

**MISSIONARY LETTERS AS A SOURCE FOR CULTURAL HISTORY:
AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ZULU AND NDEBELE
COMMUNITIES IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY**

by

JENNIFER CHIPUNGAHELO-NKWERA

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Supervisor: Dr Lize Kriel
Co-supervisor: Prof Karen L Harris

FOREWORD

This mini-dissertation is concerned with missionary writings as a source not merely for studying the missionary experience in southern Africa, but more so, as a source for unraveling the meaning and the significance of Africans' encounters with Europeans in the former's own environment in the nineteenth century. In recent years numerous South African and international scholars have made groundbreaking contributions in this regard by investigating particular African communities' interaction with particular mission societies during the course of the nineteenth century. Jeff Guy¹ has published on the Colenso family and the Zulu, Paul Landau² and John and Jean Comaroff³ have worked on the Tswana, Allen Lester⁴ and Elizabeth Elbourne⁵ have also published on missionary encounters in the British Cape Colony and in 2005 Alan Kirkaldy's study of the Berlin missionaries' encounters with the Venda will be published.⁶

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1. J. Guy, *The Heretic. A Study of the Life of J.W. Colenso*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983 & *The View across the River. Harriette Colenso and the Zulu Struggle against Imperialism*, David Philip, Cape Town, 2001. Jeff Guy is Professor in History at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
 2. P. Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom*, Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1995. Paul Landau obtained his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1992 and currently teaches southern African history at the University of Maryland.
 3. J. & J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution I: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991. The Comaroffs are Professors in Anthropology at the University of Chicago.
 4. A. Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain*, Routledge, London, 2001. Allen Lester obtained his doctorate from the University of London and currently teaches at the University of Sussex. His research interest is historical geographies of Southern Africa within the British Empire in the nineteenth century.
 5. E. Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 2002. Elizabeth Elbourne is Professor in History at McGill University in Canada.
 6. A. Kirkaldy, *Capturing the Soul. The VhaVenda and the Missionaries, 1870-1900*, Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2005. Dr. Alan Kirkaldy is Head of the Department of Development Studies, into which the Department of History has recently been incorporated, at the University of Venda.

The aim of this mini-dissertation is to examine the encounter between the American missionaries and the Zulu and Ndebele/Matebele.⁷ It will be illustrated that there were varied interpretations of African culture and tradition by individual missionaries. The letters that the American missionaries wrote will be textually analyzed for the purpose of understanding how the missionaries constructed meaning out of their observations of and interaction with the Zulu and Ndebele communities (under Dingane and Mzilikazi respectively).

Any historical work has to be visualized with a certain awareness of the applicable historiography and appropriate trends in methodology. This mini-dissertation deals mainly with a particular collection of published primary sources, namely the correspondence of American missionaries who worked in South Africa in the first half of the nineteenth century. In reading letters, as an intimate form of primary document, the researcher stands a chance to ‘uncover’ the ‘hidden voices’ of those who have been subjected to the writer’s writing – the Zulu and Ndebele communities respectively. In the paragraphs that follow, more light will be shed on the historiographical and methodological approaches used in this study.

The mini-dissertation begins with providing a brief historical background of the main groups involved in the production of the letters. The groups that are reflected upon include the American missionaries themselves, as the writers of the letters, the Zulu and Ndebele as the topic of the letters, and the Boers who played a major part in changing the course of the history of both the respective African communities and the missionaries. Because the main aim of the mini-dissertation is to trace the construction of historical meaning through the letters, the specific issues at the forefront for the missionaries themselves, had to be identified. The observations that the missionaries wrote about in their letters

7. “Ndebele” is derived from the Nguni word “Amandebele”, meaning, the Ndebele people. From this is derived the Sotho word “Matebele”, which connotes “strangers from the east”. See N.J. van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of Bantu tribes of South Africa*, Pretoria, 1935, p. 85, in K. Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi’s Ndebele in Southern Africa*, Collins, London, 1978, p. 161.

included the ‘traditional’ religion, customs, culture, and character of the respective South African communities, i.e. the Zulu and the Ndebele. Special emphasis is placed on the analysis of the observations made concerning the warrior leaders, Dingane and Mzilikazi, under whom the Zulu and Ndebele communities, together with the missionaries, lived. All the letters are found in one source book, *Letters of American missionaries 1835-1838*⁸. Other sources have been used in order to substantiate and verify the information concerning the Africans given by the missionaries in their letters.

Considering the limited scope of this study, as a coursework Masters mini-dissertation, and given the extensive and lively ongoing South African historiographical discourse on this topic, particularly in the field of Kwazulu-Natal history, this study considers a small dimension within the context of the wider field. It uses the rich reservoir of existing knowledge for a somewhat different purpose: to probe the way early Victorian white American Christians produced their own sets of knowledge about particular South African communities. It should be pointed out that, the aim is not to explore Zulu or Ndebele history in detail, but to trace the construction of meaning in missionary letters. Therefore the writings of the following authors are indispensable in contextualising this exercise: for the Zulu: Jeff Guy, John Laband⁹, Norman Etherington¹⁰ and Ian J. Knight¹¹; for the Ndebele: Peter Becker,¹² R.K. Rasmussen¹³ and P.J. van der Merwe.¹⁴

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8. The book was edited by D.J. Kotze and published by the Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1950.
 9. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand: The Rise and the fall of the Zulu Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1995.
 10. In his article “Christianity and African societies in the Nineteenth Century Natal”, in A. Duminy and R. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from the earliest times to 1910*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1989.
 11. I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs of Southern Africa*, Firebird Books, Poole, 1994.
 12. P. Becker, *Path of Blood: The Rise and the Conquest of Mzilikazi, Founder of Matebele Tribe of Southern Africa*, Longmans and Green Co. Ltd., London, 1962.
 13. K. Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi’s Ndebele in Southern Africa*, Collins, London, 1978.
 14. P.J. van der Merwe, “Die Matebeles en die Voortrekkers”, *Argiefjaarboek van die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis*, 49, II (Staatsdrukker, Pretoria, 1986).

Despite the extensive nature of Zulu and Ndebele historiography, which is not even exhaustively accounted for above, the brief encounter between the American missionaries who came to South African in the 1830s and first worked among Mzilikazi's Ndebele and later among Dingane's Zulu, seems to have been generally disregarded in the most recent scholarly outputs. The brevity of the encounter and the availability of the American missionaries' documents in published form, however, make this set of primary material an appropriate theme to explore in a mini-dissertation. By focusing on this apparently overlooked encounter the present work will attempt to make a contribution to rethinking Ndebele and Zulu interaction with European agents of modernity during a particularly tense and disruptive period.

The letters of the American missionaries were edited by Professor D.J. Kotze and published in 1950 by the Van Riebeeck Society. Kotze lectured history at the University of Stellenbosch and used the foreword to his source publication as an opportunity to show his indebtedness to the following prominent Afrikaner historians, who had been his contemporaries at Stellenbosch: H.B. Thom, J.A. Wiid and P.J. van der Merwe. Because this publication of primary material is the main source of this mini-dissertation, it is in the writer's interest also to visit the historical background of the Van Riebeeck Society itself as the publisher of the book. From this background it will be possible to consider why Kotze chose to focus on these letters at that particular moment of South African history.

Founded in 1918, the Van Riebeeck Society aimed at making primary sources in South African history available "in a readable and enjoyable form" to anyone interested in southern African history¹⁵. In 1918, after the First World War (which had weakened the antagonism of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902), white South Africans were still trying to establish a national identity.

15. The Van Riebeeck Society, <http://www.vanriebeecksociety.co.za> accessed 30 September 2004; H. Phillips, "The Van Riebeeck Society's Journey: the Origins and Destination of the Van Riebeeck Society", *The South African Journal of Cultural History* 19(1), June 2005, pp. 65- 78.

The white communities were trying to overcome the division between Afrikaners and English speaking South Africans. The volumes of the Van Riebeeck Society reflect the period in which they have been published; the earliest dealing with the Dutch heritage of the country. The society then shifted their interest to British heritage in volumes on the 1820 Settlers. They also published on the Anglo-Boer Wars. Travellers' and missionaries' accounts are perennial favourites,¹⁶ partly because they provide valuable information of the indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa, but their viewpoint is that of whites.¹⁷ In a recent appraisal of the history of the Society, Professor Howard Phillips remarked:

Clearly the Society is showing its age as the product of a particular phase of South African history, with a particular vision of the past reflected both in what it has published and in which languages, and in what it has not. From its baptismal name on, it still bears many of the marks of its birth.¹⁸

The Van Riebeeck Society's publication of the American Missionaries' letters in a decade of heightened nationalist scholarship (1950-1960) may be explained at the hand of the fact that the American missionaries differed from their British contemporaries in the Cape Colony in one major respect: the missionaries of the London Mission Society, in particular John Philip, were represented in Afrikaner social memory as the aides of the British authorities who favoured the indigenous communities at the expense of the white Trek Boers and Voortrekkers. The American missionaries, however, were remembered for their friendly relations with the Afrikaner. It was thus believed that their accounts of the animosity of the indigenous black communities

16. By 2005 these represented respectively forty and fourteen per cent of the total number of 88 volumes. See H. Phillips, "The Van Riebeeck Society's Journey: the Origins and Destination of the Van Riebeeck Society", *The South African Journal of Cultural History* 19(1), June 2005, p. 77.

17. The Van Riebeeck Society, <http://www.vanriebeecksociety.co.za> accessed 30 September 2004.

18. H. Phillips, "The Van Riebeeck Society's Journey: the Origins and Destination of the Van Riebeeck Society", *The South African Journal of Cultural History* 19(1), June 2005, p. 77. Professor Howard Phillips teaches history at the University of Cape Town and is a Board Member of the Van Riebeeck Society.

provided a more “reliable” account of black-white relations in South Africa than the British sources which tended to portray the Boers/Voortrekkers/Afrikaners as the instigators of conflict. This could be precisely why Kotze decided to compile and edit these letters, to portray perceptions and relations in the early phases of this black-white encounter.

The interpretation of mission history varies from time to time, from country to country, and from one school of historiography to another. During the 1950s, the American missionaries’ documents were obviously published in a completely different academic paradigm than the one adhered to by the authors of the more recent studies cited in a previous paragraph. The more recent spate of studies involving missionary documents has revealed that missionary sources can indeed yield new meaning by being reread, particularly when being read in a way other than it was intended to be read in the first place – so-called “against the grain”.¹⁹ Different readings can in fact be juxtaposed and compared by inferring how the letters were meant to be read at the time of their being written, with what audience in mind the letters may have been published in the 1950s, as well as in relation to what the text now has to say for us in the light of what it meant for people in the past.²⁰

The mini-dissertation comprises the following five chapters:

1. Historical background: the American Missionaries, the Boers, the Zulu and the Ndebele
2. Historiography of protestant missions and missionaries in South Africa.
3. The Americans’ mission: perceptions, expectations and preparations
4. Representations of African culture and religion

19. “Ideology, Mentalité and Social Ritual: From Social History to Cultural History”, in D.M. MacRaild & A. Taylor, *Social History and Social Theory*, Palgrave and MacMillan, London, 2004, pp. 119-147.

