band of armed Ndonga. A massacre was prevented only by the sudden death of Nangolo, which threw the Ndonga forces into confusion. This attack upon the missionaries (who were under Nama protection, and the succession dispute following Nangolo's death, gave the Nama chieftain Jonker Afrikaaner a pretext to assert his suzerainty over Ovamboland.[4]

The Ndonga were divided into two realms under the brothers Shikango and Shipango, Nangolo's heirs, when the expedition of Namas and Hereros sent by Afrikaaner introduced gun warfare into Ovamboland. The result was humiliating defeat for the Ndonga, who lost many hostages and cattle. A second Nama expedition in 1860 penetrated into Kuanyama territory, and defeated the Kuanyama forces at Ompanda, south of Odjiva. The Namas retreated with huge herds of cattle, but lost many of them, and men as well, through rinderpest and malaria. The end result was that Shikango saw the necessity of obtaining firearms, which

he did from the Nama at Omaruru; with this advantage he united Ondonga under his rule, warded off further Nama incursions, and gained for the Ndonga temporary predominance in Ovamboland.[5]

Hahn returned to Ovamboland in 1866, and was welcomed by Shikango in Ondonga. This time he was allowed to proceed to Ukuanyama, which had by this time been made a strong independent state under Haimbili. (cc. 1811-1859). Hahn met his successor, Musipandeka, and reported him also "well disposed toward missionaries."[6] Hahn's missionary reconnaissance, along with the explorations of Galton and Andersson, made Ovamboland known directly to the outside world, and for the first time it was possible to consider it as a field of missionary endeavour.

2. The Finnish Mission 1870-1915

Hahn's expeditions were part of the larger picture of mid-19th century South West Africa. The protracted series of conflicts between the well-armed Nama led by Jonker Afrikaaner and the Herero were rapidly leading to the impoverishment and decimation of the latter tribe. The work of the Rhenish Mission among the Herero was failing because of the unsettled condition of the country, and there was interest in finding new fields. Hahn's expeditions made evident the opportunity that existed in Ovamboland, and he was able to arrange for two Ambo boys, sons of Chief Shikango, to enter the Rhenish Mission school at Okahandja. By this time, however, the Rhenish Mission was not in a position to expand their work further, and new human and financial resources were needed to begin the evangelization of Ovamboland.[7]

These resources were supplied for the next fifty years by the Church of Finland. In 1859, on the one-thousandth anniversary of the martyrdom

of St. Henry, the Finnish Missionary Society had been founded as the official organ of the Finnish Lutherans for religious publishing and home and foreign evangelism. By 1868 the Society was ready to undertake overseas work, and chose to send the first party to South West Africa to seek virgin territory. There they were welcomed by the Rhenish Mission and, after a period of preparation, Dr. Martii Rautanen led the first group to Ondonga in 1870[8]

Despite promising beginnings, hostility was soon encountered. This was, according to one report, encouraged by traders whose trade in arms, liquor and trinkets for slaves, ivory and cattle was endangered; the missionaries' condemnation of polygyny, always a sore point in Ovamboland, and their refusal to participate in pagan ceremonies probably also played a part. At any rate, the progress of the mission in Ondonga was slow and difficult, and attempts to start work among other tribes had to be abandoned. When at last in 1881 four converts were baptized, the ceremony had to take place in Herero territory to avoid repercussions.

Nevertheless work continued, centered around Rautanen's mission at Olukonda, near the Chief's kraal and not far from present-day Ondangua. Medical and educational work was undertaken, and the New Testament and part of the Old were translated into Osindonga, the local dialect, by Dr. Rautanen. By 1891, the year that the Rhenish Mission began work in Ukuanyama (see below), there were 21 converts, and the process of forming a Christian community had begun.[9]

It was during this period (beginning in 1884) that the German government was establishing its authority in South West Africa, which, however, had little effect on Ovamboland, for the Germans lacked sufficient forces to occupy Ovamboland as well as subjugate the Herero.

There was inconclusive fighting at the German fort at Namutoni between Ndonga and German forces during the Herero wars of the 1904-5, but in general there was little contact, and the German government limited access to Ovamboland to missionaries and a few traders.

The turning of the tide for the Finnish Mission was the conversion at this point of Chief Martin (cc. 1900-1942) and of his mother Umtalene, who also, as Queen mother, exercised great influence. With this coup, both the number of conversions and the extent of mission work began to increase. By the beginning of the First World War there was a seminary for African pastors, a teacher training school, and a hospital. Converts to Christianity numbered 3,050 and members of the missionary body, 40.[10] Of the eight outstations, five (Ontauanga, Onayena, Osigambo, Oniipa, and Ondangua) were in Ondonga; in addition there were Elim in Ukuambi, Rehoboth in Ongandjera, and Tschandi in Ukualuthi, the last being, at 81 m. from Olukonda, the most remote. Of the missionaries of this period, two in particular are often mentioned as having won great respect: Rautanen himself, who stayed in Ovamboland 57 years, and the medical Dr. Selma Rainio, who came in 1908 and was to remain until her death in 1939.[11]

3. Roman Catholic Attempts

At the same time that the Finns were establishing themselves in Ondonga, an ill-starred Roman Catholic mission had begun work in northern Ukuanjama. Fr. Duparquet traveled through Ovamboland in 1879 from South West Africa; he met Musipandeka, whom he found dressed in European fashion and apparently favorable to mission work. In 1884, with the permission of Nahmandi, Musipandeka's successor as chief of the Kuanyama,

Duparquet returned to establish a mission at Ondjivo. He brought with him Fr. Delpesch and Brothers Charles and Gerald. At the same time two traders named DeWitt and Sabatta were invited by Nahmandi to establish a store at Ondjivo, and the Kuanyama seemed ready to accept Europeans in their midst on a permanent basis.[12]

All this was suddenly changed by Nahmandi's death in August of 1884. According to the botanist Schinz, who visited the country two years later, Nahmandi was poisoned by his sister, the mother of his heir Uejulu; while friendly to whites, Nahmandi was apparently regarded as a tyrant by his own people. At any rate, his death was the signal for a purge of Europeans. Fr. Delpesch and Bro. Charles were killed; Bro. Gerald managed to escape and, with Fr. Duparquet, who was in Humbe at the time, withdrew to Huila. The traders were dispossessed of all their goods, including large numbers of cattle received from the late chief, and narrowly escaped with their lives. The missionaries were accused of having poisoned the chief, and the fact that they had given him brandy was cited as evidence; however, the Anglican missionary Tobias is of the opinion that this was a pretext, and that the killing of any strangers present for witchcraft at the death of a chief was a traditional practice; Bishop Gibson, travelling through Ovamboland in 1903, found traders still loath to live there permanently for this reason. Moreover, Loeb received information that the tribal doctors resented the missionaries' presence and instigated the killings for that reason.[13]

At any rate, it was long before the Roman Mission in Ukuanjama re-established itself. Attempts were made to win the favour of the new Chief, Uejulu, and to start missions at Evale, to the north of Ukuanyama and at Matadiva. Uejulu's death, and that of his mother,

Ndatjoli, in 1903, hampered the attempts, and the hostility of Chief Mandume, who suspected the Mission of collaboration with the Portuguese government, in 1912 finally brought an end to the Roman Catholic Mission efforts until after the war.[14]

4. The Rhenish Mission

In 1891, the Lutherans of the Finnish Mission were at last joined by their Rhenish brethren, who, led by the Rev. P. Brinckner entered Ukuanyama to fill the vacuum left by the eviction of the Roman Catholics. According to the Roman Catholic missionary Keiling, Nahmandi had already invited the Lutherans because he preferred them to Duparquet.[15] Both Chief Uejulu and his mother, Ndatjoli, were friendly to the Mission, giving them land and protection. The missionaries for their part respected Uejulu, who was not only hospitable to Europeans, but uncommonly humane and just to his own subjects; he broke with the tradition that the Chief had to kill his father upon accession, and upon one occasion allowed the missionaries to save the life of a person accused of killing a prominent tribesman by witchcraft.[16]

Despite this hospitality, however, the mission made slow progress. There was widespread hostility among the doctors and headmen. In one instance in 1892 the mission church bell was blamed for causing a drought, and Christian converts were frequently threatened, assaulted, or kidnapped.[17] Their problems were increased by the death of Uejulu and his mother in 1903, as his successors, Nande (Chief 1903-1911) and Mandume (1911-1917) were less enthusiastic than Uejulu about Europeans; indeed, Bp. Gibson reported rumors that Uejulu was poisoned by Nande and his supporters, who feared that he would not resist the encroachments of

the Portuguese strongly enough. While the Mission by 1915 now headed by the Rev. F. Wulfhorst, had expanded to four stations (Ondjiva, Namecunde, Omatemba, and Ompanda, all in present-day Angola) and had made about 700 converts, it had made comparatively little impact on the Kuanyama tribe as a whole. Through them, however, the Kuanyama made an impact on the outside world, for the linguistic and anthropological writings of Brinckner, H. Tonjes, and K. Sckar formed the groundwork for most later writing on Ovamboland.[18]

5. Lutheran Mission Policy

In general, the attitude of the Lutheran missions seems to have been one of strong pessimism in regard to tribal culture, with the accompanying tendency to make Europeanization a part of Christianization.

In the former respect, the description of Ambo life by Kling, drawn from the accounts of Lutheran missionaries, provides a good illustration:

> Met die huislike lewe staan dit, volgens ons christlike begrippe, allertruerigs. Die Ovambo-huis is n'somber plek van bygeloof, toordery, hopeloosheid en elleude.[19]
>
> Home conditions are, by our Christian standards, very depressing. The Ovambo house is a somber place of superstition, witchcraft, hopelessness and destitution.

