

ASPECTS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN CULTURE IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE, 1893-1934¹

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THE ACCEPTANCE OF Christianity by a significant proportion of Africans in colonial Zimbabwe was not achieved without a struggle. This struggle was essentially a clash of cultures.² Although several factors contributed to African opposition to Christianity in colonial Zimbabwe, this article focuses on two factors which, from the missionaries' point of view, militated most strongly against acceptance of Christianity by Africans: the institution of polygamy and the belief in ancestral spirits. The article analyses how missionaries handled this opposition to Christianity through the ministry of preaching, the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, the establishment of Christian villages, the ministry of healing and Western education.³

OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY IN MATABELELAND

The missionaries found the Ndebele very difficult to evangelize. In the first place, there was a general suspicion among the Ndebele of the motives of the missionaries in coming to evangelize them. This was best illustrated by the Jesuit missionaries working in Matabeleland:

To persuade this people that we have come among them for their good, have left kith and kin for their sakes, is simply impossible.... The fact is, most of these people are firmly convinced that we have come among them for worldly pelf, in fact, are rolling in wealth, and no matter how much they may receive, they consider that we are niggardly, since we give so little in comparison with what they suppose us to receive. The great majority persist in retaining their preconceived ideas and nothing will shake them.⁴

¹ I dealt with this theme in an article I wrote in 1976; that article, however, was based primarily on the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives in London. I also confined the article to the period 1897 to 1914. See C.J. Zvobgo, 'Shona and Ndebele responses to Christianity in Southern Rhodesia, 1897-1914'. *Journal of Religion in Africa* (1976), VIII, 41-51. This is a much broader article.

² For a detailed discussion of various aspects of Shona culture which clashed with missionary teachings, see G.Z. Kapenzi, *The Clash of Cultures: Christian Missionaries and the Shona of Rhodesia* (Washington DC, Univ. Press of America, 1979).

³ For a detailed discussion of the interaction between missions and traditional societies and the role of Western education in winning converts in western Zimbabwe for the period 1897 to 1923, see N. Bhebe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe, 1859-1923* (London, Longman, 1979), chs. 5, 6.

⁴ 'Glimpses of missionary life in Matabeleland', *Zambesi Mission Record* (1906-9), III, (45), 581-2.

As a result, the people 'listened to the missionary with incredulity and contempt; in fact, from the very first, they distrusted the missionary, whom they regarded as an emissary sent by their White rulers to divorce them from their customs and traditions. To the grown-ups, he spoke in vain and he knew it.'⁵

In the second place, the Ndebele disbelieved the teachings of the missionaries. A Jesuit missionary at Empanjeni said that the Ndebele were so preoccupied with the materialistic aspects of life that it was useless to talk to them about the soul and its destiny. 'Most of them', he wrote, 'do not believe in the existence of an immortal soul. Death is for them the end of all things'. He said that it was futile to talk to them about Heaven and Hell, as their reaction invariably was, 'Who has seen Heaven? Who has seen Hell?' He added that the Ndebele had 'no intention of giving up their pagan habits and submitting to the law of God and His Church for the sake of future happiness, or to escape future punishment which they disbelieve'.⁶

In the third place, the Ndebele opposed Christianity because it was the religion of the White man who had conquered their kingdom in the Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893. 'The Matabele', the Jesuit missionary, H. Walmesley, wrote, 'are naturally a proud and independent tribe, as the British in their war against them found out. They disdain to bow their necks to any yoke, that of religion included'.⁷

But the greatest hindrance to Christianity in Matabeleland, according to the missionaries, was the institution of polygamy. The missionaries working in Matabeleland were unanimous on this point. The Jesuit priest, Fr. J. O'Neil, for example, wrote in 1905: 'With regard to the older pagans, there does not seem to be much hope of converting them to Christianity. Polygamy prevails among them all, and about the last thing a man could be persuaded to do would be to give up any of his wives'.⁸ The Jesuit missionary, the Revd Richard Sykes, reached the same conclusion. 'The man who has a plurality of wives', he wrote, 'is practically hopeless as a prospective Christian convert. The hope lies with the children'.⁹

The institution of polygamy requires some explanation. Polygamy was widely practised among the Shona and Ndebele. It was, in the main, a solution to social problems. For example, it was customary for a man to look after the widow and children of the deceased brother. It was also a solution to sex imbalance when

⁵ 'Reminiscences', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1914-18), V, (73), 375.

⁶ 'Glimpses of missionary life in Matabeleland', 582.

⁷ H. Walmesley, 'The Zambesi Mission of to-day', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1906-9), III, (38), 292.

⁸ J. O'Neil, 'A visit to Empanjeni', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (30), 625.