20. S. Michael, *A Companion to the Study of History*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Cambridge, 1994, p. 157.

5. Representations of African leaders

The general focus of chapter one will be an assessment of the background of the parties involved in the construction of the meaning of African history as observed by the American missionaries through their letters. In other words, a brief background on the American Board of Commission for Foreign Missionaries (ABCFM), the Zulu, the Ndebele as well as the Boers. This is important in order to understand why a certain observation was given by a particular person.²¹ For instance, it will help us to understand why the missionaries regarded all the Africans as “barbarous” and why and how the Africans responded to such an observation, consciously or unconsciously. In other words, explaining the historical origin of these four major groupings will assist in understanding why and how each party fulfilled a particular task in the construction of Zulu and Ndebele history, as observed and imbued with meaning by the missionaries in their letters.

Chapter two will show how different historians have accounted for South African missionary history. Missionary historiography in a broader African context has been accounted for by F.K. Ekechi²² as well as by Andrew Porter and Norman Etherington in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*.²³ While these studies will be taken into account, the particular southern African development of the discourse will be the major focus of this chapter. The main guideline is the trend along which the Protestant missionary historiography developed and changed over time, as analysed by Johannes du Bruyn and Nicholas Southey in their article “The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries in South African historiography” which appears in H. Bredekemp

21. *Ibid*, pp. 144-145.

22. “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.) *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, Longman, Ikeja and London, 1993.

23. A. Porter, “Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm and Empire”, in A. Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire III. The Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, pp. 222-246; N. Etherington, “Missions and Empire”, in R.W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire V. Historiography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, pp. 303-314.

and R. Ross, *Missions and Christianity in South African History*.²⁴ Chapter two therefore, provides a methodological and historiographical framework according to which the analysis of the American letters will be undertaken.

The third chapter aims at exploring the background of the American missionaries before they came to South Africa, as an attempt to conceive of the kind of audience (community of readers) these missionaries had in mind when they composed their correspondence. This is because what happened in America had a direct connection to what the American missionaries wrote about the Ndebele and the Zulu people. As was the case for the Berlin missionaries in the Transvaal in the late-nineteenth century, the choices that the missionaries made were formed by their own background²⁵ and however flawed their motivations and methods may have been, their attempts at interacting with ‘the natives’ was sincere²⁶. The structure of the chapter is centered around the first three letters in Kotze’s collection of the *American Missionaries*. In short, the first letter questions why the Americans wanted to work in South Africa; while the second letter answers these questions; and the third letter sets out the instructions given to the missionaries who had to go and work among the Zulu and the Ndebele.

In the fourth chapter I shall explore what the Americans observed in Africa. Here, the content of the letters will therefore be analyzed concerning how the missionaries perceived African culture, character and traditions in general. In this chapter of the mini-dissertation the consideration will focus on whether the missionaries were familiar with what they observed and wrote about. I shall scrutinize the conditions of the observer during the process of observation that could have affected the observation and consequently, the interpretation of the events. In sorting out these two matters, the conclusion could be drawn as to

24. Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1995.

25. K. Rütger, *The Power Beyond. Mission Strategies, African Conversion and the Development of a Christian Culture in the Transvaal*, Lit Verlag, Münster, 2001.

26. J.W. Hofmeyr & G.W. Pillay (eds.), *A History of Christianity in South Africa I*, HAUM Tertiary, Pretoria, 1994, p. 138.

why they made a particular observation.²⁷ The chapters will begin with the observations concerning the Ndebele, and then the focus will be shifted to the Zulu. The note should be made here that the first American missionaries to reach their destination were the inland missionaries to Mzilikazi. The inland missionaries arrived at Mosega on July 1835; Mosega was destroyed by the Boers on 17 January 1837.²⁸ These American missionaries left their field of labour after the war between the Ndebele and the Boers. Thereafter they joined the other American group that had already been working among the Zulu by then. The character and traditions of the Zulu were therefore more thoroughly described than those of the Ndebele. As has already been stated previously, the intention with this study is not to explore Zulu history in detail, but to trace the construction of meaning in the missionary letters.

When reading the American missionaries' letters for the purpose set out above, special attention will of course be paid to the way they responded to African practices and customs which were completely unfamiliar in the American experience. An effort will also be made to identify information that has been more deeply embedded in the message, but which may have been so much taken for granted at the time that, when read against the grain in our own time, can reveal a lot about the attitudes, the fears and the assumptions of both the Americans and the Africans during their initial encounters. The way in which French Cultural Historian Roger Chartier²⁹ describes cultural history, as a study of the process through which meaning is constructed, will thus be followed. In the fourth chapter therefore, the negative image of the Africans portrayed in the missionaries' letters will be focused on. In this, the missionaries were the victims of their own time. In defiance of all the efforts that the missionaries had invested in 'civilizing' the Africans, many Africans were still keeping in touch

27. R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, 1980, pp. 154-155.

28. D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries 1835-1838*, The Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1950.

29. R. Chartier, "Texts, Printings, Readings", in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 154-175. Also see R. Chartier, *Cultural History. Between Practices and Representations*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988.

with their own traditions and customs in many ways. In other words they rather incorporated what they learnt from the missionaries into their own way of life. In some cases, however, Christian communities were characterized by a specific internal hierarchy i.e. missionaries at the top; followed by native pastors, helpers, elders and communicants, unconfirmed members and candidates for baptism. Individual status did not depend on a customary basis of prestige. A converted young man won the opportunity of gaining a prestigious position such as evangelist or teacher in a new type of community, in contrast to the subordinate social position they had held before Christianity.³⁰

The chapter that follows, i.e. the fifth chapter, will turn the attention to the African leaders, Mzilikazi and Dingane. In this fifth chapter I shall concentrate on how the missionaries observed the individual characteristics of the respective leaders; how the leaders presented themselves to the missionaries; what the leaders did to their people and to the missionaries and how the Africans perceived their leaders. It should be pointed out that the perception of the character of the African leaders varied with the prevailing circumstances. When the missionary had a desire to gain a certain favour from the particular leader, the image portrayed would be rather “positive”, or less aggressive. But when the wants and needs of the missionaries could not be achieved, they would write negative things, condemning what they termed as the sinfulness and the barbaric nature of the Africans. All in all the general perception was negative. This was the motivation, after all, why the American missionaries came to Africa in the first place - “to change the “negatives” into the “positives” - in accordance to the Christian civilizing mission.

One has to contemplate whether this eagerness of the missionaries to change Africans rendered their letters more, or less, useful, as a source for historical research. It will be argued that if anything about Ndebele and Zulu experience

30. W. Gabbert, “Social and Cultural Conditions of Religious Conversion in Colonial South West Tanzania 1891-1937”, *Ethnology* 40(4), 2001, p. 300.

can be deduced from this particular source, it has to be approached for ‘what it is’: First and foremost, these letters are recordings of the missionaries’ own fears and expectations about their encounters with Africans. Of course, not all their fears materialized and not all their expectations were realized. But at another level, as Johannes du Bruyn explains, missionary “narratives often reflect historical indeterminacies and uncertainties which enable the other’s voice to come through.”³¹

31. J. du Bruyn, “Of Muffled Southern Tswana and Overwhelming Missionaries: The Comaroffs and the Colonial Encounter”, *South African Historical Journal* 31, November 1994, p. 308.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PARTIES ACCOUNTED FOR IN THE AMERICAN LETTERS

INTRODUCTION

The central aim of this study is an analysis of the texts of the letters of the American missionaries. Through what they observed and wrote, the missionaries tried to portray their understanding of the African way of life. There were a number of groups of people who, in one way or another, contributed to this process through which meaning was constructed. These groups of people are the American missionaries themselves, the Boers, the Zulu, and the Ndebele. These people have a great effect on the completion of the findings of this work and it is important that their background be briefly considered. This will help in relating what was observed and how the observations had implications in the making of the Africans' history. From the background one will be able to understand how the relationship, say of the Boers and the Africans, was very circumstantial and generally bad. One will be able to figure out why, to a larger extent, the letters of the American missionaries carried very negative images on the African. The background will also help to get acquainted with the inter-group relationship of the groups mentioned above. The analysis will begin with the American missionaries, followed by the Boers, then the Zulu and lastly the Ndebele.

THE AMERICAN MISSIONARIES

Because the main concern of the mini-dissertation is centered on the American missionaries, it is important first to explore the brief historical background of the American Board of Commission for Foreign Missionaries (ABCFM). It was from this Board that the group of American missionaries that came to South

Africa in the early 1830s originated. Much of the information used to compile this background was derived from Kotze's introduction to his annotated publication of the missionaries' letters. Kotze got his information from sources like the American Board's Year Books and its periodical, the *Mission Herald*, as well as works by J. Dexter Taylor (*Hundred years of the ABCFM* and *The American Board Mission in South Africa*).¹

The American Board of Commission for Foreign Missionaries was founded on 5 September 1810. It was established as a result of the Spiritual Revival which took place in Western Europe and several parts of northern America.² This was a private society not supported by any particular church interested in missionary labour.³ The aim of the A.B.C.F.M. was to devise ways and means for promoting the spread of the gospel in "heathen" lands.⁴ And so the American missionaries came to South Africa to accomplish this aim. The purpose was propagating the gospel in foreign lands and supporting missionaries by diffusing knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and by maintaining appropriate Christian activities and institutions.⁵ This was accomplished by the missionaries through their activities of building schools and churches at their respective missionary stations. These issues will be given specific attention in chapters three and four. The ABCFM was inter-denominational in aim and organization, and it therefore expected its missionaries to be tolerant in their contact with workers belonging to different churches.⁶

The ABCFM was one of the very last Missionary Societies to send their missionaries to southern Africa. The first six missionaries arrived in the Cape

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1. American Board Mission, Durban, 1935.
 2. K. Shillington, *History of Africa*, Macmillan, London, 1995, pp. 290-293. Also see G.M. Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival*, UCL Press, London, 1998.
 3. L. Paton, "Mission" contributions to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, XV, p. 596, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries 1835-1838*, The Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1950, p. xii.
 4. *Missionary Herald*, January 1834, p. 30, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 3.
 5. D.J. Kotze (ed.) *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 3.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

of Good Hope (Cape Town) in February 1835. By that time, the Moravians had also already completed nearly a century of work among the “Hottentots”; the London Missionary Society, the Wesleyans, Rhenish, French, Scottish and Berlin Societies had already gained a foothold in the Cape.⁷ Because of their late arrival, the Americans were willing to go to those “untouchable” African lands of the Zulu and Ndebele communities, the lands that other missionaries avoided and were “less” interested to work in. But the American missionaries were prepared to risk their lives in the name of the Christian civilization of the “heathen Africans”.