The doctors in particular, with strong emphasis on their cruelty and unscrupulousness, form one of the main themes of Kling's account of the Rhenish Mission and of the stories by the Finnish missionary Pettinen which Kling relates.[20]

As a logical consequence of this pessimism, the Lutheran Missionaries of this period tended to have, in the words of Estermann, "une opposition presque irreductible a' la plupart des coutumes indige'nes."[21] For

converts to Christianity this entailed not only rejection of the efundula and other religious practices, but also the abandonment of traditional dress and the red ointment of the women in favor of European clothes. For the tribe as a whole it meant missionary attempts to intervene on behalf of witchcraft suspects, as mentioned above, and disregard for traditional taboos. As examples of the latter may be mentioned Tonjes' entry of the sacred grove near Odjiva where the chiefs were buried, and his advice to Uejulu to hold a cattle census despite the belief that counting cattle would cause plague.[22]

In the positive aspects of the mission, evangelism and education, the same tendency toward Europeanization is observable. Kling reports the use of European implements--stoves, etc.--to win the interest and respect of the Kuanyama, and stresses the special welcome given the missionaries by the poor and humble looking for protection from their own tribal leaders. He also reports an instance of particularly effective evangelism in the comparatively European environment of the mines at Tsumeb.[23] In education as well, a subsequent assessment of the Finnish schools (the South-West Africa Director of Education's report on Ovamboland in 1926) stresses the same points, that the primary emphasis had been on imparting European culture, and that tribal tradition had been largely disregarded.[24]

It should not be forgotten that a large part, and perhaps the major part, of the Missions' appeal was purely religious, based on respect for the strength and devotion of the missionaries, heroic men that they by and large were. In addition, however, it seems indisputable that non-theological factors played a large part in both the success and the effect of the Missions, and that there was in particular a strong

reciprocal relationship with the moral, educational, and material aspects of European culture. That is to say that whatever respect there was for Europeans and whatever admiration or envy existed of their skills and possessions worked to the benefit of the missions. Conversely, wherever the Missions had effect they imparted a strong bias toward the standards and skills of European society, to the detriment of the continuation of tribal custom. All of this was to be most important in determining subsequent mission-government relations, as will be seen below.

Chapter 2 - Footnotes

[1]Loeb, p. 372.

[2]Loeb, p. 23.; Vedder, pp. 15, 28

[3]Vedder, pp. 15, 28.

[4]Vedder, pp. 269, 270.

[5]Vedder, pp. 270, 271; Loeb, p. 27; Hahn, p. 19.

[6]Loeb, pp. 23, 27.

[7]Vedder, p. 307; Kling, p. 217.

[8]"The Finnish Mission" (anon.), South African Outlook, LXXXI (April 1956), p. 56.

[9]Ibid.

[10]S. M. Pritchard, Report on Town to Ovamboland (Cape Town, 1915) p. 22; "The Finnish Mission," p. 57.

[11]W. A. DeKlerk, Drie Swervers Oor die Einders (Cape Town n.d.), p. 171; Pritchard, pp. 56, 57.

[12]W. B. DeWitt and J. van Moltke, "A Soldier's Life and Adventures," South West Africa Annual 1948, p. 141; Mosis Keiling, Quarenta Anos de Africa (Fraio-Braga, N.D.), pp. 141, 192; Estermann, p. 433.

[13]Loeb, pp. 28, 29; DeWitt, pp. 145, 149; Rt. Rev. A. G. S. Gibson, Between Cape Town and Loanda (London, 1905), p. 152; Rt. Rev. George Tobias (interview).

[14]Keiling, pp. 141, 192; Loeb, p. 29.

[15]Keiling, loc. cit.

[16]Loeb, p. 27.

[17]Kling, pp. 217, 218.

[18]Gibson, p. 155; Loeb, pp. 32, 37; Pritchard, pp. 12, 22.

[19]Kling, p. 213.

[20]Kling, pp. 209-210, 214.

[21]Estermann, p. 434.

[22]Loeb, pp. 25, 32, 67.

[23]Kling, pp. 226-229, 240.

[24]South West Africa Report (1927), pp. 56, 57.

OVAMBOLAND UNDER THE MANDATE

1. The Coming of the South African Administration

In 1915 Ovamboland was drawn into the pattern of world conflict, with the final result that the former state of effective independence was ended and a gradually increasing exertion of European control. At the same time that South African forces were invading German South-West Africa from the Union, a Portuguese force was preparing to attack the Germans from the north. The vanguard of this force, under General Pereira d'Eca, began the campaign by attacking the Kuanyama under Chief Mandume, who had been responsible for several skirmishes with Portuguese troops before, and who, although in fact independent, was in theory a rebellious Portuguese subject. A major battle resulted at Omongua, issuing in a costly defeat for Mandume and his retreat to the south.[1]

Meanwhile, the new South African Administration in South-West Africa had sent an army officer, one Major Pritchard, to Ovamboland to inform the tribes of the change of governments. Pritchard reached Ondonga shortly after Mandume's defeat. He found Chief Martin most receptive toward the advent of South African rule, both because he wanted protection from the retreating Mandume and his Portuguese pursuers, whom he feared would carry their war into Ndonga territory, and because he needed outside help to cope with a famine which, in the absence of the grain which the German government had sent to the missions in bad years, was reaching catastrophic proportions.[2] Pritchard therefore proceeded to Ukuanyama to determine what the situation was between Mandume and the Portuguese.

Pritchard met Mandume at Namecunde, a Rhenish mission about seven miles north of the present Angola border. Mandume insisted that the

Portuguese were the aggressors and that he had always been the ruler of an independent tribe rather than a Portuguese subject; nevertheless, he too appealed for protection and offered to place himself under the King of England and the South African Government. Pritchard was unfavorably impressed by Mandume, who had aroused some hostility among his own people by breaking taboos and excessive cruelty. He agreed, however, to ask his government for permission to allow Mandume into South-West Africa, and proceeded to contact Pereira d'Eca to find out what the Portuguese position was.[3]

The General's reply left no doubt that he considered Mandume simply a rebellious subject, and revealed that Mandume had in fact not been guiltless in the skirmishes which led up to the campaign. Pereira d'Eca stated, however, that he had no intention of crossing the border in pursuit of Mandume. It was agreed that Namacunde would be accepted as the border pending further negotiation and both countries were to station officers there. (The Germans and Portuguese had established a line running due east from the falls of the Cunene to the Okavango River as the border; it had, however, never been surveyed, nor was it specified which of the two sets of falls was intended.) A neutral zone was established south of the border into which Mandume was not to be allowed, and it was agreed that a Portuguese garrison be stationed at Ompanda.[4]

One of the by-products of the Portuguese occupation was the demise of the Rhenish Mission. The missionaries feared the hostility of the Portuguese, which probably stemmed from the fact that the missions were illegally on the Portuguese side of the border, and from the actions of missionaries in the past in helping slaves escape from the Portuguese.[5] They consequently abandoned their stations in Angola, and, afflicted by

a shortage of men and money as well as by this disaster, subsequently turned their work over to the Finnish Mission.[6] The Kuanyama converts of the Rhenish Mission for the most part followed their missionaries to the South African occupied area and formed the nucleus of the mission which the Finns subsequently established at Engela. The Finnish Mission also made several attempts to re-establish work in Angola, but was frustrated by government opposition, leaving the field open for the ultimate return of the Roman Catholic Mission.

The main result of the events of 1915, however, was to bring Ovamboland into direct contact with the South African regime in South West Africa, a contact which soon led to conflict. A Native Affairs Commissioner was stationed at Ondangua to represent the Windhoek administration, and a subordinate officer placed at Namacunde to oversee the border and supervise the activities of the Kuanyama, particularly those of Mandume. This proved to be no easy task; Mandume still regarded himself as lord of the Kuanyama in Angola and throughout 1916 instituted a series of raids to punish headmen who displeased him. In April of that year he was responsible for the murder of one such headman, and refused to go to Windhoek to stand trial.[7]

Mandume's actions and the inability of Major Fairlie, the officer in charge at Namacunde, to restrain him, drew strong protests from the Portuguese. This was increased after October 30, 1916, when Mandume, undeterred by the small South African garrison which had been placed in Namacunde shortly before, ambushed a Portuguese patrol which had been lured into the neutral zone, and killed 18 men. It was finally determined to send a South African expeditionary force to deal with Mandume, and, after the rejection of a final call to surrender, the

force, consisting of about 700 mounted troops under Lieut.-Col. Matthew de Jager, arrived in Ovamboland.

De Jager was welcomed by Chief Martin in Ondonga, who supplied the expedition with guides and bearers. A number of Kuanyama headmen as well either defected to de Jager or sent messages stating their intention not to aid Mandume. As Mandume remained defiant de Jager proceeded to Namecunde, where he received intelligence from friendly Kuanyamas that Mandume's main force, 6-900 men under his lieutenant Kalola, was waiting in ambush between Namecunde and Mandume's kraal at Ehole. De Jager's force managed to outflank the ambush and, attacking from the rear, found Mandume with only his bodyguard of 2-300 men. In a short, sharp skirmish the African chieftain was killed by machine gun fire, and his forces quickly dispersed.[8]

With Mandume gone, resistance collapsed. De Jager called a meeting of all the headmen of the tribe, who flocked to make their submission and profess their relief at Mandume's death.[9] Mandume's cattle and property were confiscated in the name of the government, and, as no heir to the throne existed, authority over the tribe was given to a council of headmen, subject to the advice of the commissioner in Namecunde. With this coup the autonomy of Ovamboland was finally at an end, and the era of South African administration had begun in earnest.