⁹ R. Sykes, 'On creating a religious atmosphere', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1914-18), V, (70), 273.

women outnumbered men.¹⁰ The payment of *lobola* or *roora*,¹¹ or bride-price, by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family was a widely-practised custom among the Shona and Ndebele. It symbolized the giving up of a daughter in marriage and was a compensation to the bride's family for the loss of the daughter to the bridegroom's family. Missionaries misunderstood completely the reasons behind the custom and denounced it because, from their point of view, it not only reduced women to the level of a commodity to be bought and sold but also degraded the position of women in the family. Ignorance of the social reasons for polygamy led Sykes to write in 1902:

The wives, by native custom, are bought for so many head of cattle, the source of wealth and importance amongst the wild native tribes of South Africa, as indeed amongst all primitive races. The man, therefore, amongst them, who can purchase a number of wives, proves his wealth, his social position and his power to indulge in luxuries, and so secures for himself importance in the eyes of his less fortunate neighbours.¹²

The Jesuit priest, Fr. Peter Prestage, and the Wesleyan Methodist missionary, the Revd J.W. Stanlake,¹³ were of the same opinion. Prestage regarded polygamy as 'the purchase of a wife by a man for the purpose of begetting children, among whom the girls, when marriageable, are disposed of to obtain *lobola*, which is used again to purchase other wives, the final object being to acquire position and substance through possession of women and children'.¹⁴

If polygamy was a vicious custom, what was the remedy? According to the Jesuits, the remedy was to 'reform the native family':

It must be based on the Christian principle. Polygamy for the future should be forbidden by law. There should be no more plurality of wives allowed by the State. Then the iniquitous custom of *lobola* might be done away with, for it is nothing short of buying women by cattle, money or goods...Polygamy being forbidden, the native family will be more susceptible to taking up and following Christian influences. Modern civilisation will gradually take the place of pagan customs. Men will see the necessity of labour. Women will be raised from their present degraded position.¹⁵

The British South Africa Company regime, however, refused to co-operate with

¹⁰ R.P. Hatendi, 'Shona marriages and the Christian churches', in J.A. Dachs (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi, I* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1973), 138.

¹¹ For details, see J.F. Holleman, *Shona Customary Law* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), ch. 4.

¹² R. Sykes, 'Hindrances to native conversions in South Africa', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (16), 54.

¹³ J.W. Stanlake, 'The mission stations of Matabeleland', *Work and Workers in the Mission Field*, Jan. 1898, 26-7.

¹⁴ P. Prestage, 'The kraal family system among the Amandebele', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1898-1901), I, (13), 443.

¹⁵ 'Notes from the different stations', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (17), 93.

the missionaries in suppressing polygamy by force. The policy of the Administration was to conciliate Africans in order to avoid a recurrence of the 1896-7 risings. In time, the missionaries themselves realized that polygamy was a deeply-entrenched custom which could not be suppressed by force. Sykes, for example, said that the defeat and displacement of polygamy would necessarily be slow. 'You cannot', he wrote, 'uproot in a day from the life of a nation what is part of that national life.' The solution was to 'get the children, to instil into them a higher and better morality; to keep them, as far as possible, from contact with heathen influences; to form reserves or separate kraals and villages of married Christian couples as these grow up to the responsible age.'¹⁶

Because of their uncompromising stand on polygamy, the Jesuits expelled polygamists from Empandeni in 1902. The report from Empandeni for that year stated, 'We shall lose in numbers, but we shall gain by the deepening of the conviction in the minds of the natives that we mean business, and that there can be no compromise between Christianity and paganism on the all-important question of marriage.'¹⁷ The Jesuits took this uncompromising position because, according to Sykes, polygamy was 'a kind of touchstone which tests the sincerity of the South African natives, like the Matabele and the Mashonas, in their desire for Christianity, and distinguishes the true metal from the base'.¹⁸

Among the Kalanga, missionaries encountered the most stubborn opposition to Christianity from the adherents of the Shumba cult. The Kalanga believed in the existence of a special class of ancestral spirits called *izishumba* which wandered about in the air seeking to enter into some female member of the clan or family to which they belonged while on earth. When a Shumba spirit wished to enter into a girl, it did so by making the girl seriously ill. When this happened, a diviner was summoned to find out the cause of the illness. If the girl was afflicted by a Shumba spirit, she would not recover until she was formally possessed by the spirit. In that case, one of the principal Shumba women was sent for to 'raise the spirit' in the girl. According to J. O'Neil, a Shumba girl was always under the influence of the woman who 'raised the spirit' in her. She could marry only into the family of this woman. Hence, the more followers a Shumba woman had, the more important she became in the estimation of the people, and hence the anxiety of the Shumba women to obtain as many proselytes as possible. 'It is not, then, surprising', he wrote,

that the missionaries have no more bitter opponents than these Shumba women. The latter do everything they possibly can to hinder girls from embracing Christianity, for they know well that no good Christian girl will ever consent to be included in their ranks, just as, on

¹⁶ Sykes, 'Hindrances to native conversions in South Africa', 54.