The board sent six missionaries and their spouses into the South African territories of Dingane of the Zulu and Mzilikazi of the Ndebele. Those who were assigned duties in the territory of Mzilikazi were Rev. Daniel Lindley, Rev. Alexander E. Wilson and Rev. Henry I. Venable. These inland missionaries left the Cape on 19 March 1835 and they reached their destination at Mosega in July 1835. The missionaries at Mzilikazi’s kingdom did not establish themselves long enough to see the fruits of their labour. The coming of the Boers in the vicinity of Mzilikazi’s kingdom led to a series of attacks between the two sides and the Boer attacks culminated in the total destruction of the Mosega station on 17 January 1837. The destruction of the Mosega station meant the end of missionary work among the Ndebele. On 27 July 1837 the inland missionaries joined the Natal mission where they continued with their missionary work.⁸

The missionaries to Zululand were: Rev. Aldin Grout, Rev. George Champion, and Newton Adams, who was a medical doctor. These missionaries left Cape Town in July 1835 and stayed a while at Bethelsdorp. On March 1836 they journeyed from Bethelsdorp overland to Natal. By 22 May 1836 they arrived

7. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

at Umlazi, the area close to Zululand.⁹ With the permission from Dingane, they worked among the people at Port Natal. After the arrival of Lindley, Venable and Wilson from the destroyed Mosega station of Mzilikazi, it was decided that Lindley would start a station at Ilovo River, about ten miles south of Umlazi. Venable and Wilson would proceed to Zululand to begin a fourth station.¹⁰

As was the case with the ‘Ndebeleland’ missionaries, the end of missionary works within Zululand began with the coming of the Boers at the end of 1837.¹¹ By 25 March 1838 the missionaries left for Port Natal, escaping the skirmishes between the Zulu and the Boers. Consequently the missionaries left for Algoa Bay and reached it on 30 March 1838. By the end of 1838 Wilson and Venable left for America, and Champion followed in early 1839.¹² In June 1839 Lindley and Adams returned to Natal to continue with evangelization.¹³

THE BOERS

It is not possible to write about the history of South Africa in the 1800s without mentioning the contribution made by the Boers. As will be shown in the coming chapters, the Boers brought about a remarkable change in the social economic and political lives of not only Africans, but also the American missionaries in the lands of Mzilikazi and Dingane. It is therefore important that we visit their brief historical background so that we can see how it affected the construction of meaning out of the missionary letters about the Africans and their traditions.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1995, p. 73; D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 14.

12. D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 15.

13. Dr. Wilson died in West Africa in 1841. Champion also died in 1841. Adams died in 1851, Venable in 1878, Lindley in 1880 and Grout in 1894, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 15.

Historically, the Boers were the descendants of the first Dutch settlers at the Cape. The history of Dutch settlement goes back to the coming of Jan van Riebeeck, who arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. It has been argued that over the centuries, the Boers developed into a tough, independent-minded and self-reliant breed of farmers. They were held to be deeply religious, believing that God had intended them to play a dominant role on the African continent.¹⁴ This apparently made the Boers regard themselves as superior to any other race apart from their own. This superiority complex was an apparent catalyst to the Boers' unharmonious relationship with the people of other races they encountered in South Africa. This resulted in massive bloodshed and loss of property on both the Boers' and Africans' sides as will be evident in the coming chapters.

The arrival of the British at the Cape had a dramatic effect on the Boers' history as well as the entire southern African region. The British took control of the Cape at the end of the eighteenth century and established new policies that equated the Boers and the 'coloureds'. (The latter were regarded by the Boers as 'blacks' with the exception of slaves.) These changes angered the Boers who, according to their religious convictions, felt superior over any other race.¹⁵

By the 1830s as a result of this and other factors many Boer families decided to pack and move beyond the Cape Colony's borders into the interior. This mass movement of the Afrikaners is historically known as the Great Trek.¹⁶ The reasons why the Boers moved from the Cape Colony were linked to the reasons why they attacked both Dingane's and Mzilikazi's kingdoms. The Boers trekked because they were "searching for a promised land where farms were

14. I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs of Southern Africa*, Firebird Books, Poole, 1994, p. 115. For a thorough study of the history of this community from a very recent perspective, see Hermann Giliomee's award winning *The Afrikaners. A Biography of a People*. Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003.

15. I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs ...*, p. 116.

16. *Ibid.*

empty and limitless; the cattle thrived and there were no white [British] officials to interfere”.¹⁷ They moved into the interior in large numbers with their families and all their belongings. Reinforced by the feelings of alienation from the Africans whom they encountered on the way; they confronted their enemies with a degree of discipline and social order which transcended their own factional disputes in every crisis.¹⁸

The nature of the Boers’ movement did not allow them to move as a big group containing all the families. They left in different seasons and moved in family bands and headed towards the north, but in different directions. Thus, the opposition they encountered from the Africans depended on the nature of the African communities they met in the course of their movement. Against the centralised communities with organised armies, the opposition could be more active than in encounters with communities where people lived in destitute conditions and were scattered. It is therefore no surprise that the Boer encounters with the Ndebele and the Zulu, who were the most centralised kingdoms of the time (late eighteenth century up to mid-nineteenth century), amounted to massive bloodshed.

When the Boers first arrived in the Ndebele land, the American missionaries were already there, beginning to establish themselves at a place called Mosega that Mzilikazi had awarded them. In August 1836 the Boers crossed the Vaal from the south. They did not alert Mzilikazi of their arrival and thus the presence of so many parties of Voortrekkers advancing towards the Vaal became a mounting concern for Mzilikazi. He was restless because he knew these people intended to settle and were militarily superior.¹⁹ The very first encounter between the Boers and the Ndebele was one of serious conflict. This happened with the Voortrekker party led by Hendrick Potgieter in August

17. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand* ..., p. 80; also see I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs* ..., pp. 116-117.

18. K. Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi's Ndebele in Southern Africa*, Collins, London, 1978, p. 117.

19. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand* ..., p. 80; I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs* ..., pp. 115-116.

1836, who were accused of trespassing as they camped along the Vaal. The confrontations between the Boers and Mzilikazi continued until November 1837. The Ndebele were ultimately conquered at the raid of Mosega, whereafter Mzilikazi and the remnants of his people fled northwards. They crossed the Limpopo and created a new capital in the Molopo hills that they named Bulawayo. The end of Mzilikazi eventually meant the end of the American interior missionaries' field of labour.²⁰ Other parties of the Boers advanced also towards Dingane's Zululand.

Another party of Voortrekkers under the leadership of Piet Retief arrived in Zululand in October 1837. Unlike the Ndebele across the Vaal, Dingane was "aware" of the coming of these Boers into his territory. As a result the Boers and Dingane managed to "negotiate" the so-called secession of the land south of the Thukela.²¹ Dingane met Retief and some of his people on 5 November 1837, and the negotiations between them went on until 8 November 1837. By that time, Dingane assured Retief that he was willing to cede him the land but he did not name the specific piece of land, although he knew what piece of land the Boers wanted – the land south of the Thukela. Apparently, tired of the Boers' begging, Dingane conspired and had Retief and all members of his party killed. The massacre took place at *Kwa Matiwane* on the outskirts of Dingane's capital on 6 February 1838.²² The massacre signified the end of Retief and his party, but not the end of the Boers' encroachments into Zululand.

This is but a brief representation of what has remained one of the most contested and controversial episodes in South African history right through to the Apartheid era and beyond.²³ Dingane's massacre of the Boers has made a

20. I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs ...*, pp. 115-116.

21. P. Colenbrander, "The Zulu Kingdom 1828-79", in A. Duminy & B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from the Earliest Times to 1910*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1989.

22. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand ...*, p. 88.

23. J. Naidoo, *Tracking Down Historical Myths. Eight South African Cases*, Ad Donker, Johannesburg, 1989, pp. 82-119.

significant mark on the history of the relationship between black and white South Africans. It has resulted in the cultivation of negative images of one another among the different races, each accusing the other of not being fair.

ZULULAND

The Zulu kingdom was founded in the eastern part of South Africa. Geographically, Zululand extends from the Drakensberg mountains in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east: from the southern region of what is now Swaziland and Mozambique in the north, across modern day Kwa Zulu Natal to the broader lands of the Transkei to the south.²⁴ Before explaining how the Zulu people encountered the whites, it is important first to explain how the Zulu kingdom came into being. The explanation has a direct connection to the encounter between the Zulu and the whites and to the Zulu's relations with the neighbouring small chiefdoms. This in turn affected the work of the American missionaries in South Africa, especially as far as their interpretation of the Africans' traditions is concerned, as we shall see in the course of this section.

The founding of what came to be known as the Zulu kingdom was attributed to the rise of a ruler named Shaka. Originally, the Zulu were just a vassal chiefdom which Shaka's father, Senzangakona, ruled. During the early nineteenth century most African chiefdoms were involved in periodic armed confrontations. Attempts by various chiefdoms to secure the best possible combination of land types for grazing and agriculture in an extended period of drought, and to protect developing trade routes facilitated state formation at the time. This in turn led to tension and further conflicts between them and their neighbours.²⁵ As such Shaka's father proved to be insignificant in the rise and

24. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand ...*, p. 3.

25. J. Guy, "Ecological factors on the rise of Shaka and the Zulu kingdom" in S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, Longman, London, 1980, pp. 102-119.

the consolidation and protection of the chiefdom. It was under Shaka's rule that the Zulu as an exclusive kingdom was formed. Shaka succeeded in creating a very disciplined army based on the *amabutho* system (age regiments), an army that captured herds of cattle from small neighbouring chiefdoms and conquered their people to make what eventually became the Zulu kingdom. It was this kingdom that Dingane had inherited after plotting the murder of his half brother, Shaka.²⁶ It should be pointed out that by the time the tension had become evident in the Zulu state, the kingship had already acquired widespread legitimacy at political, ideological and economic levels. This was a truly remarkable achievement given the brevity of the prior existence of the kingdom.²⁷

While poor communication, political and religious hostility made evangelization difficult through most of sub-Saharan Africa, the land of the Zulu seemed full of promise. Here was a great and highly disciplined, politically stable black state²⁸ in a healthy environment, easily reachable from the sea. This advantage eventually made Natal one of the most heavily evangelized regions of the globe.²⁹ Historically the rise of the Zulu monarchy provoked great interest among the Christian missionaries in Europe and America. Missionaries in Zululand came from different faiths: Anglicans, American Congregationalists, Scottish Presbyterians, English Methodists, French and German Catholics, Lutherans from Saxony, Prussia, and Scandinavia were all present.³⁰

26. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

27. A. Hamilton, "The Amalala in Natal, 1750-1826". Unpublished paper, Department of History, University of Witwatersrand, 1982, p. 2, quoted in P. Colenbrander, "The Zulu Kingdom, 1828-79", in A. Duminy & B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand ...*, p. 85.