2. South African Administration to 1940

In surveying the policy of the South African Administration in Ovamboland, it is instructive to note the recommendations of Major Pritchard in 1915 and those of South West African Administrator Gorges in the report of the de Jager expedition of 1917, because both stress the basic guidelines of future policy: minimum necessary government

for law and order, and the cultivation of the supply of labor. Pritchard wrote "I have purposely dwelt somewhat fully in the prevailing distress and the barbarous conditions which have existed in the north of Ovamboland in order to point out how pressing is the obligation to establish good government and to restore law and order where necessary." Further on, he continues, "But, apart from the moral obligation resting on the Government, Ovamboland, as a potential source of labor supply, constitutes an important factor in the general economic position of the Protectorate."[10]

South West Africa Administrator Gorges gave a detailed plan:

> Ovamboland for many years to come must be administered by its Chiefs with as little interference by the white man as possible, except, of course, when demanded in the interests of good order and humanity.
>
> Its chief value to us is the large supply of labour it affords for the needs of the European community of this Protectorate. By cultivating good relations with the Chiefs and by providing the labourers with the protection and assistance of the officers specially detailed for that purpose on the mines and elsewhere the prosperity of the tribes and a feeling of trust and confidence in the Administration will, without a doubt, be assured.
>
> It is much too early to think of European methods of government to be applied to these people. It would be unwise to assume that they accept us and our assurances at our own valuation. We have to outlive the very natural suspicions in the mind of all natives that white men enter a country for land-grabbing purposes. Once they feel satisfied that we are not there to supplant the Chiefs, to levy tribute, to seize land or crops or cattle or otherwise to despoil the people, they will give us unquestionable loyalty. A policy of waiting and watching is the one eminently suited to the situation in Ovamboland. We have disposed of the great disturbing element that existed in that area, and there is nothing in sight to prevent the peaceful settling down of the Chiefs and the people of that portion of the Protectorate.[11]

This high degree of indirect rule, dictated by the isolation of Ovamboland and its remoteness from European settlement was unusual in Southern Africa, where the tendency had been toward the imposition of

European-style elective councils; it was to be, however, the basic philosophy of the Administration during the period under consideration.

As it worked out in practice, the administration in this period consisted of a Native Commissioner, a medical officer, and a clerk at Ondangua, and a subordinate officer at Namacunde to oversee the Kuanyama and the border. These were assisted by a number of police "boys." The Native Commissioner from cc. 1921 to 1947, C. H. Hahn, was the grandson of the Rev. Hugo Hahn and earned the name Shongola (from ongola, meaning whip) from the instrument with which he pursued a grain thief during a famine in the early part of his career in Ovamboland.[12] He was a man of strong character and won much respect from the tribes.

While the administration tried to intervene in the affairs of the individual tribes as little as possible, its influence on Ambo life did not remain, as it was described in the 1923 Administrator Report, "purely moral."[13] Murder and rape could be tried only in Windhoek, and appeal in other cases lay to the Commissioners and thence to Windhoek, although tribal law formed the basis for decisions in the latter cases. The right of chiefs and landlords to arbitrarily remove land was also limited to stabilize tenure, and in Ukuanyama, where the government representative could sit in the council in place of the former chief, he also had veto power over all laws. Nevertheless, the bulk of legal and administrative business was still handled, as in the past, by tribal leaders.[14]

In Ovamboland, as in South-West Africa, as a whole, the administration was under considerable pressure from the white population, the Afrikaans and German farmers as well as the Mining Companies, to secure

an adequate labor supply for the south. The Administrator Report for 1921 states "it was...the duty [of District Commandants in South West Africa] ...to see that all available labour was utilized--they were, in fact, the golden bridge between the farmer and the native labourer," and refers further on to "The native question which, in South West Africa is synonymous with the labour question."[15]

Particularly during the labor shortage of the early 1920's it was necessary to apply pressure to obtain labor in the face of poor conditions in the mine compounds, the arduous journey on foot to Tsumeb necessary for employment, and the risk of being rejected for health reasons upon arrival. The report quoted above goes on to say,

> Every effort is being made to stimulate the recruiting of natives in Ovamboland for service in the Territory [the European portion of South West Africa]. . . The natives the Territory have been obedient and peaceable, but exhibit a disinclination for work. One of the Chiefs in Ovamboland, Spumbu, has not been so amenable as could be expected, and has had to be censured by the Resident Commissioner for dereliction of his duties.[16]

Subsequently the building of a road into Ovamboland, the improvement of mine conditions, the physical screening of applicants before departure, and the institution of a rebate system and a store at Ondangua enabling workers to receive and spend their pay in Ovamboland, all worked to promote recruitment and ameliorate the labor shortage, which in fact became a surplus during the depression years.

A series of droughts (1929-30), coupled with the lack of jobs because of the depression and the greater concentration of population (caused by the cession of the neutral zone to Angola in 1926 and the consequent southward migration of most of the population), produced serious famine conditions for several years. The Administration tried to ease the hardship by a public works program which employed several

thousand people and created valuable roads and small reservoirs. They also seized the opportunity of the famine, which one report referred to as a "blessing in disguise," to persuade the tribes to accept an annual tax (5 shillings per adult male, and 2 shillings for leaving Ovamboland for reasons other than employment) which would finance improvements in the Reserve, create a reserve for famine relief, and at the same time create an incentive to seek work in the south.[17] Since it was the practice of Commissioner Hahn to trade grain stores for Ambo guns in times of want, the system also contributed to the disarming of the tribes.

In Ukwanyama, the conciliar mode of government worked well, and a similar system developed in Ombalantu and Onkalonkathi-Eunda, where no traditional chieftainship existed. Likewise Chief Martin of Ondonga, whose weakness of character an official report called "perhaps more of a blessing than otherwise,"[18] got on smoothly with the authorities, as did for the most part the chiefs of the Kualuthi and Ngandjera.

In Ukuambi, however, a quarrel blew up between Chief Ipumbu and the government which is of special interest from the viewpoint of mission influence. Ipumbu, according to Commissioner Hahn, was something of a tyrant who enjoyed "the most authority over his subjects [of the Ambo chiefs] and woe betide the man who refuses to obey an order or shows any disrespect;" his strict rule led some of his important followers to seek refuge in Ondonga. Moreover, Ipumbu was hostile to the influence of the missionaries, refusing, according to Hahn, "to let them take the reins out of his hands, with the result that they have made comparatively little progress and are unlikely to do so as long as he remains at the head of the tribe."[19]

The cause of the incident was the desire of Ipumbu to marry one Nekulu, who was a Christian, and moreover his niece and hence forbidden him according to Ambo custom. The girl sought refuge at a nearby Finnish mission, where she was followed by Ipumbu and a group of armed men. The missionary Aho at first denied the girl's presence and then promised to give her up if her mother would come; while the girl's mother, Ipumbu's sister-in-law, was being sought, Aho succeeded in smuggling Nekulu out in a mission auto to Ondonga. This infuriated Ipumbu, who sent his men to fire rifles over the mission buildings in order to break up services and generally intimidate the missionaries. "The Country" according to the official report, "was in a state of fear, and the Ukuambi natives did not know what Ipumbu would do next."[20]

At this point Commissioner Hahn intervened, ordering Ipumbu to pay a fine for the improper use of firearms. Ignoring this and two subsequent warnings, Ipumbu gathered his forces and prepared for the coming of troops. Instead of troops, however, the government called in aircraft, who first dropped warning leaflets on a selected kraal and then devastated the empty kraal with bombs. Terrified, Ipumbu withdrew toward Angola, and finally surrendered, having been deserted by the majority of his followers. He was deposed in favor of a council and relegated to exile in Ukuanyama. In his statement of submission, after admitting his guilt and that of his advisers, he stated "The missionaries are also to blame. They took Nekulu away from me. They have taken all my people. I have had much trouble with the mission because they always tried to make me small."[21]

For the following few years the administration of Ovamboland ran fairly smoothly, except for the dispute over missions which will be

dealt with in a succeeding chapter. The South-West Africa Commission of 1935-6 received favorable testimony on the Administration from all the Ambo leaders consulted, and reported that the system of indirect rule and slow progress seemed satisfactory.[22] The economic situation was slowly improving with a series of good harvests, although only by the end of the decade was the country approaching the pre-1928 level of prosperity.[23]

In 1937 through 1939, however, a series of quarrels occurred between the government and Chief Martin of Ondonga, over various changes desired by the government. The first bone of contention was the uninhabited north-eastern section of Ovamboland, which traditionally belonged to Ondonga, but which the government wanted to give to the crowded and expanding Kuanyama. Martin and his headmen objected, and only gave way under considerable pressure.

A more serious conflict ensued when Martin decided to refuse to let the government courts try two cases of murder, claiming it was his right and at one point threatening to abdicate. The impasse was finally broken only when a police force and three aircraft sent to Ondangua as a warning, succeeded in intimidating Martin. The government Report for the year regarded the affair as Martin's attempt to reassert his waning power. The Report contended that Martin "as well as his Headmen were gradually losing authority and because of this they were not able to keep pace with the other tribes in so far as tribal development was concerned." This weakness of the Chief "rendered it a most difficult matter to get anything done, in Ondonga. . . the Chief seemed very indifferent as to whether any development schemes were carried out" and regarded "any drive on the part of officials. . . as unwanted interference"

while his headmen were "antiquated in their outlook. . . laissez faire. . . 'yes' men." The Report concluded: "Martin's recent resistance to the Administration's policy of taking away his jurisdiction over capital cases has been a desperate attempt on his part as well as that of his Headmen to rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of his followers as well as in the eyes of ruling natives of other tribes."[24]

It is particularly interesting to note in the foregoing account the consequences of the policy of indirect rule. It was a policy aimed at preserving as much as possible of the tribal political system, and it was later charged that the missions presented a major threat to this system. As is evident in the above quotation from Ipumbu, there seems to be justice in the charge. At the same time, the operation of the administration itself seems to have presented an equally great threat to the traditional way of doing things. The confrontations with Mandume and Martin were caused primarily by the administration's determination to exercise sovereignty in all areas rather than by any action of the missions, and these, along with many less spectacular negotiations and interventions, all worked to change the Ambo rulers from the autonomous Chiefs that they were at the advent of the South Africans to the executors of government policy they were becoming by 1940. In fact, the various aims of government policy--roads and dams, labor recruitment, regulation of major justice, agricultural development--in the end overruled the stated policy of non-intervention, and the initiative of government passed largely to the Administration.