¹⁷ 'Notes from the different stations', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (15), 54.

¹⁸ Sykes, 'Hindrances to native conversions in South Africa', 54.

the other hand, it is practically impossible to effect the conversion of a Shumba woman even on her deathbed.¹⁹

The Jesuit missionary at Empandeni, Fr. E. Biehler, reached the same conclusion: 'Once a girl has been initiated,' he wrote, 'there is no hope of her ever becoming a Christian. Many women, no doubt, make a pretence of possession to make themselves important; others, on the contrary, are the very picture of Satan'.²⁰

O'Neil concurred: 'The old Shumba women', he wrote, 'detest the missionaries and their work and are our greatest opponents. Their hatred of God and His Church is so great that at times one could almost believe that they are, in reality, possessed by the Evil One'.²¹ He added that the Shumba women refused to listen to anything about God or their souls. He cited an incident of a Shumba woman who died a horrible death after refusing throughout her illness to listen to anything about the future life. He visited her frequently at her village. He said that she would readily enough speak about any subject, but the moment he began to talk about God, 'she turned her face to the wall'.²²

So far, I have discussed, in general, African opposition to Christianity in Matabeleland. But how did individuals respond to the Christian message? African opposition to Christianity in Matabeleland at the level of the individual can be best illustrated by the cases of Chief Tshitshi and Chief Gambo.

Chief Tshitshi lived in a Reserve near the Jesuit mission at Embakwe, about eight miles from Empandeni. He was one of those Kalanga chiefs who vacillated between embracing and resisting Christianity. When Embakwe mission was established in January 1902, he was not favourably disposed towards the missionaries and their work. As a result, the attendance of children at the newly-opened school left much to be desired. Shortly afterwards, however, he changed his attitude towards the missionaries. He went out of his way to make sure that every child in his village attended school daily and he also urged the headmen of other villages to send their children to school. According to O'Neil, Tshitshi's favourable attitude produced 'a change of feeling' in the hearts of many who used to be hostile to the missionaries. The attendance of children at the school in the Reserve more than doubled and several children asked to be instructed and baptized. Among those who were baptized was Tshitshi's nephew.²³

But Tshitshi soon changed his attitude again. When a large number of his pagan followers who had always been hostile to Christianity saw what was

¹⁹ J. O'Neil, 'Habits and customs of the natives of the Mangwe District, South Matabeleland', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1910-13), IV, (60), 540-1.

²⁰ E. Biehler, 'Empandeni outstations', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1910-13), IV, (52), 229.

²¹ J. O'Neil, 'Superstitions of the Amakalanga of the Mangwe District', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1906-9), III, (34), 149.

²² J. O'Neil 'Reminiscences', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1898-1901), I, (13), 528.

²³ J. O'Neil, 'The native mission at Embakwe', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1906-9), III, (39), 344-5.

happening and what was likely to happen in the near future, they were furious and started a campaign against the missionaries. They reproached Tshitshi for his favourable change of mind towards Christianity and charged him with deserting the people and their traditions and 'going over to the enemy'.

Pressed on all sides by public opinion, Tshitshi tried to play 'a double game, professing friendliness as of yore, but not fulfilling any one of his promises'. He retracted the permission he had given to two of his grown-up daughters to be instructed and baptized and his visits to the mission became less and less frequent. This 'caused jubilation in the ranks of the opposition. Several people who had consented to the baptism of their children forbade them to go for instruction any more, and a number of young men who had been on the point of coming forward to enrol themselves in the ranks of the catechumens held back.'²⁴

Tshitshi dreaded the influence of Christianity among his people, shrewdly suspecting that once they were converted to Christianity he would lose his control over them. He also feared that if his young daughters were instructed and baptized, their elder sisters who were already or would soon be of marriageable age would not give him peace until he allowed them to embrace Christianity. He did not object to his sons being instructed and baptized; in fact, one of his sons was baptized early in 1908. But to permit his daughters to marry Christian husbands, that was another matter. O'Neil added:

If he can, he will hinder their doing this, and so once more he has forbidden boys and girls to attend school. Interviews have been held between us, and the old fox has told lies and made all kinds of promises and protestations; but he won't act. He still makes a pretence of friendship, but it is certain that he is incensed against us, since he knows that every boy and girl on the Native Reserve is longing for baptism. It will be a stern fight, but I feel confident that the children will win in the long run if they remain steadfast to their determination. The movement in favour of Christianity is now too strong and too widespread to be set back.²⁵

Gambo Sithole was, by all accounts, one of the most powerful Ndebele chiefs before the fall of the Ndebele state in the Anglo-Ndebele war in 1893; he commanded one of the Ndebele impis in the struggle against the British in 1893. His experiences during the war thoroughly convinced him that it was hopeless to continue the struggle against the British because they were too strong. He therefore remained loyal to the new regime in the Ndebele rising of 1896. The Administration valued his loyalty and rewarded him with large herds of cattle.