28. Politically, Dingane inherited the *Ibutho* system, as institutionalized by Shaka. The system formed the basis of the King's power and authority. Through it, Dingane was able to exercise a real degree of social and economic control over his subjects. He was able to harness their productive and military potential to the service of the Zulu State. He was also able to undermine the regional power bases of the over-mighty subjects. See J. Laband, *Rope of Sand ...*, p. 58.

29. N. Etherington, "Christianity and African Societies in Nineteenth Century Natal", in A. Duminy & B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand ...*, p. 277.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

It should be taken into consideration that the Zulu had encountered other whites before the coming of the American missionaries. The presence of whites in Zululand began to be felt in the last years of Shaka's reign. Colonial encounters included the traders at Port Natal, the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay and the British in the Eastern Cape.³¹ It is important to note that the first white settlement in the southeast was established in the vicinity of Zululand. Called Port Natal, this was founded in 1824 under the leadership of Frances Farewell and Henry Frances Fynn. The two English traders were given permission by Shaka to settle in the area and exercise authority over the land surrounding Port Natal.³² When the missionaries came into Zululand, they wrote not only about the Zulu, but also about their relations with their fellow whites at the Port. The writings of these non-missionary whites concerning the Zulu will be used to confirm what the American missionaries wrote in their observations of the Africans' ways of life.

NDEBELELAND

The Ndebele are those people who recognized Mzilikazi as their sovereign. These people possessed certain rights and responsibilities within the state system created after Mzilikazi left Zululand in 1821.³³ In order to understand the Ndebele polity, it is important first to give a brief background of Mzilikazi. This background will help better to understand Mzilikazi's relationships with his neighbours, with the people he led and the relationship he had with the American missionaries and other whites.

Mzilikazi was born a member of the Khumalo clan, a vassal state of the mighty Zulu kingdom. He grew up among the Zwide clan, as he was likely to be killed

31. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand ...*, pp.72-73.

32. E.A. Cubbin, "Origins of the British Settlement at Port Natal May 1824-July 1842". Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1983, pp. 6-56.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

before he could inherit his father's throne. When he reached adulthood, he returned to his original homeland and occupied the throne his father was forced to vacate. He was installed as chief of the northern Khumalo clan.³⁴ Mzilikazi heard of Shaka's expedition that killed many people including five sons of Zwide, the clan that had raised him. Mzilikazi became at ease, now that Shaka was emerging as the most powerful chief in Zululand. He took his people and cattle and surrendered to Shaka. Mzilikazi begged Shaka for protection, and promised to serve him and declared the Khumalo people would welcome the opportunity to join the ranks of the Zulu regiments. Shaka was happy to incorporate the Khumalo into his clan. They soon formed a close relationship.³⁵

Their friendship did not last long. As a vassal chief, Mzilikazi was given an assignment of conquering the Rasini people. He was supposed to take all the cattle he had conquered to Shaka, but he refused, consciously knowing that he would be put to death for that.³⁶ Mzilikazi collected his people and preceded northwards, he conquered the Nyoka people who were under Shaka. This was the beginning of Mzilikazi's emigration and conquest of small chiefdoms and the formation of the Ndebele kingdom.³⁷ His strategy was to butcher the people and take the young people and incorporate them in his army. In due course the foreigners in his army outnumbered the original nucleus of Khumalo warriors.³⁸ He finally decided to settle in the place that he called *eKupumuleni* - the Place of Rest - in the surroundings of the upper Olifants River.³⁹ The area was in Transvaal.⁴⁰ Here the women took over agriculture where men went out hunting. He had chosen, in 1824, to live peacefully in his place of rest rather than continue as a conqueror. He had however, to build military kraals in the

34. P. Becker, *Path of Blood; the Rise and Conquest of Mzilikazi, founder of the Matabele Tribe of Southern Africa*, Longman's, Green and Co. Ltd, London, 1962, p. 17.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 17; I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs ...*, p. 102.

36. P. Becker, *Path of Blood ...*, p. 23; I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs ...*, p. 103.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

40. Among the people Mzilikazi conquered were Sotho and Pedi who were located in the area. See T. Barnes *et. al.*, *People Making History*, Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1991, p. 66.

vicinity of *eKupumuleni* and organized his warriors into regiments according to Shaka's pattern.⁴¹ However, his dream of resting in peace was ended by the arrival of Boers in the Ndebele territory in August 1836.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter background information has been provided regarding the prominent role players in the interaction described in the American missionaries' letters. The Boers, the Zulu and the Ndebele were all in various stages of expansion and consolidation of their control over land in southern Africa. Unlike in many other encounters between missionaries and indigenous people during the nineteenth century, the American missionaries were not subjects of or direct representatives of the colonial powers encroaching on the African communities. It is necessary to contextualise the position of the American missionaries within the very vast corpus of historical research on missionary encounters. This will be undertaken in the chapter that follows.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PROTESTANT MISSION AND MISSIONARIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

The general focus of this chapter is the assessment of how different historians have written about South African missionary history. The main guideline is the trajectory along which the Protestant missionary historiography developed and changed over time. This is based heavily on the analysis presented by Johannes du Bruyn and Nicholas Southey in their seminal article “The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries in South African historiography” which appears in Henry Bredekemp and Robert Ross’s book.¹ Other publications consulted include books, diaries and journals that were available in English.

While the aim with this chapter is to write primarily about South African missionary historiography, the broader geographical context is also sketched with references to examples from outside South Africa, like the Ukaguru area in Tanzania and the Taveta region in south eastern Kenya. I have also consulted Felix Ekechi’s paper “Studies on Mission in Africa” which appeared in Toyin Falola’s 1993 compilation, *African Historiography: Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*. Ekechi holds similar arguments on mission historiography as Du Bruyn and Southey. Therefore, in some cases I have used Ekechi’s arguments to confirm what Du Bruyn and Southey have concluded.

1. Historian Norman Etherington also analysed the history of missionary studies in South Africa, and his articles will be consulted during the course of this investigation. However, for the purposes of this survey, Southey and Du Bruyn’s chapter provided the best overarching structure. See N. Etherington, “Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa: a South African Case Study”, *Africa* 47(1), 1997.

The chapter has been divided into five sections. Section one deals with the first phase of Protestant mission and missionary historiography in South Africa. Du Bruyn and Southey identified this as the era of reverential historiography.² The materials used to build section one includes the diaries of missionaries such as Robert Moffat and Daniel Lindley. The missionaries' accounts, which appeared in the missionary bibliographies, show how historians revered the missionaries and their work. Section two focuses on the historiography that portrays missionaries as agents of colonialism. This is the second phase of Protestant mission and missionary writing in South African historiography. Here, the views of how the missionaries involved themselves in trading activities are among the issues discussed. Section three focuses on the shift of historiography towards African initiatives and the importance of traditional religion. One of the issues under discussion is the image of God among African people.

Section four comprises the fourth phase of Protestant mission and missionary writings in South African historiography. It focuses on the works of historians who based their writings on the articulation of mission theology and African religion. It was in this phase that historians started to study the concept of the 'Supreme Being' among African societies. Here, the Xhosa concept of the 'Supreme Being' is being analysed. In the fifth section I focus on the subsequent trend in mission historiography: the *encounter* between missionaries and Africans. The issues under discussion include the need for the historian to understand the social background of missionaries in order to reflect on their behaviour and practices that occurred when they interacted with the Africans in their communities. This section considers the encounter from both the European and the African sides.

2. J. du Bryun & N. Southey, "The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries in South African Historiography", in H.C. Bredekemp and R. Ross (eds.), *Mission and Christianity in South African History*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1995, p. 36.

In summary, the sections which are set out here are primarily based on those identified by Du Bruyn and Southey as a kind of chronological development of Protestant missionary historiography. At first, historians wrote about the missionaries with a reverential focus. Then the missionaries came to be seen as agents of colonization. After this realization, the emphasis of historiography changed and identified more with African initiatives. It is from this trend of historiography that there appeared the school of historians who wrote about the importance of traditional religion over Christian religion. Later the focus changed and there appeared the historiography on missionaries and the ‘African encounter’, and its social and cultural context.³

Although Catholic missionary groups are also represented in southern Africa, it is mostly the Protestant missionaries that seem to engage the interest of Du Bruyn and Southey.⁴ One may ask oneself why Protestant missionaries? It appears that most of the missionary activities in South Africa were conducted by the Protestants. There were generally very few Roman Catholics. This is not surprising in the light of the fact that both waves of European colonization in South Africa (the Dutch in the seventeenth century and the British in the early nineteenth century) were initiated by Protestant-dominated powers. Since the American missionaries, the focus of my study, were Protestant too, I too chose to limit my contextualising study in this chapter to the Protestant missions.

3. Du Bruyn & Southey, “The Treatment of Christianity ...”, pp. 36-40.

4. Protestantism refers to the branch of Christianity which rejects the primacy of the pope, emphasizing individual faith and accepting the Bible as the prime authority. The Protestants include mainstream denominations that practise infant baptism (Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican); and radical denominations that practice adult baptism (Baptist, Quaker, Moravian, Mennonite, Holiness and Pentecostal bodies). See *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 15, Helen Hemingway Benton publishers, London, 1991, p. 99.