Chapter 3 - Footnotes

[1]Pritchard, p. 8.

[2]E. M. Wolfe, Beyond the Thirst Belt (London, 1935), p. 73; Pritchard, pp. 4, 5.

[3]Lawrence Green, Lords of the Last Frontier (Cape Town, 1952), p. 230; Pritchard, pp. 6-7, 17-18; Loeb, p. 34.

[4]Pritchard, pp. 9, 17.

[5]Pritchard, p. 5; Kling, p. 208.

[6]Kling, p. 241; Gibson, pp. 161-162.

[7]E.H.L. Gorges (Administrator) and Matthew J. de Jager (Commander), Report on the Conduct of the Ovokuanyama Chief Mandume and on the Military Operations Conducted against him in Ovamboland (Cape Town, 1917), pp. 1-4.

[8]Gorges and de Jager, pp. 3-18.

[9]Gorges and de Jager, pp. 19-20.

[10]Pritchard, p. 13.

[11]Gorges and de Jager, p. 6.

[12]Margareta Oldevig, The Sunny Land (London, n.d.), p. 149.

[13]p. 10.

[14]South West Africa Report (1930), p. 99; Loeb, p. 78.

[15]pp. 5, 13.

[16]South West Africa Report (1921), p. 13.

[17]South West Africa Report (1930), pp. 64-65.

[18]South West Africa Report (1931), p. 68.

[19]South West Africa Report (1927), p. 33; (1928), p. 44.

[20]South West Africa Report (1933), p. 53 ff.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Report of the South West Africa Commission (Pretoria 1936), p. 19.

[23]South West Africa Report (1937), p. 47.

[24]South West Africa Report (1938), p. 62; (1940), pp. 161-168.

THE ANGLICAN MISSION

1. Foundation

Of the three Missions in Ovamboland, the history of St. Mary's Anglican Mission is both the best documented and the most accessible in English, being recorded in regular publications from 1929 on. Since it was founded recently enough to have been affected by the growth in anthropological self-consciousness that has marked twentieth century missionary thought, the Anglican mission also offers interesting examples of attempts to translate Christianity into African terms more perfectly than was done by the earlier missionaries.

As early as 1860, Bishop Gray of Cape Town had preached on Ovamboland as a potential Anglican mission field,[1] but it was not until 1903 that the area was visited by an Anglican cleric, Assistant Bishop Gibson of Tape Town. He reported favorably, saying that the Lutheran Missions "would gladly welcome us, and indeed are urgent that we should come;" however, the hostility of the German authorities toward English missions made him pessimistic about the immediate prospects.[2]

This obstacle was of course removed by the South African occupation, which also led to a new Anglican contact with Ovamboland. One of the three chaplains accompanying the De Jager expedition of 1917 was Archdeacon Fogarty, the Anglican priest having jurisdiction over South West Africa, who saw the need for something to fill the moral vacuum caused by the downfall of Mandume, and promised the Africans that missionaries would be sent. Yet another visit to South West Africa,[3] this time by Bishop Segal of George in 1919, finally led to active interest on the part ofthe Cape Diocesan Mission Board.[4]

At this meeting was a doughty 42-year-old priest named George Tobias, whom a colleague once described as "a bit of spiritual biltong" (a particularly indestructible form of South African jerked meat).[5] Born in South Africa and educated and ordained in England, he had served several parishes in the Cape, was wounded while serving as a military chaplain in France, and was now seeking new scope for his vocation. When the Mission Board hesitated to commit itself to a new area, Tobias offered himself, and, with the support of Archbishop Carter of Cape Town, the project got under way.

In July of 1924, government permission was obtained for an Anglican mission in Ukuanyama. This area, although not officially assigned to any mission, in fact contained several Lutheran stations serving refugees from Angola. These were allowed to continue with the backing of Tobias despite some misgivings on the part of the Archdeacon Fogarty and of the Administration, who feared that conflict might ensue. Financial support having been obtained from a number of parishes in the dioceses of Cape Town and George, Fr. Tobias proceeded to Tsumeb in South West Africa to begin the arduous journey by donkey cart through the Thirst Belt to Ovamboland.[6]

In Ondangua, the Administrative headquarters, a meeting with the Kuanyama headmen took place. In the presence of officials they formally assented to the Mission and granted a site, delimited by a circle drawn around the tree which still stands at the center of the present-day mission at Odibo. Fr. Tobias set up his solitary camp and began the work which occupied his first months: building with local help a 134' x 20' church-school, learning the language, translating hymns and the Book of Common Prayer, and developing his first informal

sessions with curious children into a permanent school.[7]

There was initial distrust of the missionary; earlier missionaries had aroused considerable hostility with their attacks on polygamy, and the local headman had started the rumour that Tobias was a cannibal to prevent parents from letting their children be taught. Nevertheless, natural curiosity and the desire of young men to learn English and European ways before going to work on the mines prevailed, and soon Tobias had a group of students who were willing to trade labor in return for food, clothes and instruction. English and reading led to New Testament study and the catechism, and by 1926 Fr. Tobias' diligence and patience had produced a class of 26 catechumens studying for baptism (for which two years of instruction are required), and 20 more "hearers" were in the first stages of instruction. Of particular importance was the coming of a Finnish Mission convert, Petrus Nandi, who expressed a desire to join Tobias, and who, after being confirmed and trained as an Anglican preacher, was to prove a great asset to the Mission. With the arrival of Fr. Bridges, who joined Fr. Tobias in 1925, Dr. Philip (1927-28) and nursing Sister Wolfe (1928-40), the foundation was laid for the expansion of the Mission in both scope and activity.[8]

2. The Strategy of Expansion 1926-1940

Despite financial difficulties caused by the Depression, the Mission grew considerably. By 1940, when George Tobias left to become Bishop of Damaraland (the Anglican Diocese of South West Africa), there was a second main station at Holy Cross, to the east of St. Mary's, which had been developed by Fr. Cawthorne, who replaced Fr. Bridges as assistant priest. From these missions 12 outstations, seven from Holy Cross and

five from St. Mary's, had been established, each with a building and regular services. The number of converts had increased from 500 (1935) to 1,100, of whom 500 had been admitted to full communicant status in the Church.[9] The two main schools had (as of 1935) 100 pupils, of whom a few had reached standard VI, and elementary "bush schools" existed at the outstations. A hospital staffed by several nurses (one of whom had become Mrs. Tobias) and intermittent doctors, had been established, and treated anywhere from four to seven thousand patients per year.[10] An efficient public works and industrial training program had been established under several directors, of whom the latest and most notable was A. C. MacDonald, a skilled and dedicated Yorkshire artisan who became one of the pillars of the Mission. In short, St. Mary's Mission had taken firm root among the Kuanyama.

The strategy which produced this success was, according to Tobias, "to avoid the dangers which attend too rapid expansion and. . . to aim , during the early years, chiefly at training carefully, spiritually, morally and intellectually the most promising of the boys and young men to become missionaries and teachers to their own people."[11] Using the two main stations, the European priests and African preachers visited kraals on Sunday afternoons or at other times to try to develop a regular congregation of interested "hearers." Again, I can do no better than to give Fr. Tobias' own description of the process:

> Our method is to select a number of kraals in the neighborhood of one central station, and to gather the people for a weekly service. Then. . . comes a request for a school. The next development is that a number of children and grown-ups from the school join the Hearers Class at St. Mary's and attend Sunday morning services, and eventually become full Church members.
>
> Kraal preaching often seems futile. At first the people attend only out of politeness and are far from reverent in

> their behavior and seem chiefly interested in begging a pipeful of tobacco before the preacher departs. But the visiting of the neighbouring kraals to gather a congregation for the service in the selected kraals brings us into regular touch with a number of people and promotes friendliness and breaks down suspicion. If the service is held regularly, year in and year out, in time individuals respond and form a nucleus around which others gather.
>
> Often in very hot weather and when the people are busy. . . it is very difficult to gather a congregation. . . But patience, regularity, and perseverance nearly always reap a harvest in the end.[12]

When a permanent congregation was established, a "bush school" (teaching mostly basic literacy and the catechism) would be founded, at first served from a main station and then with a resident teacher-evangelist of its own. Some of these teachers, like Petrus Nandi at Onamtayi (south of Odibo), were, because of their isolation, effectively independent missionaries, becoming, if successful, persons of high status in their localities.

The schools were, of course, a vital means of attracting people to Christianity. The Ambo seem to respect knowledge of even the most academic sort which fact, reinforced by the advantages of education for work in the south, drew some young people to the schools even in spite of considerable objection. (As an example of the respect for knowledge, Fr. Tobias was once interrupted in the course of some carpentry by a headman and subjected to an interrogation beginning with "Who was Abraham's father?" When the missionary, taken aback, was unable to remember the right answer, his questioner concluded that he was a definitely substandard missionary and departed unconverted.) The main schools, in addition to the three years of religious instruction leading to confirmation, produced a considerable number of literate Christians and a smaller supply of trained teachers. While non-Christians were

allowed to enter school, pagan social pressure usually discouraged those who were not sincerely interested in the new religion, and the majority became Christian.