Gambo personally went to the Revd J.W. Stanlake and requested a teacher at his village. 'He was quite convinced', Stanlake wrote, 'that his nation was in the dark and was desirous that his children should come to the school. From Gambo

²⁴ 'Notes from the different stations', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1906-9), III, (40), 369.

²⁵ J. O'Neil, 'A year's progress at Embakwe', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1906-9), III, (42), 456-7.

we are expecting great things.²⁶ Clearly, Gambo had reconciled himself to White rule. According to the Wesleyan Methodist missionary, the Revd C.H. Temple, Gambo had accepted the advent of the English 'philosophically' and clearly saw the futility of 'attempting to arrest the march of civilisation. This philosophical spirit he has endeavoured to spread among the other chiefs of the country.'²⁷

But while Gambo was prepared to live at peace with the White man and shrewdly recognized the importance of missionary education for his children — two of his sons were at Tegwani and he wanted his heir to be highly educated — he did not embrace Christianity. He said that he was too old to change his ways. 'Can you', he asked the Wesleyan Methodist missionary, the Revd H. Oswald Brigg, in his own metaphorical way, 'change the growth of the horns of an ox when he is already old — can the horns which have grown backwards for many years be suddenly changed to grow forwards?'²⁸ Thus, while Gambo believed that Christianity was good for young people, he did not embrace it himself.

OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY IN MASHONALAND

As in Matabeleland, traditional customs militated against the acceptance of Christianity in Mashonaland. Again, as in Matabeleland, the missionaries regarded polygamy as one of the greatest hindrances to the acceptance of Christianity in Mashonaland.

The Jesuit missionary at Chishawasha, Fr. Richartz, for example, wrote in 1901: 'With regard to the older Mashonas there is, generally speaking, but little chance of converting them. Confirmed polygamists as they are and wedded to the superstitions of their ancestors, it is scarcely to be expected that, except in very rare cases, they will consent to live according to the Christian Law.'²⁹ By 1905 the situation around Chishawasha had not improved. The polygamists listened willingly enough to the Christian Gospel but to put away all but one of their wives and be baptized in the heyday of life and vigour was a step they could not bring themselves to take.³⁰

In Southern Mashonaland, the Jesuits encountered the most stubborn resistance to Christianity among the older Karanga around St Joseph's mission near Chief Hama's village in Chilimanzi District. According to O'Neil, these older

²⁶ J.W. Stanlake, 'Mission work in Matabeleland', *Work and Workers in the Mission Field*, Nov. 1899, 479–80.

²⁷ C.H. Temple, 'A ride through Matabeleland', *Work and Workers in the Mission Field*, Sep. 1897, 385.

²⁸ H. Oswald Brigg, 'Light and shade in Rhodesia', *Bulletin of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 63, Dec. 1909.

²⁹ F. Richartz, 'Chishawasha today', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1898–1901), I, (14), 475.

³⁰ 'Notes from the different stations', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902–5), II, (29), 571.

Karanga had no high thoughts, no wish to be lifted up out of their 'degraded state', and 'absolutely no desire that their children should be educated, still less that they should embrace Christianity. The missionary therefore has no hope of doing anything with the children.' He added that the adults at Gokomere mission near Fort Victoria were even worse than those living at Hama's: 'They are hopeless pagans, and nearly all the fathers have sold their daughters — even small children — in marriage to some heathen'.³¹

Clearly, Africans were deeply attached to their traditions. The missionaries saw the destruction of these traditions as a prerequisite to the Africans' acceptance of Christianity. The missionaries realized that this was not going to be an easy task. 'It is exceedingly difficult', O'Neil wrote, 'to induce a native to give up his superstitious practices. He cannot be reasoned out of them. You may demonstrate their absurdity and futility as clearly as possible; but precisely because they rest on no rational foundation, you cannot get him to acknowledge their foolishness.'³² This was echoed by the Revd J.W. Stanlake who argued that the conversion of the heathen was a slow process. 'A sense of sin and the need of a Saviour', he wrote, 'can only be to the native mind a gradual awakening... Our work is similar to the submarine engineer; it is out of sight. We are undermining. Sometimes the unexpected happens. Our work is put back, and we must start drilling again; but we do not despair.'³³

The missionaries hoped to destroy African traditions through the ministry of preaching, the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, the ministry of healing, the establishment of Christian villages and Western education.