PHASE ONE: REVERENTIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Reverential historiography is the first phase of Protestant mission and missionary historiography as described by Du Bruyn and Southey.⁵ The word “revere” means “respect” or “admire deeply”. Reverential historiography therefore, refers to the writings of those scholars who admired missionaries and their work. So whatever the reason for their writing, these writers always perceived the missionaries as their heroes. Most of the writings found under the category of reverential historiography focus on the extension of missionary zeal and activities. Du Bruyn and Southey argue that reverential historiography was prevalent until the 1950s.⁶

The characteristics of reverential historiography indicates that scholars who wrote the history of the missionaries during this first phase based their accounts on the writings from the biographies of famous missionaries and the activities they performed during their contact with the Africans. The reverential writings of mission historiography also focused on European strategies of spreading Christianity in Africa, the theological context and the organizational structure of the evangelisation process, missionaries’ endeavours and the hardships *they* encountered while spreading the gospel.⁷

Several other scholars have also tried to typify the reverential phase of the pre-1950s. Felix Ekechi,⁸ a West-African historiographer, confirmed what Du Bruyn and Southey called reverential historiography by giving two major features that summarise its characteristics. The first feature is that the accounts were ethnocentric and biased towards the missionaries. The second feature suggests that stories were presented from the missionary point of view instead

5. Du Bruyn & Southey, “The Treatment of Christianity ...”, pp. 36-38.

6. Du Bruyn & Southey, “The Treatment of Christianity ...”, p. 36.

7. *Ibid.*

8. F.K. Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, Longman, Ikeja and London, 1993.

of the African viewpoint, that is, from “givers” to “receivers”.⁹ The accounts in the reverential category placed primary emphasis on missionaries as “heroic labourers” among the pagan Africans.¹⁰ Above all, all the missionary works were explained in terms of Christianity and the civilized West confronting the heathen and primitive African.¹¹

Emphasis on missionaries’ ‘heroic’ activities

In this section of the essay, my aim is to see *how* some writers revered the missionaries and their work. Among the writers of reverential historiography is Edwin W. Smith. Smith is a missionary historiographer who travelled into South Africa with the aim of confirming some of the observations that were cited in the letters of Daniel Lindley. Lindley was one of the American Board missionaries who worked among the Zulu in the mid 1800s and whom I shall return to in subsequent chapters of the mini-dissertation, in order to suggest alternative readings of his letters to those by Smith.

My assessment of Smiths’ writing will focus on his work *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley*,¹² a biography of this famous missionary published in 1949. It appears that the main aim of Smith’s work is, apart from giving an original source of history, to praise Lindley. Therefore Smith could be categorized as having written in the heroic, reverential history style, as identified by Ekechi,¹³ as well as Du Bruyn and Southey, as typical for the time.

Smith’s accounts of the life of this American Baptist missionary reveals the difficulties that he came across while trying to reach the people of eastern

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9. M.J. Kerr, *Pattern of Christian Acceptance: Individual Response to Missionary Impact 1550-1950*, Oxford University Press, London and New York, 1972, p. xii, in F.K. Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 146.
 10. R. Turker, *Eighteen Years in Uganda and East Africa*, Arnold, London, 1911; B. Mathew, *The Book of Missionary Heroes*, George H. Doran Co., New York, 1922, in F.K. Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 160.
 11. R. Turker, *Eighteen Years in Uganda and East Africa*, Arnold, London, 1911, in F.K. Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 146.
 12. E. Smith, *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley 1801-80*, The Epworth Press, London, 1949.
 13. F.K., Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 146.

Durban. In describing Lindley's experiences, Smith writes that in January 1847 Lindley tried to reach the people of Inanda, but he could not because the Umgeni River had risen in flood. Below is part of the explanation that Smith cited from Lindley's writings:

...my horse is laid up, I have myself a severe cold, some pain in my side, some in my jaw-bone, some in my right eye, some in my forehead, some in my thumbs, and plenty of tick-bites. In fact I could wish that I had remained with my dear wife and children.¹⁴

The above quotation portrays Lindley's strong motive for spreading Christianity. The purpose of listing all the hardships is to display Lindley's heroic attitude and dedication. His missionary zeal for reaching the people in need of salvation in the face of the challenging problems is portrayed in such a way as to encourage the reader to admire Lindley.

Smith continues to write about how Lindley built mission stations and schools in the area he thought he would reside permanently in, or at least for a long time. Lindley began to establish the Inanda station, by building houses which contrasted strongly with beehive-shaped houses of the local people. He finished building the church in early 1849. The church opened with only six members, and the numbers grew to thirty-one over a period of six years. According to Smith, this shows that the adherence was slow to develop in the community, probably due to the fact that the people were yet to realize the importance of the new religion in their daily life activities. Lindley was not happy with the limited response. This could have made Lindley despondent since he regarded it as sign of his failure in accomplishing what had brought him to Zululand, that is to spread the gospel. This made him to exclaim that, "The heathen around us are dead, dead, very dead".¹⁵ Smith emphasises that the Africans were not ready to accept the Christian gospel because of the "death" of their souls. Here

14. E.W. Smith, *The Life and Times of Daniel Lindley ...*, p. 273.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

it seems that Smith simply followed, almost just took over, Lindley's perceptions. However, as the historian-biographer, he was supposed to reveal more insight into the reason why the Africans did not want to convert, than the missionary himself. In fact, Smith reveals little insight into the fact that the Zulu people had a completely different cultural milieu. As a reverential historiographer, Smith initially indulges Lindley's ignorance about Zulu culture and lets him "get away with" very controversial, almost offensive statements about the Zulu.

Lindley's change of perception about African traditions

And yet from Smith's portrayal one can also detect how over time some missionaries, after a close encounter with the 'natives' and a growing understanding of their life style, changed their perception of the image of the 'natives'. Lindley's own was one such opinion about the Zulu that changed. At first Lindley used to think that there was nothing in them (the Zulu) but "pure, unmixed, unalloyed, unmitigated selfishness, and mostly of the meanest kind". Then he remarked that the Zulu "have risen a trifle in our estimation".¹⁶ Smith further shows that later Lindley was able to support the Zulu traditions of *Uku-lobola* and admitted the people who practiced it in his church. "*Uku-lobola*", Lindley insisted, "as it exists among the tribes of south east Africa, has been on the whole, a great blessing to the people. If today, one word from my mouth would instantly annihilate the custom, I would not speak that word".¹⁷ Smith here shows the readers that, missionaries, like Lindley, could be flexible and accepts African traditions that were not part of their own way of life. To his fellow missionaries, Lindley's acceptance of *Uku-lobola* was unusual. They saw this as representing the purchase of a bride and actively discouraged the practice. However, as much as this revelation bears the potential of alternative readings of the missionary encounter, Smith is still

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

revering Lindley and hence confirming Du Bruyn and Southey's characteristic of reverential historiographers always protecting the missionaries' stance.

Moffat's perception of African traditions

Like Smith, Cecil Northcott was a historian and a biographer who also wrote mission historiography. Northcott's reverence of Robert Moffat, a contemporary of Lindley and the other Americans featured in this mini-dissertation, is shown in the title of Moffat's biography, *Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa*. So right from the title of the biography Northcott directly introduces Moffat in a positive light by labeling him a pioneer in Africa. In his introduction to the biography, Northcott claims that Moffat played a formative part in African history between 1817 and 1870. Moffat is seen as:

... a pioneer of white civilization north of the Orange River, as an early traveler through the wastes of Bechuanaland, as a creator of a pattern of mission which has been copied all through Africa, and as a planter of the white man's authority for the first time beyond the Limpopo [who] stands amongst the great ones of the African history.¹⁸

Furthermore, Northcott indicates that Moffat pitied himself for enduring the harsh conditions of African life and won his triumphs by immense patience and unwearied pertinacity.¹⁹ Here again we see Northcott admiring Moffat by showing the readers that he was courageous as his mission was to bring African people to God at any cost, even if it meant endangering his own life.

One of the features of reverential historiography is that the writers wrote portraying the European cultural superiority over the African culture and practices. This fact is shown by Northcott's writings about Moffat's perception

18. C. Northcott, *Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa 1817-70*, Butterworth Press, London, 1961, p. 11.

19. *Ibid.*

of the Bechuana, “Hottentots” and the Bushmen. Moffat saw the Bechuana, “Hottentots” and the “Bushmen” as living in a world of superstition and ignorance. In Biblical phraseology he claimed that the hearts of the people who lived in superstition were darkened and needed to be softened.²⁰ The only means of softening the darkened hearts according to Northcott, was through the process of sharp rebuke and denunciation of their traditional beliefs and practices. It should be noted that reference to “dark hearts” of “heathens” was a recurrent trope in missionary literature.²¹

Ekechi too is of the opinion that being converted meant change of religion, hence of culture, and the development of a new conscience. The change of conscience required that the new converts give up all their traditions like dancing, singing, polygamy and ‘payment’ of bride price.²² Therefore, Northcott indicates that Moffat pursued this process with immeasurable patience even when derided.²³ Here again Northcott reveres Moffat by showing that he was a man with patience, and relates certain incidences where this occurred. One such incident was when the people he tried to ‘discipline’ and ‘change’:

... snored at public worship, scattered insects among the congregation, ransacked the preacher’s house while he was preaching, stole his precious tools, knives and spoons, and if twenty sheep were purchased Moffat and his colleagues were lucky to get home with ten.²⁴

In Northcott’s perception such incidents did not prevent Moffat from carrying on with gospel preaching.²⁵ Northcott further shows how difficult it was for Moffat to be accepted with his deep belief in Christianity and that he was brave

20. *Ibid.*

21. A. Kirkaldy, *Capturing the Soul*, p. 139.

22. F.K. Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 147.

23. C. Northcott, *Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa ...*, p. 75.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

25. Robert Moffat’s Journal, 22.2.22, National Archives, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), in C. Northcott, *Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa ...*, p. 76.

enough not to despair and carry on with his work of evangelisation no matter what the circumstances. On the other hand, Northcott ignores the African side. He does not seem to be interested in finding out why the Africans were not interested in Moffat's gospel. The fact that Africans had their own religion, and that what Moffat was preaching probably did not bring any sense to Africans' daily lives, did not seem to appear in Northcott's mind. After all, he was a reverential historiographer. Because Northcott's historiography reveres Moffat, he does not consider the possibility that the Africans might have been reacting the way they did because they did not conceive any significance in what Moffat preached.

In short, the historiography of both Smith and Northcott fits into the Protestant mission historiography in its reverential phase. These biographers' style of writing reveres Lindley and Moffat respectively, as they have depicted the missionaries as heroes, showing the difficulties they encountered during their travels and evangelisation process; showing the missionaries' frame of mind when referring to Africans as uncivilized as opposed to the European.

PHASE TWO: MISSIONARIES AS AGENTS OF COLONIALISM

This is the second trend of Protestant mission and missionary historiography as identified by Du Bruyn and Southey. In this trend, missionaries were portrayed as agents of colonialism and precursors of colonial conquerors.²⁶ In other words, this view revealed the missionaries as the direct agents of colonialism and European imperialism rather than purely the saviour of Africans, as they had appeared in the reverential writings. Du Bruyn and Southey point out that this trend, which portrays missionaries as agents of colonialism, appeared between the 1950s and 1960s.²⁷ It should be borne in mind that this was a

26. J. du Bruyn & N. Southey, "The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries ...", p. 36.

27. *Ibid.*

critical time in the history of Africa when most of the African nations were involved in the struggle for liberation from colonial domination.