Africans having become Christian,there arose a conflict between European Christian morals and local custom. While polygyny was rejected as inconsistent with the Christian doctrine of marriage, the Anglicans were in general more tolerant in matters like dress and beer-drinking than previous missionaries had been.[13] Fr. Tobias described the problem thus:

> . . . The Finnish Mission has forbidden its women the use of this red grease ointment. . . The Finns aim at making as big a cleavage as possible between Christians and their heathen neighbours. Hence the national dress and many customs quite innocuous in themselves are forbidden as savouring of heathenism. . . Either I must say the thing is sinful and forbid it to all, or I must allow it to all.[14]

This did not, however, mean the survival of traditional dress:

> . . . Quite apart from the native wish to copy the white man, it European dress is inevitable in the case of our younger women. The older women, who passed through the initiation for marriage ceremonies before they were converted to Christianity, are permitted to wear the national dress, which is becoming though not too sanitary. Our Christian girls however on reaching womanhood, have to take to European clothes as they are not allowed to wear the costume of an adult Kwanyama woman.[15]

In doctrine as well there was an attempt to distinguish between these elements contradicting Christianity and those compatible with it. Indeed, one later (1945) Director of St. Mary's, George Dymond, wrote that it was "fanatic" to "assume that all non-Christian religions and cultures must be scrapped entirely as 'heathenism' or 'superstition' before Christianity can ever come into its own" and asserted that "Blundering zeal and consecrated ignorance are vastly more potent for mischief than is selfish apathy."[16] In a later issue of the Mission

Quarterly Dymond went on to list seven aspects of Bantu religion which could make it, like the Law of the Old Testament, a "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24 AV): recognition of the need for supernatural aid for material prosperity, desire to consecrate the events of human life, religious ritual, desire for community with the Divine, religious awe, belief in inspiration and immortality, and the unique forms of expression which, Dymond felt, might eventually influence European religious thought.[17]

Even with this tolerant philosophy, it was difficult to coexist in practice with traditional native culture. For one thing, there could be no compromise on crucial issues like polygyny and such religious rituals as efundula, and these, as seen above in thematter of clothing, were in themselves enough to create a cleavage with traditional culture. Moreover, there was not always the desire to preserve that culture. Fr. Tobias wrote, in connection with an unsuccessful attempt to introduce Kuanyama church music:

> . . . The trouble is that many of our Christians do not approve of Kuanyama music in Church. Lutheran Puritanism has taught the people to cut out all national manners and customs that are in any way associated with their heathen past. Christians like to be as different as possible from the heathen.[18]

3. Obstacles to Evangelism

It should be understood, however, that all the progress described above represented only the beginnings of a breach in a substantially solid wall of pagan resistance. Fr. Tobias remarked that " the bulk of the tribe were conservative and tenacious of their own customs; they are suspicious of strangers and watch them warily to discover their motives."[19] As indicated above, the prime sources of conflict with

African opinion were the issues of efundula and polygyny.

Efundula, as mentioned above, is an essential prerequisite for pagan marriage. Hence both parents and fiancees often strongly objected to girls becoming Christian or even attending school, since this threatened their marriageability in "respectable" circles. Cases were numerous of girls being removed by force to go through efundula; Loeb reported that the issue was still a sore point in 1948, and a case was reported to this writer when he visited the Mission in 1964 of an orphan being forcibly removed from the custody of an African priest's wife to be initiated.[20] Since Christians were forbidden even to witness these rites, the issue was a source of tension even among Christians whose relatives might be involved.

Polygyny likewise was an issue which forced a choice between Christianity and participation in the traditional social structure. Since Kwanyama marriage was a fairly loose arrangement, with economic importance rather than inviolable bonds as the protection of the wife's position, it was not impossible for a convert to extricate himself from excess marriages.[21] Nevertheless the personal anguish at having to choose between two or more wives was often considerable, and the economic consequences, as will be seen below, were serious enough to warrant government concern. As with efundula, the dispute over polygyny led to efforts to protect women and girls from the influence of Christianity, and, by making the conversion of kraal heads difficult, seriously slowed the Mission's progress.

Other points of conflict also caused trouble. On one occasion an African missionary was threatened with murder because he buried a Christian too near to a kraal, and the missionaries were not immediately

successful in persuading the Africans that twins, which according to custom should have been ritually purified, should be allowed to live.[22] The same comparative freedom of children which allowed them to join the Christians also allowed them to depart, which led to problems with the schools.[23] In all of these matters involving African custom, it took a certain amount of time for each side to completely understand the other, leading Fr. Tobias to remark, "Mistakes on the part of the first members of the Mission staff through ignorance of Native names, customs, and thought have to be lived down. . . The Priest-in-charge of St. Mary's knows . . . how much damage he did by hasty judgements and impatience."[24]

There were other problems of an economic nature. One was that the Mission was expected to provide famine relief, straining its modest budget. Fr. Tobias wrote in 1930, "They the Africans do not realize our limitations, and some of them imagine that it is stupidity and lack of sympathy alone that prevents our buying great quantities of millet in Angola and giving freely to them."[25] Another source of difficulty was the constant coming and going of young men between Ovamboland and the south. This was especially true with the pupils of the mission schools, who were, by reason of their education, both highly employable and more aware of the benefits offered by the outside world. While none of these obstacles was insurmountable, all of them, added to the Herculean task of keeping a complex organisation and its physical plant functioning under frontier conditions, absorbed much time and energy which could otherwise have gone into evangelism.

4. Christian Converts and Christian Leaders

A number of factors are mentioned in the Mission literature as

contributing to conversions to Christianity. According to Nursing Sister E. M. Wolfe, the initial African interest in the Mission stemmed from a desire to identify with the victorious South African government, of which the Mission was simply seen as one aspect. A number of Africans who had joined the Finnish Mission sought to change their allegiance to the Anglicans for this reason. (They were discouraged by Fr. Tobias.)[26]

Sister Wolfe also wrote that the Mission school tended to attract young people who were for some reason at odds with their families, commenting that "at first our boarding establishments were largely cities of refuge for those who wanted to escape from their temporary homes."[27] There was also a tendency for the Mission to act as a channel for social advancement for people of low status. Fr. Tobias wrote:

> . . . people of no account, who have joined the Church, have become personages. Men and women, who were formerly of the slave class and latterly had become hangers on at the kraals of others, on becoming Christians have developed a new power of initiative and self-respect; have married and set up their own establishments, and by their industry and personality have become quite important personages in the community.[28]

Thus the Anglican Mission, like the Lutheran, seems to have sometimes served as a "safety valve" or refuge for individuals somehow dissatisfied with their lot in traditional society.

Despite the importance of social factors, religious motivation doubtless played a pre-eminent part in the early conversions to Christianity if not in its initial attraction. Here too there was some difficulty of communication. Mrs. Cawthorne, wife of the missionary at Holy Cross described the problem thus:

> The Native comes to Christianity in a way exactly opposite to ours. His first interest is purely for worship and only then through loyalty do higher moral ideas make any appeal. Discipline pure and simply produces in the Native an artificial frame of mind and all the time there remains a reservation that if circumstances press too keenly he can 'go back to the

> blanket' and heathen worship. This weakness lies behind all sermons and teaching in Church classes.[29]

There was thus the danger on the one hand that Christianity would become simply a matter of ritual without moral consequences (a danger increased by the fact that the moral sanctions of pagan society were in large measure removed) and on the other hand the danger that, by imposing alien moral standards too severely on people who imperfectly understood them and their connection with Christianity, hostility would be aroused.

One way to fill this vacuum caused by a convert's withdrawal from pagan elements of traditional culture was to create Bible study groups - cum - sewing circles for both men and women. These served to create a bond among Christians, to further religious education, and also to give opportunity for imparting useful information on child care, handicraft, etc. Exclusion from such a group also served as a social sanction against moral lapses or return to paganism.

All of this is not to say that there was not enthusiastic Christian leadership among the converts, even in matters of morality. One woman in particular, a converted herbalist named Lakela, in the words of Mr. MacDonald, "set herself up as the guardian of good behavior in the church and woe betide any women who did not behave."[30] Again, Fr. Tobias describes in detail the work of some young men in this matter:

> These young men in their zeal have formed themselves into a committee to deal with offenses and abuses such as impurity, drunkenness and attending heathen feasts and ceremonies. They have done this quite of their own initiative. They meet regularly for prayer and conference and deal with abuses by way of warning and exhortation and only if all other means fail do they propose to make a public accusation.
>
> They are being very narrowly watched by the older men who rather naturally resent their interference. But they have been so bold and open in announcing their determination not to remain passive when wrong is done and so earnest and

> sincere and humble in pleading their purpose, that public influence is felt for good.[31]

As the area around St. Mary's became heavily settled with Christians coming in from other places (the three surrounding districts trebled in population during the first twelve years of the Mission) an indigenous Christian community slowly began to grow up.

Two of the African Christian leaders deserve mention as being of great importance to the Mission down to the present day. These are Lazarus Haihambo and Gabriel Namueja, who joined Fr. Tobias in the early days of the Mission. He commented on their usefulness and progress in their studies, saying that "because of their modest bearing and deference to their elders, and because of their ability, they are accepted and respectfully listened to, even by the big ones among the heathen."[32] After having reached Standard VII, and having been trained in theology by Fr. Tobias, they were ordained to the priesthood in 1937, the first African Anglican clergy in South West Africa.

To sum up, the Mission's progress in its first decade and a half was still comparatively small and needed consolidation, but represented a sound beginning. If Christians were still only a small proportion of the Kuanyama people, the growth of the Mission was still much more rapid than that of the Finnish Mission in its early years, admittedly under far different political conditions. Perhaps the most important step was the rapid development of enthusiastic local leadership, for sincere African Christian witness made an impression the Europeans seldom could. As Fr. Tobias said in connection with some contributions to the Mission from Cape Africans, "What Europeans do they [the Kuanyama] do not pretend to understand, but these gifts from Natives is a different matter."[33]

5. The Lutheran and Roman Catholic Missions 1920-1940

The other Missions in Ovamboland enjoyed a similar increase in the interwar period. The Finnish Mission in particular grew both in numbers and influence under the South African administration, albeit with some conflict which will be discussed below. Church membership increased from 17,447 in 1925 to 31,115 in 1935.[34] The Mission's hospitals by 1935 treated nearly 39,000 patients per year and its schools, which included an industrial and nurses' training institutions, had over 10,000 students by 1939.[35] These figures are symbolic of a deepening as well as a widening of the Mission's influence, as its doctrines and mores and its emphasis on European culture continued to make inroads on Ambo society.