THE MINISTRY OF PREACHING

The missionaries hoped to convert Africans to Christianity through the ministry of preaching. In this respect, they discovered through experience the importance of Africans witnessing to fellow Africans if their work was to succeed. The importance of Africans witnessing to fellow Africans was emphasized by Dennis Kemp, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary in the Gold Coast in 1898:

The life of the consistent native Christian is a greater testimony to the Gospel than the life of the European ever can be... He is skin of their skin; his life is known from his youth upwards; he is trained under conditions known to them, and similar to theirs. In his case his associates can but attribute to the Gospel the changed life he lives. He is a standing advertisement to the Gospel he preaches, and his message gains cogency from the fact of his life. When a man can get up and say, 'You know me and my former life; you witness

³¹ J. O'Neil, 'Our missions at Hama's and Gokomere', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1914-18), V, (77), 499.

³² O'Neil, 'Habits and customs of the natives of Mangwe District, South Matabeleland', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1910-13), IV, (58), 468.

³³ J.W. Stanlake, 'Progress and promise of pioneer work in Matabeleland', *Work and Workers in the Mission Field*, Mar. 1902, 102.

the life I now live. This life I live, not of myself, but through the power of the Christ whom I proclaim' — the effect is conviction.³⁴

The importance of Africans witnessing to fellow Africans was echoed by missionaries in colonial Zimbabwe when they discovered through experience that the African evangelist, under the careful and constant supervision of the European minister, could become the most effective missionary to his people. These considerations prompted all Christian Churches in colonial Zimbabwe to train African evangelists. Three outstanding examples of early African evangelists in colonial Zimbabwe were Njamhlope, Peter Mantiziba and Andria Khumalo Mtshede.

Njamhlope, a former *n'anga* (traditional doctor), was converted to Christianity and baptized by Fr. Andrew Hartman in January 1899. At the age of twenty-seven, he enrolled as a student at Empandeni where he excelled both in his school work and in the study of the Christian doctrine, so much so that when Embakwe mission was started in 1902 he was sent there to take charge of the school. He catechized the children every day and, on Sundays, he instructed women and children in the open air.

In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he visited nearby villages every Sunday and preached to the people in their homes. His eloquence and earnestness won over the inhabitants.³⁵ The Jesuit priest at Empandeni, Fr. A. Leboeuf, said that Njamhlope was one of the most sincere and exemplary men he had ever met, 'so good and edifying, so anxious for the conversion of others that we had not the slightest hesitation in entrusting the important work of teaching others to him.'³⁶

The most eloquent testimony to Njamhlope's work was made by O'Neil in 1906:

This man's influence and example have done more than words can say...a dozen native catechists of Njamhlope's type would be a blessing untold to any missionary, and would enable him to convert a multitude of heathen in a comparatively short space of time...Simple, earnest, modest, prayerful and, which is rarest of all, perfectly unassuming, he is the model of what a Christian native should be, and, though entirely unconscious of it himself, he has won a debt of gratitude from us which it would be difficult to repay.³⁷

Peter Mantiziba, a Kalanga evangelist, was converted to Christianity and baptized in 1906. In 1907, he was sent to Nenguwo Training Institution (renamed Waddilove in 1915) for training as an evangelist after which he worked in the Selukwe Circuit of the Wesleyan Methodist Church until 1913 when he was transferred to Northern Rhodesia, where he did outstanding work as an evangelist

³⁴ D. Kemp, *Nine Years at the Gold Coast* (London, Macmillan, 1898), 145-6.

³⁵ O'Neil, 'The native mission at Embakwe', 346.

³⁶ A. Leboeuf, 'Mission work at Embakwe', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (24), 380.

³⁷ J. O'Neil, 'The out-stations of Empandeni', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1906-9), III, (31), 26-9.

and eventually became Assistant Minister in the Broken Hill Circuit.³⁸ When he died in February 1934, the then Chairman of the Wesleyan Methodist Synod in Southern Rhodesia, the Revd Frank Noble, in a eulogy to Peter Mantiziba, said, among other things: 'He had a most winning and persuasive way of presenting the Gospel to his own people: I have been present on occasions when he has dramatised a New Testament story with most striking effect. He was not only able to do this; one could see that he loved doing it.'³⁹

Andria Khumalo Mtshede was born about 1875 and was a paternal nephew of Lobengula, the Ndebele king. He was converted to Christianity in 1897. After he had been a member on trial of the Wesleyan Methodist Church for some years, he was baptized and received into full membership. He served as a local preacher for nine years (1903-12) before he was transferred to Northern Rhodesia to serve as an evangelist. He served in this capacity for eight years until he was recommended for the ministry in 1920. As Assistant Minister, he served in the Luano Valley of Northern Rhodesia.⁴⁰ When he died in January 1929, the Wesleyan Methodist missionary, the Revd Oliver Roebuck, made a fitting tribute to Andria's work when he said: 'He shared the lives of his people...He seemed to know everybody. Certainly everybody knew him. The old folks honoured him, the children hung about him — he loved them and they knew it. He was loved and deserved to be loved. He reigned in the hearts of his people.'⁴¹

TRANSLATION OF THE SCRIPTURES INTO THE VERNACULAR

Missionaries realized from the beginning that, in order to strengthen the faith of the converts, it was necessary to translate the Scriptures into the vernacular to enable the converts to read the Scriptures for themselves. For this reason, translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular was begun.