The historical writings that appeared in the second phase that views missionaries as the direct agents of colonialism reversed the view that missionaries came to Africa on humanitarian grounds. Scholars observed that, “The humanitarian concern for Africa served as justification for missionary invasion of Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries”.²⁸ The characteristics of the writings based on missionaries as colonial agents is centered around the argument that the Christian missionary movement was in response to political and commercial changes in Europe following the Industrial Revolution.²⁹ In short, the historical writings under the second phase emphasized that the missionary movement was an imperialistic venture; considering the fact that “imperialistic colonialism involves a sense of mission, of spreading a nation’s vision of society and culture to an alien subjected people.”³⁰ Different views from different historians were portrayed regarding the missionaries. Thus missionaries were seen as agents of imperialism, “as agents of colonialism and precursors of colonial conquest”.³¹

Missionaries as supporters of segregation policy

Among the writers who emphasized that missionaries were colonial agents was Nosipho Majeke, pseudonym for Dora Taylor. Majeke was a scholar who wrote on missionary history with special interest in South African missionaries. Majeke’s views appeared in her book *The Role of Missionaries in Conquest*. Living and experiencing changes in South Africa, Majeke saw the need for the

28. F.K. Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa,” in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 146.

29. T.O. Beildeman, *Colonial Evangelism, a Social Historic Study of East African Mission at the Grassroots*, Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 6, in F.K. Ekechi, “Studies on Missionaries in Africa”, in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 146.

30. *Ibid.*

31. J. du Bruyn & N. Southey, “The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries ...”, p.36.

type of history that would liberate the ‘native’ South Africans from white colonial regimes during the apartheid era. Her piece of historiography therefore, aimed at inspiring black South Africans of the twentieth century to fight for their own liberation.³² Majeke’s view followed the fact that the historical writing that appeared at the time of her writing focused on praising the missionaries and the apartheid government in general.

Thus, Majeke emphasized the view that missionaries paved the way for the subjugation of African chiefdoms and capitalist penetration. She further insisted that missionaries came from a capitalist Christian civilization that “unblushingly found religious sanctions for inequalities as it does to this day and whose ministers solemnly blessed its wars of aggression”.³³ Majeke cited that it was the missionaries who were responsible for the policy of segregation; that the Moravians and the early London Missionary Societies’ (LMS) missionaries “followed the principles of segregation from the outset... the segregated mission reserve was the particular contribution of the missionary to the pattern of South African society”.³⁴ In this it appears that Majeke was referring to missionaries living on their stations. But it is also true, in my opinion, that some African rulers (like Malebôhô of the Hananwa community) engineered the segregation policy as they never wanted the missionaries to live among the people they ruled. As a result, these chiefs gave the missionaries a piece of land far from where they resided aiming at protecting their people and their society at large.³⁵ So it appears that to some extent even Africans themselves unconsciously “supported” segregation policy with the hope of defending their communities from colonial regime.

At another level, it is Majeke’s opinion that the missionaries made a great show of “protecting” the Griqua against the Boers, but actually it was the Boers who

32. C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, David Philip, Johannesburg, 1988, p. 137.

33. *Ibid.*

34. K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, Southern, Johannesburg, 1988, p. 157.

35. C. Sonntag, *My Friend Maleboch, Chief of the Blue Mountains* (ed. K. Sonntag), Sigma, Pretoria, 1983, pp. 1-10.

were being protected by the British in their extensive land seizures. Majeke observed that time after time when the Boers were in danger of being defeated by the Africans, the British came to their help. This happened when the united forces of the Khoi Khoi and Xhosa – Ndlambe's warriors – had pursued the Boers as far south as George. Also when Dingane had put the Voortrekker leader, Piet Retief, and his party to death in 1838 as his answer to their arrogant request for his country, the British at Port Natal joined forces with the Boers.³⁶ Majeke here appears to disagree with the historians of the reverential phase. She portrays the missionaries as enemies to the South African 'natives'. To Majeke, the tendency of missionaries siding with the Boers and British against the 'natives' confirmed the fact that missionaries were agents of imperialism rather than evangelists.

Missionaries as traders

Another dimension of the second phase of mission historiography is built on the fact that missionaries were involved in trading activities as well. Roger Beck is a scholar who studied the activities of missionaries at the Cape in early nineteenth century. Beck's observations appeared in the 1989 issue of *The Journal of African History*.³⁷ The title of the article itself, "Bible and Beads", implies the dualism of missionaries' activities in their evangelisation mission. Beck gives an example of the prominent missionary, David Livingstone, who is also classified as a trader and an explorer. Livingstone as a missionary and agent of colonialism in Africa was involved in what Beck calls "religious and secular colonization" and therefore it appears to Beck that, "pioneer missionaries in Africa (like David Livingstone) were, perforce, traders".³⁸ Livingstone's declaration in 1852 that promotion of commerce was the best

36. K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, Southern, Johannesburg, 1988, p. 158.

37. R.B. Beck, "Bible and Beads"; Missionaries as Traders in Southern Africa in the Early 19th century", *The Journal of African History* 30 (2), 1989, p. 213.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

way to prepare the Africans for the gospel,³⁹ shows no doubt that the statement reflects Becks' historical writing that portrays missionaries as traders.

Furthermore, Beck contends that trading for the missionaries was not in most cases a coincidence. Generally, when the missionaries arrived in Africa, they took with them European manufactured goods for three basic reasons: firstly to encourage conversion to Christianity, secondly, as payment for service and lastly, as presents to African leaders.⁴⁰ Although the reasons do not seem to encourage trading activities, it was possible that there were also some elements of trade in it. For example, the payment for service could include a bartering system of trade. The exchange was probably between 'natives' labour' and articles like clothing. It could be possible also that the manufactured goods the missionaries brought with them were used as a form of attraction in order to get Africans converted to Christianity.

However, the majority of the missionaries who were engaged in trading activities justified their status as the means of survival or a positive means of instilling European customs and beliefs into the Africans. It is however evident that some missionaries abandoned the holy book for the account book.⁴¹ A good example is shown by Jean and John Comaroff,⁴² the anthropologists who studied missionary activities among the Tswana community. They point out that a missionary from the L.M.S., James Archbell, a Yorkshire man from West Riding, withdrew from the Methodist ministry after a long evangelical career in southern Africa and took up farming in Natal, then founded a bank, and later became the mayor of Pietermaritzburg.⁴³

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

41. *Ibid.*

42. In J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991.

43. G.A.W. Mears, "The Bechuana Mission or the Advance of Christianity in Transvaal and the Orange Free State," *Methodist Missionaries*, No. 4, Rondebosch, Cape Town s.a., in J Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution I...*, p. 85.

It is Beck's argument that trade across the Cape frontier in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and the government's attempt to regulate that trade, cannot be understood without first considering the role of protestant missionaries as traders and bearers of European manufactured goods in the South African interior.⁴⁴ This argument shows how Beck followed the trend of those scholars who saw missionaries as agents of colonialism and capitalist imperialism. Therefore, although writing much later than the initial second phase historians, Beck's views fit into this second trend of historiography of Protestant mission historiography, as it vividly shows how the missionaries in the area he was studying involved themselves in trading activities rather than evangelisation.

Missionaries as agents of colonial conquest

Protestant mission and missionary historiography of the 'second trend', is also evident in the writings of historian John Tlou Makhura who, like Beck, continued with the trend set by the likes of Majeke long after new phases in mission historiography had been introduced. Makhura is also of the opinion that missionaries were agents of colonial conquest. His argument appears in his 1993 masters' dissertation entitled *The Bagananwa Polity in the North Western Transvaal and the South African Republic c. 1836 – 1896*.⁴⁵ Makhura wrote about the experiences between the Hananwa and the Berlin Mission Society (BMS). Makhura observed that in 1886, the Christian presence had been felt through the Hananwa area when the Hananwa leaders, hunters, traders and travellers had been widely engaged in trade that often involved the missionaries. Hence the coming of the BMS missionaries and their working among the Hananwa was nothing else but an agency of conquest, operating

44. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

45. J.T. Makhura, *The Bagananwa Polity in the North Western Transvaal and the South African Republic c. 1835-1896*, M.A. Thesis, University of Bophuthatswana, 1993, pp. 95-97.

consciously or unconsciously in collaboration with other colonial agencies (the British) towards a similar goal of subjugating the Hananwa.⁴⁶

Makhura makes the point that the reason why the Hananwa accepted the Berlin missionaries was for protection, taking into consideration that the Hananwa were threatened by the events of the Difaqane. Furthermore, it was the time of the resurgence of African resistance in the north-east and the subsequent sacking of Schoemandsdal in 1867.⁴⁷ Thus, the Hananwa hoped to get firearms from the missionaries, but the missionaries refused to supply firearms and ammunition to the Hananwa. This refusal strained the relationship between the missionaries and the Hananwa.⁴⁸ The reason for refusing to supply the ammunition was probably that missionaries were afraid that the Hananwa might fight them using weapons they themselves had supplied. The fact that the Transvaal laws forbade the selling of firearms to Africans should also be taken into consideration as this type of offence could get the missionaries suspended.⁴⁹

In explaining more about missionaries being the colonial agents, as identified by Du Bruyn and Southey, Makhura refers to the contrasting expectations between BMS missionaries and the Hananwa's frame of mind. He claims that "[w]hile the Hananwa expected the missionary stations to serve as a bulwark against any foreign aggression, the missionary residence among the Hananwa proved to have been more detrimental."⁵⁰

Makhura mentions the example of Christoph Sonntag, a BMS missionary who resided at the bottom of the Blue Mountain outside the Hananwa community.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-97.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

48. BMB, 1872; 3/5, p. 316; C. Sonntag, *My Friend Maleboch* (ed. K. Sonntag), pp. 9-10, in J.T. Makhura, *The Bagananwa Polity ...*, p. 97.

49. L. Kriel, "Christoph Sonntag's Mmaleboch: The Missionary Diary as a Secular Source in the Reconstruction of Bagananwa History, 1892-1895", *South African Historical Journal* 36, 1997, pp. 182-183.

50. J.T. Makhura, *The Bagananwa Polity ...*, p. 60.

Sonntag ran Leipzig station that served as a military mission station for the combined Boer forces against the Hananwa in the 1894 war. “From now on” Sonntag explained on 14 June 1894, “...the house and the station were never empty of commando.... They all wanted drinking water, and, if possible, something to eat or refreshments of some kind. We gladly gave the exhausted men what we had: oranges, lemons, bread, eggs, chicken, potatoes.”⁵¹ Thus, from the above experience, Makhura argues that while on the surface missionaries appeared to be friendly to the Hananwa, they nevertheless identified themselves in large measures with other colonists. He is of the opinion that the Boer settlers used the missionaries to hasten the subjugation of the Hananwa.⁵²

Here again we see that Makhura’s view is in sharp contrast to that of reverential history that portrays missionaries as good-will ambassadors. He points out that Sonntag, although very popular and famous among the Hananwa, betrayed them by making his mission station a military camp and siding with the Boers. Makhura’s view therefore supports the view that missionaries were the agents of colonial conquest as formerly claimed by Majeke.