During this same period two Roman Catholic missions began work in Ambo territory. The first, operating from South West Africa, was founded in 1924 and established stations at Oshikuku [illegible] and Okatana in Ukuambi, where medical and educational work was soon well underway. By 1939 therewas a hospital at Okatana and twelve schools, staffed with Europeans and Africans trained at the Roman Catholic college in Doebra, South West Africa, with a total of 904 scholars.[36] According to the Administrator Report for that year, this Mission was the second strongest in Ovamboland.[37] With the Angolan Roman Catholic Mission centered at the old Lutheran station of Ompanda, which had been refounded by Pere Carlo Middelburger, C.S.Sp., in 1928, this made Roman Catholicism a force of considerable strength among the Ambo; however, since by this time the Angola border had become a political reality, the two Roman Catholic missions, which were in different ecclesiastical jurisdictions, effectively functioned as separate groups.[38]

6. The Missions 1924-1940: Conclusion

The general pattern of this period was one of expansion and intensification, under the protection of the South African Administration, and filling the vacuum created by the destruction or decline of the African political system. Commissioner Hahn described the process in these words:

> As the Missions develop, the influence of the Churches in Ovamboland is becoming increasingly marked and strong. . . . Through their influence old tribal life and discipline is gradually disappearing, and incidentally the power and influence of the chiefs is lessened.[39]

It was this process of cultural change that precipitated the conflict between government and Mission described in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 - Footnotes

[1]Wolfe, p. 9.

[2]Gibson, Between Cape Town and Loanda, pp. 197-8.

[3]Tobias, Quarterly (October 1939), p. 1.

[4]Tobias (interview)

[5]Dymond, Quarterly (Jan. 1945), p. 2.

[6]Tobias (interview)

[7]Tobias, Quarterly (1927), p. 1.

[8]Tobias, Ibid.,and Interview.

[9]South West Africa Report (1935), p. 59; (1940), p. 182.

[10]South West Africa Report (1929-1936), sec. "Public Health."

[11]South West Africa Report (1940), p. 182.

[12]Quarterly (Jan. 1934), p. 1.

[13]Archdeacon Hulme, Quarterly (June 1943), p. 1.

[14]Quarterly (April 1937), p. 1.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Dymond, Quarterly (July 1945).

[17]Quarterly (April 1946).

[18]Quarterly (April 1930), p. 2.

[19]Quarterly (Jan. 1935), p. 1.

[20]Loeb, p. 244.

[21]Tobias, Quarterly (Oct. 1929), p. 4.

[22]Tobias, Quarterly (Oct. 1939), pp. 3-4; (July 1933), p. 2.

[23]Wolfe, p. 11.

[24]Quarterly (Jan. 1935), p. 1.

[25]Quarterly (April 1930), p. 2.

[26]Wolfe, pp. 30-31.

[27]Wolfe, p. 23.

[28]Quarterly (Oct. 1929), p. 1.

[29]Quarterly (Jan. 1939), p. 2.

[30]unpublished ms.; also Wolfe, p. 64.

[31]Quarterly (April 1932), p. 3.

[32]Quarterly (Jan. 1930), p. 11.

[33]Quarterly (Oct. 1933), p. 4.

[34]South West Africa Report (1936), p. 51.

[35]South West Africa Report (1938), sec. "Public Health"; (1940), sec. "Education".

[36]South West Africa Report (1940), sec. "Education".

[37]Ibid., p. 144.

[38]Rev. Carlo Middelburger (interview)

[39]South West Africa Report (1928), p. 46.

MISSION ACTIVITY AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

1. The Issues

Government policy in Ovamboland, as has been noted, was essentially one of indirect rule. Inasmuch as it depended on traditional tribal leaders to preserve order, it was essentially a conservative policy. Moreover, it was administered by C. H. Hahn, a man who in his attitude toward Ambo culture was in many ways a conservative himself, at least on matters not directly interfering with Administration policy. He had a strong and sincere respect, which was reciprocal, for the African leaders, and his writings are studded with such comments as "as a consequence of the advance of civilization many of the fine and ancient traditions have unfortunately died out"[1] (in reference to the pagan custom of keeping the holy fire.) Thus it was not surprising, considering the far reaching changes being brought about in African culture by the Missions, that they incurred some opposition from the Administration.

Government criticism of various aspects of mission policy was a recurrent theme of official reports throughout the 30's, but was presented in greatest detail in the report by Commissioner Hahn which was included in the Administrator Report for 1938 (included in this paper as Appendix A). There are in this document basically two arguments: that the conversion of Africans to Christianity undermined the traditional political system, and that the abolition of polygyny and other African customs among Christians was detrimental to their social and economic life.

As to the justice of the first charge, it has already been pointed out that the government's role in undermining chiefly authority was

considerable. Moreover, it is probably that conflict between the Mission and chiefs was overestimated while tension between administration and chiefs was underestimated, since the former, while often concerned with superficial matters, often took the form of open disagreement (e.g. the Ipumbu affair), while the latter, albeit concerned with the very substance of governing power, generally worked itself out in conferences and behind-the-scenes pressure, and seldom resulted in an open confrontation. In any case, a pagan chief or headman was more likely to complain to the Commissioner of Mission interference than he was to complain to the missionary of government interference. Then too, pre-European pagan society was not the changeless, conflict-free "carefully balanced social system" which Hahn frequently seems to speak of, but a flexible, feudal arrangement with considerable competition between groups and individuals in which a strong leader could make considerable changes.[2]

Nevertheless, having allowed all necessary qualifications, the fact remains that the long term effect of Christianity was that of radical change. Even with a maximum of understanding and good will on both sides (by no means universally the case) a pagan leader would find that, to the extent that his people became Christian, they belonged to a new society, with new leaders whose rank was based on a different standard, and they oriented their lives to a new set of ideals. Although a multitude of bonds, economic, social, and familial, might still connect them with pagan society and its leaders, their loyalty was henceforth always a divided one, and their appeal in time of distress could well be to their new, rather than their old, leaders. In short, to the extent that a leader's constituents became the Mission's, they become less his. In a situation where young people and paupers tended to become Christians

much more rapidly than did kraal heads and heamen, this process did indeed undermine both the traditional system of government and the policy of indirect rule which was so firmly committed to that system.

In like manner, there was considerable justice in Hahn's comments on the abolition of polygyny. Missionaries also comment on the hardship caused by converts abandoning polygyny, and the anthropologist Loeb, writing some twenty years later made essentially the same observations as Hahn, adding that by that time the ratio of women to men was still higher because of the number of men doing migratory labor.[3] However, since the Missions' opposition to polygyny was primarily on theological grounds, it being considered incompatible with the Christian ideal of marriage, and since all the Missions concerned were determined to maintain uniformity in morals with their mother churches, the sort of compromise suggested by Hahn seems never to have been seriously considered. It should be noted also that, according to Loeb, "the general effect of white acculturation in Ovamboland has been favorable. The improvement in health and the increase in both the human population and the number of cattle has been noteworthy."[4] Apparently the educational and medical work of the Missions, combined with the agricultural improvements sponsored by the government, more than compensated for the ill effects of monogamy.

The Missions in their turn had criticisms to make of government policy. Commissioner Hahn's report referred to above drew an official protest from the Roman Catholic Mission in Ukuambi,[5] and elicited considerable comment from the other Missions as well. One such critique, actually written by Fr. Cawthorne of the Anglican Mission before the publication of Hahn's report, gives an idea of the Mission side of the

question.

> The present policy seems to be simply to preserve law and order by indirect rule through Chiefs and Headmen, without doing anything to improve the condition of the people. In Ovamboland, with the exception of a small grant to the Finnish Mission for Industrial Instruction, the government does not spend 1d. on education. Medical services are totally inadequate, though this is not a matter of policy but of parsimony. The Administration would like to have a healthy population, because they look on Ovamboland as a valuable reserve of Native Labour. As to training up Natives to become qualified Teachers, Medical Orderlies, Forestry Officers, Agricultural Demonstrators, Government clerks, etc., the very idea would be alien to our rulers. The Natives are most useful to the European as raw labour, and they must be encouraged to 'stay put.' The main argument against the work of the Missionary is that it undermines the authority of the Headmen. There may be something in this, though we do all we can to instil into our converts the duty of loyalty and obedience to the Government and to the Chiefs and Headmen. What undermines the authority of the Headmen more than anything else is Police-Boy Government. They are feared and resented by both Headmen and people as an upstart bullying class, who have the ear of the white rulers as his interpreters and servants. Unless they are very carefully supervised they tend to become a great power for corruption and injustice.[6]

There were other complaints--that the Government tax tended to split families by driving men to the mines, that officials encouraged pagan rites to entertain European visitors, and the like--but the general theme remains the same: that Administration policy was conservative, doing little to encourage and even resisting progress, but nevertheless promoting innovation (as with taxes and police boys) where European interests were at stake.

2. Changes in Government Policy

A number of new measures grew out of the Mission-Government dialogue on these problems. In 1932 a Government Proclamation was issued, requiring official consent for the building of churches, schools, or missions on Crown or Reserve lands.[7] This measure was implemented in 1936 with a ruling setting specific requirements for mission schools,

which included adequate buildings, paid teachers approved by the Government, and adequate European supervision. No new schools were to be built for three years, and there was to be only one school in an area, to prevent friction between the several Missions.[8] The Missions complied, under a certain amount of protest, with the result that the Anglican Mission was forced to construct ten school buildings in one year to meet requirements, and the number of African-run schools maintained by the Finnish Mission decreased from a high of 163 in 1934 to 60 by 1936 (although the financial repercussions of the Depression were also a factor in the latter case).[9] Nevertheless there was, at least among the Anglicans, satisfaction that the measure was basically a sound one and hope that more Government concern for education would ensue.