Among the missionaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular was undertaken by the Revd John White who completed the translation of St Mark's Gospel into Shona in 1897,⁴² St Matthew's Gospel in 1900, St John's Gospel in 1902 and published the complete

³⁸ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, B/C/A.10, S. Douglas Gray, 'Peter Mantiziba', 1917; H.J. Baker, 'The Story of Mantiziba', *The Foreign Field of the Wesleyan Methodist Church* (1906-7), 362; T.D. Samkange, 'A short story of the life of the late Rev. Peter Mantiziba', *The Rhodesian Methodist* (1933-4), IX, xii, 15-17.

³⁹ F. Noble, 'District notes', *The Rhodesian Methodist* (1933-4), IX, xii, 3.

⁴⁰ P.B. Mantiziba, 'Death of the Rev. Andria Kutshwa Mtshede', *The Rhodesian Methodist* (1928-9), IV, xii, 15-16; for a eulogy, see G.E. Hay Ptuke, 'In Memoriam: The Rev. Andria K. Mtshede', *ibid.*, 15.

⁴¹ O. Roebuck, 'From Matabeleland warrior to Methodist minister', *The Foreign Field of the Wesleyan Methodist Church* (1928-9), 194.

⁴² J. White, 'Translation work in Mashonaland', *Work and Workers in the Mission Field*, Oct. 1901, 421-2.

New Testament in Shona in 1907. Translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular enabled literate Shona converts to understand the teachings of the Scriptures better than before.

CHRISTIAN VILLAGES

In order to shield their converts from the 'unwholesome influences' of their 'pagan' neighbours, the Jesuits and the Wesleyan Methodists established Christian villages at Chishawasha and Epworth, respectively. The Jesuits argued that there was little hope that the neophytes would live as Christians should if they were permitted to return to their homes after baptism. They therefore established Christian villages at Chishawasha in order to give their converts 'an *esprit de corps* and a moral force' and make them proud of their faith instead of being ashamed of it like some of the converts who lived in 'pagan' surroundings.⁴³

The necessity for establishing Christian villages at mission centres was forcefully stated by the Jesuit missionary, J. Loubière, in 1921:

The pagan atmosphere is so thoroughly corrupt that laymen themselves come to the conclusion that we must take our Christians out of it...The devil is so well at home in the native milieu, he has such a hold on the native mind, that nothing short of heroism will enable a young convert to persevere if he is in daily contact with his pagan acquaintances...It is only by creating new surroundings for the converts, by introducing them into a healthy and Christian atmosphere, that we may hope to preserve them. It is only by this new departure that we may hope to establish a true Christian community built up on the corner-stone of Christian life, i.e., the Christian family. If our Christian couples remain, as at present, lost among the heathens, I defy any missionary to start a truly Christian family.⁴⁴

For these reasons, the Jesuits established three Christian villages at Chishawasha, called Loyola, Montserrat and Rosario, where married Christian couples resided. In 1904, nearly sixty Christian couples resided in these Christian villages.⁴⁵

In order to transform the lives of the converts completely, the Wesleyan Methodists established a Christian village at Epworth. When the Revd Alfred Sharp visited Epworth in January 1900, he was impressed with the progress which had been made at the mission during the preceding nine months:

In the place of a few dilapidated Mashona huts, we have now a well laid out village, with wide streets, sanitary lanes, and neat gardens...Our rule is that every inhabitant must

⁴³ Viator, 'Chishawasha after thirteen years', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1906-9), III, (32), 68.

⁴⁴ J. Loubière, 'Christian villages', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1918-21), VI, (91), 370.

⁴⁵ F. Richartz, 'Twelve years' progress at Chishawasha', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (23), 338.

build a square house, or at least a house as near square as possible to a native, and already the village presents a very pleasing view; a model of a missionary settlement.⁴⁶

When the Revd J.W. Stanlake visited Epworth in April 1900, he was also pleased with the progress which had been made at the mission since the Revd Sharp's visit there in January. 'During the year', he wrote, 'the whole place has undergone a change. In every respect, it is a "model" mission station. A large brick church has been erected, the entire cost having been raised by the natives.'⁴⁷

MEDICAL MISSIONS

In addition to the ministry of preaching, the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, and the establishment of Christian villages, missionaries also established medical missions. They did so for two reasons. Firstly, the ministry of healing was an important part of the ministry of Jesus Himself as well as that of His disciples. Missionaries therefore regarded the ministry of healing as an integral part of the Christian witness. Secondly, missionaries viewed medical missions as an important evangelistic agency. 'If by skilful treatment a sick native is relieved of pain or cured of his disease', the Wesleyan Methodist Church medical missionary, Dr L.G. Parsons, wrote, 'he must wonder why it has been done, and is far more prepared to receive and respond to the gospel message than if this is presented to him with his pain unrelieved.'⁴⁸ For these reasons, at some central mission stations where a trained medical doctor was not available, some missionaries practised as amateur doctors.⁴⁹