Generally, the whole view of missionaries as the agents of colonialism is explained following the part they played as conquerors and traders. Therefore, in contrast to the reverential phase of Protestant historiography, the second trend that views missionaries as the agents of colonialism, tries to show that it was not always the case that the missionaries did good things to the Africans they tried to convert. The fact that missionaries came from Europe where the effects of the Industrial Revolution touched every sphere of life, shows that there could not be the possibility of missionaries behaving purely as evangelists, as they too were part and parcel of European life.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

PHASE THREE: AFRICANS' INITIATIVES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF AFRICAN RELIGION

According to Du Bruyn and Southey's categorization of Protestant mission and missionary historiography in South Africa, the African initiative trend is the third phase. This trend was prevalent during the late 1960s and 1970s.⁵³ Like the previous trend, that is, missionaries as colonial agents, scholars who wrote under the African initiative trend also reversed traditional European biases. They emphasized African activity, African adaptation, and African choice.⁵⁴ The characteristic features of the writings in the African initiatives trend is that the historians wrote about the nature of interaction between Christianity and African traditional religion, missionary education and the problem of conversion.⁵⁵ It was also during this period that "historians of mission activity began to probe African perceptions of missionaries and their messages, the range of protest marshaled against missionary activity, and the ways in which chiefs exploited missionaries for political advantage and economic gain."⁵⁶

Therefore it appears that, on the one hand, the previous (second) trend that emphasizes missionaries as being colonial agents condemns the missionaries basically on the grounds of their economic participation and exploitation of Africans. On the other hand, the trend that emphasizes African initiative and the importance of African religion, is more concerned with social affairs in the workmanship of the missionaries in their missionary zeal of spreading the gospel. In other words, scholars began to study missionary enterprise from the perspective of social change.⁵⁷ Hence there is a close relationship between

53. J. du Bruyn & N. Southey, "The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries ...", p. 39.

54. F.K. Ekechi, "Studies on Missionaries in Africa", in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 147.

55. *Ibid.*

56. J. du Bruyn & N. Southey, "The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries ...", p. 39.

57. F.K. Ekechi, "Studies in Missionaries in Africa", in T. Falola (ed.), *African Historiography ...*, p. 157.

these two trends as both highlight the negative side of missionaries, with the exception that in this trend the missionaries are also often viewed as the victims of circumstance, as they too, were being exploited by the Africans.

Christianity and the disintegration of South African communities

In 1934, several decades before the emphasis on African initiative would become a prevalent trend in mission historiography, a chapter entitled “Christianity and the Religious Life of the Bantu” was included in a book compiled by the social anthropologist Isaac Schapera.⁵⁸ The author, W.M. Eiselen, was a descendent of Lutheran missionaries and at the time a professor of anthropology at the University of Stellenbosch. He would later play an important role in D.F. Malan’s apartheid government.⁵⁹ While it is difficult to separate what Eiselen wrote about the importance of African religion in the 1930s with his political career in the 1950s, it cannot be ignored when looking into the mission historiography of the 1960s and 1970s. As early as 1932 Eiselen emphasised how Christianity through missionaries and the European Christians changed the social life of “Africans”.⁶⁰ The fact that Eiselen’s work can be studied with such a strong reference to the third trend in mission historiography, serves as a reminder that the phases as identified by Du Bruyn and Southey provide an indication of prevalent trends rather than a final set of fixed categories.

In order to link these two religions (African traditional religion and Christian religion) and later to show how they clashed, Eiselen begins by giving an

58. W.E. Eiselen, “Christianity and the Religious Life of the Bantu”, in I. Schapera (ed.), *Western Civilisation and The Natives of South Africa: Studies in Cultural Contact*, George Routledge and Sons Ltd., London, 1934, pp. 65-82.

59. Eiselen later played a prominent role in the National Party Government’s grand apartheid planning. In 1948 he became Chair of the Bantu Education Commission and in 1949 he was appointed as Secretary of Native Affairs. See L. Zöllner & H. Heese, *The Berlin Missionaries and their Descendants*, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1894.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 66. Eiselen used the term “Bantu”, as product of his own age, as the term “Bantu” was commonly used to refer to black people. I have used the term Africans in the place of “Bantu”.

outline of the importance of African religion before the coming of the missionaries. Eiselen explains the chief principles of African traditional religion, one of which was that the African religions “share a common belief of mankind and in the survival of the soul after death, and that the religious system is bound to reflect, to some extent, its social system”.⁶¹ It appeared to Eiselen that, African religion was a responsibility of the community. This responsibility bound the community as a single entity.

Eiselen is thus of the opinion that the coming of missionaries was an important step toward winning the individual soul for Christ, the individual soul is therefore expected to be won from these groups with a community outlook. The coming of missionaries therefore meant a dramatic change in the African community outlook. These missionaries:

... came to teach a people, where individual personality counted for little, and where private interest were made subordinated to those of the group, that a man must leave father and mother and family in the pursuit of his own individual salvation.⁶²

The above quotation could also mean that Eiselen sees the African religion as self-sufficient and suited to the needs of the societies concerned. Therefore traditional religion was an important practice for the African people. In showing how in turn Christianity destroyed harmony in African communities, Eiselen gives an example of Maleo, the ruler of the Kopi (a community of Transvaal Sotho) who first welcomed the missionaries and then turned against them.⁶³ The reason why Maleo turned against the missionaries is that he found out that the missionaries were enticing his subjects away from him. The missionaries prevented the converted African people from paying homage to the chief and the ancestral gods when the yearly first fruit offerings took place.

61. W.E. Eiselen, “Christianity and the Religious life of the Bantu” ..., p. 67.

62. *Ibid.*

63. T. Wangemann, *Maleo und Sekukuni*, in W.E. Eiselen, “Christianity and Religious Life of the Bantu”, p. 69.

Eiselen implies that the African first fruit festival was an important ceremony as the people of the community gave thanks to their ancestors for providing them with food.

The missionaries also changed the attitudes of the youths who were participating in the initiation schools. In these schools, three African religious commandments were insisted on and expected to be conferred upon the youth. The commandments were: honour your elders; worship your chief; and make sacrifices to your ancestral spirit.⁶⁴ Although these “commandments” represented the throne of the community and had to be carried forward by the youth, it was also an oversimplification of African groups’ attitude to their rulers by the missionaries. However, it was important that the youth adhered to the teachings as they were expected to carry the throne of the community to the future, after their parents’ generation disappeared. But the youth, most of whom had joined Christianity, were not permitted to attend initiation and they were also prevented from taking the oath of allegiance to the royal house.⁶⁵ These practices of isolating the youth away from their traditional initiation school ceremonies destroyed the African religion and the society in general and created a kind of animosity between the two sides: that of missionaries and that of the Africans. Furthermore, it divided the society between the side of those who supported the missionaries and those who wanted to stick to their traditional practice. In short, Eiselen shows how the coming of missionaries and consequently, the spread of Christianity amongst Africans ‘disrupted’ African social life. This could also mean that Eiselen realises the importance of African religion, which aligns with the nature of the third phase in Protestant mission and missionary historiography.⁶⁶

64. W.E. Eiselen, “Christianity and Religious History of the Bantu” ..., p. 69.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Apart from the division caused in African society, there was also the third possibility, of a blending of two religious traditions - as happened in the African Initiated churches (formerly referred to as the Independent Churches). Some examples: R. Edger, “The Prophet Motive: Enoch Mgijima, the Israelites and the background to the Bulhoek Massacre”, *International Journal of Historical Studies* 15(3), 1982, pp. 401-422; S. Hayes “The African Independent Churches: Judgement through Terminology?”, *Missionalia* 20(2), August 1992, pp. 139-146;

The relationship between African chiefs and missionaries

While Eiselen blames the missionaries for intruding into Bantu social life, Charles Ballard, a historian who wrote about the political economy of Zululand, does not. Ballard argues that missionaries were being exploited by the African chiefs for the benefit of the chiefs themselves, and sometimes for the benefit of African society at large.⁶⁷ Ballard considers the activities of the missionaries in Natal between 1835 –1877 and how the then king of Zululand, Mpande, who was prominent mostly during the 1850s, used the missionaries while pursuing his utilitarian policy.

Ballard admits that the Norwegian and German missionaries at first tried to work within the framework of the ruling class and the social system of the people.⁶⁸ He argues that missionaries performed the tasks they hoped would be appreciated and rewarded by the King.⁶⁹ He points out that the missionaries served the ruling class as carpenters, doctors and general handymen and also acted as political advisors. A good example is Reverent Schreuder of the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), who tried to gain leverage with Mpande and Cetshwayo, by acting as political advisor in Anglo-Zulu affairs.⁷⁰ While the missionaries worked with the expectation of being appreciated and rewarded, the Zulu King, Mpande, and the ruling class, had no intention of letting Christianity disrupt the customs and social routines of Zulu society. Ballard cites that under his utilitarian policy, king Mpande extracted European

H. Pretorius and L. Jafta “‘A Branch Springs Out’: African Initiated Churches”, in R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1997), pp. 211-226.

67. In J. Simensen (ed.), *Norwegian Missions in African History, Vol. 1. South Africa, 1845-1906*, Norwegian University Press, Oxford, 1986, p. 77.

68. *Ibid.*

69. N. Etherington, “Social Theory and the Study of Christian Mission in Africa: A South African Case Study”, *Africa* 47(1), 1977.

70. H. Weise (ed.), *On a Tough Mission Post in Zululand: the Life Experience of the Missionary Friedrich Volker According to the Notes of his Wife*, Hermannsburg, 1945, pp. 14-36, in C. Ballard, “From Sovereignty to Subjection: The Political Economy of Zululand 1820-1906”, in J. Simensen (ed.), *Norwegian Missions in African ...*

technological and medicinal help, while at the same time “quarantining [*sic*] mission stations”. Ballard gives an example of how Schreuder was denied permission to build a mission station in Zululand until the time when the king was struck by rheumatic pain, then he called the reverend to treat him, which he did, and *then* the king granted him permission to “...live, build and teach my people at Impanga and then, from time to time, practice your medicine when I call for you”.⁷¹

Ballard believes that the Zulu king used and manipulated the missionaries for his own benefit. He points out that, even after two decades of missionary endeavour, white missionaries had made only a few converts among the Zulu. The reason behind this failure was the strength of the Zulu social system, combined with the hostile policies of the kings and the ruling class. The only advantage cited, is that the missionaries were acute observers of Zulu society. This is because many missionaries were well-educated men who collectively recorded more written accounts of their experiences and perceptions, than any other group of Europeans.⁷² Ballard appears to have a degree of sympathy for the missionaries by trying to indicate that some kings were clever enough to exploit the missionaries. But Ballard also shows that the strength of African society was one of the reasons that made the missionaries be easily exploited by the Zulu kings, taking into consideration that Zulu society was already stable and centralized. Here again, an observation should be made that, by focusing on the African initiative, Ballard seems to be moving in the direction of the fifth phase of missionary historiography that looks into the missionary-African encounters. This could also show that the phases that Du Bruyn and Southey identify can indeed pervade one another and also overlap.