Mission education standards in fact had been under Government scrutiny for some time, the usual criticisms being the lack of properly trained teachers and the stress on religious and academic training as opposed to industrial training and other practical skills.[10] One interesting section in the South West Africa Director of Education's report in 1927 criticised the Finnish Mission's Europeanizing education because it created the sort of Westernized African that necessitated the color bar.[11] In 1927 the recently established Finnish Industrial School at Onguediva, which the Government found commendable, was given a subsidy of £100 per year, as was the Teachers Training School at Oniipa.[12] The South West Africa Commission Report in 1936 recommended more Government aid and closer inspection, noting that, while Mission education was "not all that it might be," Government schools would be prohibitively costly and probably impossible to staff because of the

hardships involved.[13] All of this culminated in another inspection by the South West Africa Director of Education in 1936, and a detailed report which led to further Government involvement in education. The Director listed four sources of trouble: untrained teachers, too many schools for the available staff, inadequate equipment, especially at the elementary levels, and irregular attendance. He particularly criticized unimaginative teaching methods "more calculated to make the school a place of infinite boredom than of pleasure."[14]

One immediate result of the investigation was the setting of school standards mentioned above, which had the effect of concentrating trained teachers at a few, higher quality schools. Another measure was a Government salary of £18 - £24 per year for certified teachers passing Government examinations in English or Afrikaans and the subjects required for Standard VI; it was hoped this would prevent the few trained people from being lured to the South. In 1939, after certification of a number of their teachers, St. Mary's Mission was selected as the official training school for Government Interpreters, clerks, and Headmen, providing a further source of subsidy. Other Government suggestions were followed voluntarily by the Missions: St. Mary's hired a trained educationist and introduced a formal manual training course, and the Finnish Mission sent four of its teachers to the Union to receive training in Afrikaans, which became the official language of their higher schools. The net result was that the Government, in spite of its basic conservatism (and in spite of some Mission opposition--the Roman Catholics objected to the "enforced development" of education)[15] had responded to external and internal prodding and to the danger of uncontrolled change and committed itself to the support of standardized

European education, one of the most important agents of cultural change.

3. Conclusions on Mission-Government Relations

If any one maxim is suggested by the events described in this paper, it is that the co-existence of an African culture with a technologically superior European culture is an extremely difficult thing to manage, whatever may be the official policies of the European institutions involved. Of the European agencies in Ovamboland, two--the South West African Administration and the Anglican Mission--had expressed the desire to preserve Ambo culture, saving only those areas where compromise was impossible. In spite of this, the Government's quiet use of pressure and occasional display of force did as much to undermine the independent power of the chiefs and headmen as did the more obvious conflicts created by the Missions, and the tolerant policies of the Anglican Mission created nearly as much of a cleavage between Christian and pagan as did the more Puritanical attitude of their Lutheran brethren. Not only the inability of Church and state to compromise on matters of basic policy, but also the many subtle effects of precept and example, and the impetus which both groups gave, sometimes involuntarily, to the growth of a cash economy, conspired to undermine the power oftradition.

There is, however, another point, less obvious but equally important, which should be made. This point is, that by 1940 the Administration had succeeded in making a compromise between tradition and progress which was acceptable to all parties concerned. In governing, the Administration had succeeded in making tribal leaders the executors of official policy without destroying the outward appearance of local government; this was particularly successful in tribes ruled by councils,

perhaps because of the lack of a prestigious ruler who might react against the slow ebb of his power. In Mission relations, the Administration by its subsidies and regulations had not only eliminated the danger of disorder by reasserting European control, but also had put the Missions on good behavior by demonstrating the Administration's will and ability to protect its own interests and to reward co-operation. Missions, tribes and officials had been welded into a co-ordinated alliance for the advancement of a Government policy, the keynotes of which were order, slow, controlled progress, and an ample labor supply. It remains to be seen how long this alliance will last--the Odendaal recommendations for accelerated public works and an Ovamboland legislature dominated by tribal leaders seem to be a logical extension of the policy to cope with the conditions of the 1960's--but it seems certain that it is still one that retains much strength.

Chapter 5 - Footnotes

[1]Hahn, "The Ovambo," The Native Tribes of South West Africa, p. 18.

[2]Hahn, quoted in Report of the South West Africa Commission (Pretoria, 1936), p. 16; cf. Loeb, pp. 29-35.

[3]Loeb, pp. 142-3.

[4]Ibid.

[5]South West Africa Report (1940), p. 179.

[6]Quarterly (July 1935), p. 3.

[7]South West Africa Report (1933), p. 52.

[8]South West Africa Report (1937), p. 48.

[9]Tobias, Quarterly (Jan. 1937), p. 1; MacDonald (interview); South West Africa Report (1935), p. 56; (1935, 1937) secs. "Education."

[10]South West Africa Report (1924), p. 15; (1925), pp. 29-30.

[11]South West Africa Report (1927), pp. 56-57.

[12]South West Africa Report (1928), p. 53.

[13]Report of the South West Africa Commission, pp. 21-22.

[14]South West Africa Report (1937), pp. 40-41.

[15]South West Africa Report (1938), p. 69.

SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT

It is outside the scope of this paper to give a detailed history of Ovamboland from 1940 to the present; nevertheless it may be of interest to note briefly some of the major developments in the Ovamboland Missions in the period after 1940. In general, it seems fair to say that the trends which had been established by 1940 continued: the Government increased its support and regulation of the educational and medical work of the Missions, the Missions continued to expand, with Government support helping them to cope with their own ever-present financial problems, and Ovamboland as a whole continued to be drawn into the economic and cultural orbit of European civilization.

The War itself, while it restricted both Mission and Government resources and hence retarded active programs on the part of both agencies, accelerated the process of Westernization. In the former connection, (the War as a negative factor), it is interesting to note the remarks of Fr. Lazarus, one of the African priests of the Anglican Mission:

> . . . many Africans relapsed into heathenism, seeing their white priests leave and hearing threatenings to Christians by the Nazis who were fighting the English. They thought that Christianity would no longer exist. . . . they said "What can this poor native priest do, as poor as ourselves, when the white priests have come and gone? The coming Nazis do not favour Christians nor Christian ways and leaders."[1]

At the same time, the Native Military Corps gave many Africans both an opportunity to travel and a chance to accumulate considerable sums of money which, according to the Anglican Fr. Dymond, by the end of the War "had reached Ovamboland and had begun to rot everything."[2] This, with the weekly bus service which began transporting mine and other labor to

and from the outside in 1939, began in earnest the conversion of Ovamboland to a money economy.

With the end of the War, the substantial revenues of the new South West Africa income tax were available for internal use, and Mission subsidies were increased; by 1963 the Anglican schools were receiving R 7,000 (£ 3,500) per year, plus additional aid for medicines and nurses' salaries.[3] Eventually the schools of the Roman Catholic and Finnish Mission were voluntarily turned over to the Government as "community schools"--i.e. schools with essentially the same staff, but run by a local committee under Government supervision; the Anglican Mission has been invited to enter a similar arrangement, but has so far declined.[4]

Mission activity had by 1964 resulted in a Christian population of over 50% (and, incidentally, a literacy rate estimated at 40%).[5] The Anglican Mission had extended its work to the Eastern reaches of Ukuanyama, approximately 100 miles from Odibo, and counted about 24,000 adherents. A theological training school for African priests was established in 1963, and educational and medical facilities expanded in addition to the growth in size.[6] The Finnish Mission had been reorganized into an autonomous African Church with an Ambo bishop; it counted in 1955 80,000 members under 43 African pastors in addition to the European staff.[7] The Roman Catholic Mission in Ovamboland had by 1964 19,000 members, and that at Ompanda, Angola approximately 41,000.[8] In short, the Missions have in many ways become an "establishment." They are generally faced, not with the problems of a persecuted minority, but with the tasks of deepening the faith and knowledge of new converts, of ecumenical relations, and of coping with social change which is beginning to accelerate rapidly.

It is this social transformation which is most in evidence in the more accessible areas of Ovamboland and in the recent writings of missionaries. The labor link with the South has brought not only wealth but ways to spend it. African-owned trading posts have sprung up along the main roads, and not only European clothes but European-style houses, automobiles, and radios have begun to appear. Prostitution and illegal liquor sales have become profitable. Political activity in the form of the South West Africa Peoples Organization has appeared, and, while not yet a mass movement, has attracted considerable support from educated Africans. In short, Church bodies heretofore oriented to the conflict with paganism, in which all the power and prestige of civilization were on the side of Christianity, must now confront economic and political secularism which is neither pagan nor uncivilized and which is not necessarily conducive to Christianity. One missionary saw the challenge thus:

> . . . Ovamboland is on the march. The march from the traditions and loyalties of the past thousand years, to the bewilderments and complexities of the twentieth century, a shattering metamorphosis unless sustained by new values and faith in the living God.[9]

Chapter 6 - Footnotes

[1]The Maramba (successor to Quarterly) (June 1965), pp. 10-11.

[2]Quarterly (Jan. 1947), p. 4.

[3]MacDonald (interview); South West Africa Report (1947), p. 16; Rev. S. Mallory (ed.), Ovatumua (successor to Maramba)(Dec. 1963), p. 6.

[4]Odendaal Report, fig. 42.

[5]Odendaal Report, p. 35.

[6]Ovatumua (Dec. 1963), p. 7.

[7]"Octocentenary of the Church of Finland" (anon.), South African Outlook LXXXV (Aug. 1955), p. 124.

[8]Fr. Baldmeyer (Windhoek R. C. Cathedral; interview); Fr. Middelburger (Ompanda R. C. Mission; interview).

[9]Veronica Andrew, Ovamboland (London, 1953), p. 9.

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Appendix A

When the Union Government sent its officials into Ovamboland for the first time in 1915, they found the country in a state of chaos. Inter-tribal raiding and even civil war in certain tribes was the order of the day. Their first duty was to establish order. This took time, but by 1920 it was an established fact. The next step was to consolidate Government control over the tribes and disarm the natives.

The policy of the Government was to effect this without interfering too much with the existing institutions of the natives themselves. In other words the natives were to be educated to rule themselves with the Government officials acting as advisers and supervisors. This was gradually brought about until the system worked smoothly.