The first permanent medical mission staffed by a trained doctor began in 1893 when Dr W.L. Thompson, a missionary of the American Congregational Church, opened a dispensary at his home at Mount Selinda mission. A fellow American medical missionary, Dr W.T. Lawrence, established a small hospital at Chikore mission in 1900. Dr Samuel Gurney, a missionary of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, started a medical mission at Old Umtali in 1903. Missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church started a hospital at Morgenster mission when the first medical missionary, Dr John T. Helm, arrived in 1894.⁵⁰ These medical missions proved to be an invaluable evangelistic agency.

⁴⁶ A. Sharp, 'A chairman's tour, Rhodesia District', *Work and Workers in the Mission Field*, Jan. 1900, 19-20.

⁴⁷ J.W. Stanlake, 'The Annual Synod of the Rhodesia District', *Work and Workers in the Mission Field*, Apr. 1900, 157.

⁴⁸ L.G. Parsons, 'Medical missions', *Bulletin of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 65, Feb. 1910.

⁴⁹ The Wesleyan Methodist missionary, the Revd H. Oswald Brigg, for example, opened a dispensary at Tegwani. For details, see H. Oswald Brigg, 'The missionary as an amateur doctor', *The Foreign Field of the Wesleyan Methodist Church* (1917-18), 147-9.

⁵⁰ D.P. Mandebvu, 'Church history of the African Reformed Church in Rhodesia', in D.P. Mandebvu, *Introduction to Mission History* (Morgenster, Morgenster Mission Press, 1976), 6.

MISSIONARY/WESTERN EDUCATION

In addition to the the ministry of preaching, the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, the establishment of Christian villages and the ministry of healing, missionaries also introduced Western education among Africans in colonial Zimbabwe. Missionaries regarded schools 'not only as a good thing in themselves but, above all, as a means of evangelism and the extension of the Church. The Church and the school should go hand in hand.'⁵¹ The Catholic missionaries, for example, believed that 'without schools there would be no missions, no African attendance, no adherents, no success...Pupils meant catechumens and converts.'⁵² The Anglicans and the Wesleyans viewed literary education as 'a powerful force by which to weaken the influences of indigenous religion, superstition and witchcraft on African society and expedite the acceptance of Christianity'.⁵³

Because the missionaries regarded the adults as hopeless pagans, the emphasis in every case was on the children and young people. 'It is on them', the Jesuit missionary at Chishawasha, Fr. Francis Richartz, wrote in 1901, 'that our main, indeed our sole hopes of building up a Christian community rest; and from the beginning, it has been our aim and endeavour to get them under our supervision while young and to keep them and train them until they are old enough to marry.'⁵⁴ Sykes concurred: 'It is in their plastic days', he wrote, 'that the lessons of our holy religion can best sink into their minds and their actions before ingrained prejudices and vicious habits have acquired a permanent hold.'⁵⁵ These sentiments were shared by O'Neil: 'It is practically impossible', he wrote, 'to make any real impression on the adults. With rare exceptions they are unchangeable, and will not give up their pagan and barbarous customs. The young are much more pliant.'⁵⁶ For these reasons, the missionaries hoped to effect a transformation of African society through education by building schools at their major mission stations.

Initially, parents were reluctant to send their children to school. The Tegnani Circuit Superintendent, the Revd H. Oswald Brigg, for example, reported in 1909 that parents gave all kinds of excuses for not sending their children to school, some

⁵¹ P.S. Hassing, 'The Christian Missions and the British Expansion in Southern Rhodesia, 1888-1923' (Washington DC, American Univ., unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1960), 279.

⁵² A.J. Dachs and W.F. Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe, 1879-1979* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1979), 107.

⁵³ R.J. Zvobgo, 'Government and Missionary Policies on African Secondary Education in Southern Rhodesia with Special Reference to the Anglican and Wesleyan Methodist Churches, 1934-1971' (Edinburgh, Univ. of Edinburgh, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1980), 42-3.

⁵⁴ Richartz, 'Chishawasha today', 475.

⁵⁵ R. Sykes, 'A visit to our mission station at Empandeni', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (15), 24-5.

⁵⁶ J. O'Neil, 'Habits and customs of the natives of Mangwe District, South Matabeleland', *Zambesi Miss. Rec.* (1910-13), IV, (48), 79.

even going to the extent of saying that they had no children.⁵⁷ At St Joseph's Jesuit mission in the Chilimanzi District, O'Neil said that children came to school for a few days but had no desire to learn and objected even to the mildest school discipline. 'Fortunately', he wrote, 'in some kraals a few miles away, there were a number of grown boys and girls who really wanted to learn and these now began to attend school regularly. It was of these youths and young women that the first converts were made.'⁵⁸

When mission stations were first opened, the preaching place was usually accompanied by a school. In the village schools, the classroom was the church and the church was the classroom for many years. 'To the early communities, church and school were identical and one could not be conceived without the other.'⁵⁹

In the rural communities, the village schools functioned as 'points of contact with Christianity and Western education'.⁶⁰ It was in these village schools that the first converts were made among the pupils. The Revd John M. Springer of the American Methodist Episcopal Church at Old Umtali mission said that these pupils were an important factor in the task of converting others. 'When the boys went home at vacation times', he wrote, 'they told their friends the Good News they had received. The small boys often started a little school of the younger brothers and sisters, teaching them hymns and sometimes the ABCs.'⁶¹ He added:

The results of this broadcast seed-sowing was that soon the chiefs began to send in requests for native teachers. This was a distinct gain. At first the chiefs had absolutely refused to even consider having schools at their villages. But the visits of our pupils in the kraals during vacations and while on evangelistic tours carrying some book or other always in their pockets, a primer, a hymn-book, or one of the Gospels, out of which they would read, to the great admiration of the small children, had resulted in a widespread desire for an education on the part of both boys and girls, and discontent at the kraal life. They were constantly running away to the mission to go to school. So it was no longer a question of school or no school, but of schools in the kraals or at the Mission.⁶²

Because the conversion of Africans to Christianity in colonial Zimbabwe was the basic objective of missionary education during the early period, religious instruction occupied a prominent place in mission schools. Two examples will

⁵⁷ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, S/M/S/A, 1906-1911, Rhodesian District Synod Minutes, 1910. H. Oswald Brigg, Tegnani Circuit Report, 1909.

⁵⁸ O'Neil, 'Our missions at Hama's and Gokomere', 498.

⁵⁹ W.R. Peadar, *Missionary Attitudes to Shona Culture, 1890-1923* (Salisbury, The Central African Historical Association, Local Series 7, 1970), 8.

⁶⁰ J.G. Kamusikiri, 'African Education under the American Methodist Episcopal Church in Rhodesia: Objectives, Strategy and Impact, 1898-1966' (Los Angeles, Univ. of California, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1978), 64.

⁶¹ J.M. Springer, *The Heart of Central Africa* (Cincinnati, Jennings and Graham, 1909), 39.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 40.

suffice. At Old Umtali mission, the curriculum during the first decade was 'dominated by religious instruction, accompanied by industrial training'.⁶³ At Chishawasha, all students were required to attend religious instruction for an hour and half every day, half an hour immediately after Mass, another half an hour later in the morning, and a third in the evening.⁶⁴ In addition, missionaries established boarding facilities at their major mission centres because they had discovered through experience that it was very difficult to instil into students the 'Christian virtues' as well as 'moral, industrious and orderly habits' unless they were removed from their 'pagan' environment.⁶⁵ In time, the major mission centres produced the first indigenous African evangelists and teachers.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have discussed the interaction between Christianity and African culture in colonial Zimbabwe between 1893 and 1934. I focused on two factors which, from the missionaries' point of view, militated against the acceptance of Christianity by Africans in colonial Zimbabwe, namely the institution of polygamy and the belief in ancestral spirits. I discussed the reasons for African resistance to Christianity in Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Missionaries misunderstood completely the reasons for polygamy in African society and denounced polygamy because, from their point of view, it not only reduced women to the level of a commodity to be bought and sold but also degraded the position of women in the family. The Jesuits not only expelled polygamists from their mission farms but also urged the government to suppress polygamy by force.

The Jesuits were unable to do anything about the Shumba cult among the Kalanga. Missionaries met African opposition to Christianity in colonial Zimbabwe through the ministry of preaching, translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, the establishment of Christian villages and the ministry of healing. Because missionaries regarded the adults as hopeless pagans, they turned their attention to children and young people and hoped, through them, to effect a transformation of African society through Western education. In the village schools, the first converts were made among the pupils. The major mission centres produced the first indigenous African evangelists and teachers who, in time, evangelized their own people even more successfully than the European missionaries themselves.

⁶³ Kamusikiri, 'African Education under the American Methodist Episcopal Church in Rhodesia', 43.

⁶⁴ Richartz, 'Twelve years' progress at Chishawasha', 340.

⁶⁵ 'Notes from the different stations', *Zambezi Miss. Rec.* (1902-5), II, (19), 172.

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of the role which Nenguwo Training Institution played in this respect, see W.R. Peaden, 'Nenguwo Training Institution and the first Shona teachers', in Dachs (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, I, 71-82.