Mission work had been commenced in 1870 by the Finnish Mission Society of Helsingfor. Until the Union Government established officers in the country the Mission work had not made any great strides. With the development of order and good government the missionaries found their task much simplified, with the result that they extended their field of operations by leaps and bounds, opening stations in all the tribes. (Mission statistics prove this conclusively.) Prior to all this they were fairly well established in Ondonga and had a more or less precarious footing in Ukuambi, Ongandjera and Ukualuthi.

In 1924 the Anglican and Roman Catholic Missions commenced operations in Ukuanyama and Ukuambi respectively. This marked the advent of feverish competition on the part of the different denominations to spread their influence over as much virgin territory as possible. The Finns which had numerous adherents encouraged their converts to establish

"schools" any and everywhere to fore-stall the other denominations. The other two denominations at first were at a disadvantage but within a few years adopted the same methods. The result of this policy was that in quite a short time innumerable large shady trees and other suitable places were pre-empted by natives who called themselves "teachers." The Missions lost control and many of the "teachers" proceeded to develop the prestige thus attained to enter into competition for power with the headmen of their Omikunda. This was being made more and more possible by their increasing number of natives baptised and who thus became "Christians."

This delightfully easy way of attaining power and prestige tempted more and more "Christians" who could barely read and write and had a smattering of bible lore, to set up for themselves.

No attempt was made by the missionaries to control these "schools" but they were nevertheless accepted as gratifying evidence of the spirit manifesting itself in the bosoms of their converts.

In fact instances occurred where the missions took advantage of the state of affairs obtaining to organise their teachers into semi-judicial bodies and granted them powers of settling disputes, civil and even criminal cases where both parties were Christians.

The position was reached where a rift was gradually but surely appearing in all the tribes with the Christians on one side and the heathen on the other. Indeed this division was being accepted by the missionaries as evidenced by the appointment of spies who reported on the private doings of the ordinary rank and file of the Christians whose misdeeds then formed the subject of proceedings before the semi-judicial bodies already mentioned. Punishments were applied in the form of Church

censure and the ordinary ignorant native who had been converted came to fear and follow the "teacher" more than his headman.

The ruling natives became alarmed at the rapid undermining of their authority and complained to the Government through its officials that their power was being filched from them and they were powerless to prevent it.

This trend of affairs could not be tolerated by the Government and accordingly legislation was introduced to control mission work. This took the form of the control of sites (Church, Missions and Schools) Proclamation No. 31 of 1932.

The root of the evil was the indiscriminate establishment of "Schools" or other centers of mission work by natives without authority from either the Government or the Missions and the consequent undermining of the local headman's authority.

The regulations issued under the above Proclamation effectually put a stop to this. The effect of the legislation is that no "School" may be established without a permit signed by His Honour the Administrator and the missions are able to exercise adequate control over their outstations. Prior to this numerous schools were in existence of which the European Missionaries were not even aware.

The greatest result achieved, however, is the disappearance of the schism between Heathen and Christian and the ensuring of freedom of action to natives in matters of religion, whether they are Christians or not.

The foregoing is the political aspect of mission work. With reference to the economic, the following remarks are offered: -

The Ovambo are mainly dependent for sustenance on agriculture. The

staple food is a millet which they call "Omahangu". The production of this grain entails much hard work and the size of a man's field is determined by the number of wives he has. A heathen with several wives usually has a fairly large kraal with a correspondingly large cornfield. In such a kraal are usually to be found, not only the man, his wives and children, but also several young men and girls who repay hospitality by performing certain tasks. The girls do corn pounding, cultivation and other women's work while the young men busy themselves with the cattle, making of corn baskets, repairing the kraal, fetching poles and other men's work. Such a community is a strong self-supporting unit and in a famine generally holds out until rain ends the food shortage.

Should such a kraal-head embrace Christianity, and become baptised all the young men and girls return to their families. The man's wives do likewise with their children and he is left alone. If he wishes to marry one of these wives by church rites he cannot do so until she also is baptised.

The compact and self-supporting entity is now broken up and the man is reduced to one wife status. He can no longer cultivate his large field, nor keep his large kraal in repair. The result is that his wife cultivates a small part of the corn field and he uses the now disused parts of the kraal to repair and keep habitable the small section now occupied by him and his wife. Eventually the poles rot with the passing of time and he, being alone, cannot fetch new ones, so he uses corn stalks and bushes and his kraal develops into an eyesore. Existence which once was a happy affair, well organised and disciplined with plenty of willing hands to assist, now becomes a drudgery. It is a struggle to produce corn for the year and if the season is not a good one

he may have to resort to bartering away his cattle for corn. Church dues which are paid in corn assist further to deplete his stocks. In this way he becomes poorer and poorer and the greater his poverty the fewer his friends become and the less assistance he can count on from them.

There are, of course, exceptions, but these form a mere drop in the ocean when compared with the number of Christians in the country who in lean years have nothing to fall back on and struggle for mere existence.

The heathen, when his children reach the age of usefulness, has them to rely on for the performance of many tasks, as he has them at the kraal all the time and they must be usefully employed. The Christian, on the other hand, must send his children to school or incur censure on the part of his spiritual leaders. He thus loses their services for the greater part of the day. Then also besides the regular Sunday services there are innumerable church holidays which have to be observed. The seasons advance inexorably and any time taken up with religious observances means a smaller production, tasks left undone and a general deterioration of the standard of the kraal and the tribal organisation surrounding it.

The last two famines proved conclusively that the Christian kraals were the first to be affected and most of the bigger heathen kraals needed no assistance at all.

In Ovamboland, therefore, Christianity operates against the native economically. It is quite obvious that an organised native kraal in which the head of the kraal has several wives, produces more food and necessities of life than that of a Christian with his single wife. The more wives a kraal head has the higher his status and the bigger his authority. When the planting season approaches and the arduous

cultivation of fields commences, the kraal head organises working parties consisting of his wives, their children, members of different Epatas* and friends living in surrounding kraals. Beer and food are provided for the workers and the work is tackled with a will and soon disposed of. When this kraal-head's field is cultivated the workers proceed to the next kraal where similar provision has been made, and so on until all the fields of the participants have been disposed of. By this pooling of tribal resources work is made easy and with the subsequent feasting this sort of labor becomes an attractive undertaking.

In Christian kraals the organization and tribal spirit is sadly lacking and although many Christians take part in cultivating the fields of the heathen and receive reciprocal aid, the very fact that they are taught that the making and drinking of beer and working on Sundays and church holidays are sinful operations, tends to prevent their full-time co-operation with the heathen, who dislike the breaking of continuity in their work which induces slackness, a habit into which the African native only too easily falls unless prevented by tribal custom.

From this it is apparent that a native by adopting Christianity with its consequent monogamy reduces his status. He becomes a weak link in the all important organisation of food production. It is futile for the missions to argue against these facts. Our observations show that as already stated, in times of drought it is the Christian Ovambo who requires assistance long before those who adhere to tribal life.

It has been stated by missionaries that there are not sufficient women in the country to provide more than one wife for each man. To this I would reply that our last census revealed that over the whole

*Matrilinear clan

country there were 30,000 women as against 20,000 men (counting men and women of marriageable age). As the woman is a definite asset, being the chief foor producer, there is naturally an inclination on the part of the thrifty and enterprising natives to acquire as many wives as possible.

It should not be forgotten either that men marry at a much later age than girls and Ovamboland is no exception to this rule, and many of the men reflected in the above figures would not marry for several years whilst practically all of the women would be married already. It is a rare occurrence that a girl of marriageable age in Ovamboland remains unmarried. This brings the ratio of women to men at least 2 to 1.

In certain Christian churches in the Union, in Pondoland for instance, I understand polygamy is accepted and as it plays such an important part in the lives of an agricultural people living in such a difficult country as Ovamboland with its periodic famines and constant struggle with nature to provide food, I see no reason why, if one Christian church can accept polygamy as consistent with its teaching, those operating in Ovamboland cannot do likewise.

The question is sufficiently important to be fully pursued by the Administration.

It should, however, not be forgotten that the missions do bring benefits to the native, apart from purely spiritual ones. In the first place the medical work done by the missions deserves every praise, particularly the Finnish Mission Society. In spite of financial handicap they do untold good in this direction and also act as distributing agents for the medicines supplied by the Government. This saves the Administration considerable expense. They also teach the native to read and write and this is a boon in a country of great distances, as it

provides a convenient method of communication between members of families who are somewhat spread out. This is even more so in the case of natives going to work on the mines in the South. It stimulates the remittance of money by natives working on the mines, etc., because they can advise their relations by letter and also receive acknowledgement in the same manner.

The advantages and disadvantages of the civilising influence of mission work provides scope for argument. Briefly it can be stated as follows:

The mission does bring enlightenment to the native and the missionaries attempt to improve his standard of living. Unfortunately the wrong methods are too often applied. It is sought to impose a European standard on a primitive people in a country where the opportunities for earning the necessary money to maintain such a standard are practically non-existent. As soon as a native is Christianised he thinks he must wear European clothes and being already limited to one wife and a small kraal is unable to provide them. The unfortunate result is numerous natives dressed in unsightly and dirty tatters which they think pass as civilised dress. In his natural state the native manufactures his garments from the produce of the country. These do not affect his health and he need not be ashamed to appear anywhere in them; and above all he retains his caste.

If, through mission influence the tie provided by the Epata were broken because of different religious outlooks it would mean the disruption of the greatest influence in the country for unity of the people. On it are based the laws of succession and inheritance.

Some missionaries fortunately realise the importance of this but

there are others who have tried to instil European customs and are imbued with a spirit which condemns all native institutions as heathenism, whether these customs are in keeping with public order or not, and irrespective as to whether the European customs are adaptable to native life.

--Native Commissioner (C. H. Hahn)
quoted in Union Government 25-'38,
pp. 63-6.