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71. N.M.T., June 1851, p. 109, in J. Simensen, “Religious Change as Transaction: The Norwegian Mission To Zululand, South Africa, 1850-1906”, in K.H. Petersen (ed.), *Religion, Development and African Identity*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1987.
72. C. Ballard, “From Sovereignty to Subjection ...” in J. Simensen (ed.), *Norwegian Missions in African ...*, p. 77.

Missionaries as providers of economic and political benefits to Africans

In putting more emphasis on his argument that missionaries were exploited, Ballard cites that the missionaries benefited the Zulu both economically and politically. As a result of the encounter, economic and technological development that had not been there before entered Zululand. The missionaries introduced tools such as the steel axe, hoe, plough, hammer, saw, crowbar, bore, plane and chisel. It was also the missionaries who gave instructions on how to use these tools. The missionaries introduced the knowledge of how to use fertilizers and drawing methods in order to increase harvests. They also introduced simple methods of vaccinating livestock.⁷³ Apart from introducing household materials such as clothing, wax candles, beds, pots, furniture, knives, beads and matches, the missionaries worked as smiths, masons, joiners and carpenters. They also constructed houses and repaired wagons.⁷⁴

Writing on the Zulu's political benefit from the missionaries, Ballard cites that even though missionaries were not supposed to become involved in the internal power struggles and attempts to maintain Zulu independence, they were expected to play an active role as diplomatic intermediaries between the Zulu kingdom and the Natal government. It was also taken for granted that the missionaries would not spread unfavourable information about the internal condition of Zululand, as the king himself wished to have control over the information released to Natal. So it seems to Ballard that the Zulu king wished to control missionaries mentally by deciding for them what to say, at what time, and to whom.

While Ballard is of the opinion that the Zulu king benefited from the diplomatic roles of the missionaries, this was not always the case. An example of this is the relationship between Khama, the Tswana chief, and the missionary he trusted the most, Reverend William Charles Willoughby, who helped the king

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

as advisor in trade and political matters. In 1895 the British colonial government planned to transfer the new Tswana protectorate to the administration of Cecil Rhodes under the chartered company, the British South African Company (BSAC). Khama was not willing to divide his country into two, one part to fall under the Company and another under the British government. Khama thought that Willoughby had blackmailed him and that he had exceeded his authority by promising land to the BSAC on which to lay a line of railway.⁷⁵

It thus appears that sometimes missionaries used their position of being trusted as advisors to the African kings for the benefit of the colonial government that had offered them protection. While scholars like Eiselen and Mills (who will be discussed in a subsequent section) blame missionaries for the destruction of culture in African communities, Ballard believes that it was the missionaries that were being exploited. In his view they had been the ones who brought development through new technologies and assistance in political matters as advisors to the kings.

In short, the trend in which African initiative and the importance of religion is fore-grounded, which is the third in Du Bruyn and Southey's categorization of Protestant mission and missionary historiography of South Africa, shows that Africans had their own initiatives and traditional religion which they followed. And so, the coming of the missionary meant either the change of traditional religions or the disappearance of some of them. It could also mean the assimilation of some practices from the Christian religion as will be discussed in the next phase.

75. South African Correspondence Relating to the Visit of Chief Khama, Sebele and Batheon, London, 1896, Bluebook 2, No. 5 in P.S. Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1995, p. 37.

PHASE FOUR: ARTICULATION OF MISSION THEOLOGY AND THE AFRICAN RELIGION

The fourth trend of Protestant mission historiography is characterized by an investigation into the articulation of mission theology and African religion. Du Bruyn and Southey cited that this trend appeared in the 1980s. The main feature of the trend is centered on the fact that the historians wrote about the theology of African society and its importance. During this same period historians also speculated about how the image of God was perceived by the African societies. Historians therefore studied the concept of the Supreme Being among the African groups.

Xhosa traditional beliefs and practices

W.G. Mills was a missionary historiographer who spent time in researching Xhosa traditional practices such as initiation ceremonies for girls and boys, bride price, burial practices and marriage practices. Mills gives an example of how these traditional practices were important. He found out that *intonjane*, female initiation, was a practice which was deeply associated with killings and dances. But the main aim was the preparation of the girl for childbirth and marriage. The practice was considered important because it was believed that without it, a girl was liable to fall ill soon after marriage and have sickly children. Any trouble associated with young brides was likely to be diagnosed by a diviner as having been sent by her father's ancestors. It was said that the ancestors were aggrieved that the custom had been omitted and that she should return to her parental homestead to undergo the rite.⁷⁶ Therefore, it is difficult to emphasize the importance of traditional religion without touching on some of the traditional practices that are associated with it. So, while missionaries

76. T. Soga, *The Amaxosa: Life and Customs*, London, 1932, p. 218, in W.G. Mills "Missionaries, Xhosa Clergy and the Suppression of Traditional customs", in H. Bredekemp and R. Ross (eds.), *Missions and Christianity in South African History ...*, p. 158.

like Moffat viewed *intonjane* practices as sinful in front of the Christian God, Mills shows that these practices held a strong meaning for the Xhosa people.

Mills also shows the importance of *ukwaluka* which was male initiation. In the *ukwaluka* ceremony male youths were circumcised. The circumcision symbolised the transition from youth to adulthood, a practice that was common among the southern Nguni. Without circumcision, a youth was never considered a man no matter how old he got. Even worse was that the youth was excluded from all male activities: he could not inherit, nor have a woman to marry. Mills further insists that a youth was never accepted in a family without *ukwaluka*. But after *ukwaluka* a youth became a full family member, he was welcomed by the living adults and their guiding spirit, that is, the ancestors who would never accept an uncircumcised man.⁷⁷

This overview of these religious practices is set out to show that this particular generation of historians sought to learn more about the traditional practices. The practices that these historians investigate were those ignored by the missionaries and the historiographers who revered them. Those who ignored the African practices were the generation of historians from the reverential phase who only wrote about the missionaries' hardships in spreading the gospel. Mills's interpretation shows that African religion and practices were important to the Africans themselves. These practices and their importance were hardly recognised by reverential historiographers as they were seen as sinful in front of God.

The image of God in African traditions

As already indicated, Du Bruyn and Southey identify the fourth phase of Protestant mission and missionary historiography in South Africa as one which focuses on the study of the image of God in African traditions. For a scholar

77. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

like Janet Hodgson, who based her research on the Xhosa people of South Africa, the origin and development of the concept of a Supreme Being among Africans became the main topic of investigation. This emphasis on African religion and its Spiritual Being began to appear in the writings of the 1980s.⁷⁸ While studying the origins and development of traditional concepts of a Supreme Being, Hodgson found that the Xhosa use the word *Qamata* and *Thixo* representing their Supreme Being, as a designation of their own religion. It is interesting to note that these names were also used by the Khoi.⁷⁹

Hodgson further observed that with the interaction with the European Christian religion, the word *Thixo* was adopted as the name of the Christian God in the early nineteenth century and it superseded *Qamata* in religious usage among the Xhosa. The assimilation of the word *Qamata* from the incoming culture into their tradition, brought with it the concept of the Supreme Being as no longer merely a First Cause and Sky Deity, but as One now actively involved in human affairs.⁸⁰

It appeared to Hodgson that in the interaction with European Christianity, the Xhosa assimilated new ideas about the Supreme Being, together with certain rituals and practices. This made the Supreme Being approachable and “the ancestor cult remained the focus of their religious activities with the emphasis on quality of life rather than on the future”.⁸¹

African’s religious and moral order

In contrast to the views of missionaries like Robert Moffat and their early biographers like Smith, who saw that African societies had neither religion nor morality, Hodgson argues that, the Xhosa religion follows a moral order which

78. J. du Bruyn & N. Southey, “The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries ...”, p. 39.

79. J. Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1992.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

81. *Ibid.*

is the harmonious integration of the world and the self in it. Life is ordered according to reciprocal obligation and responsibility, and conformity is at a premium in maintaining harmony.⁸² So Hodgson observed that, *Qamata*, according to Xhosa beliefs, was the greater spirit, greater than the spirit of their chiefs. People often did not allow themselves to think about him or about matters concerning him. They could only say that he was greater than all creation; he was everywhere and was thought to see all things; he was sometimes asked to help people and was believed to respond; he was thought to be altogether good though there was some uncertainty about this; and that there was none other than him; “he is all alone”.⁸³ To some extent, the features that are portrayed by Hodgson indicating how the Xhosa regard their Supreme Being seem to match with how the Christian God is being portrayed by the Christians. Hodgson appears to argue that the central concept of the Supreme Being was almost the same to both missionaries and Africans.

Hodgson emphasises that in Xhosa society, the worship of *Qamata* was associated with ritual supplications. In times of national crisis he was active in rain making and driving off evil spirits. Those at the top of the social order were considered to be closer to *Qamata*, that is, the chiefs, councilors, elders and homestead heads. The ancestors were the mediators between the Xhosa and *Qamata*.⁸⁴ In short, Hodgson’s interpretation contradicts the reverential phase as Hodgson has tried to show that there were both morals and religion amongst the African societies, but the missionaries were too prejudiced to notice this.

82. J. Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa*, p. 65.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

PHASE FIVE: MISSIONARY - AFRICAN ENCOUNTER

While the third trend of Protestant mission historiography focused on the importance of African religion and how the missionaries were used, the fourth trend focuses on how the Africans perceived the image of God as a Supreme Being in their traditional practices. It therefore appears that the subsequent trend encompassed a generation of historians who now began to feel the need to focus specifically on and explain the encounter between the missionaries and the Africans. The descriptions of the encounter could reveal information about the way representatives of the two respective sides – Africans and missionaries – acted, responded and reacted to one another.

An early promoter of this trend of historiography was T. O. Beidelman,⁸⁵ a social anthropologist who studied the Kaguru society and the Church Mission Society (CMS) missionaries in Tanzania. Beidelman's views appeared in his article "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Mission in Africa."⁸⁶ Beidelman's study aimed at focusing on both sides of the encounter, the Kaguru side and the missionary side, in order to understand social and religious changes in Kaguru society. Beidelman insists that it is important for historians to understand the social background of the missionaries in order to know how the changes happened on both sides of the encounter.⁸⁷ In this section the encounter will be discussed from both African and European perspective.

European side of the encounter

Beidelman argues that many historians study missionaries in a generalised manner without any background or context. There is no description of the career of any rank-and-file missionaries. He further asserted that historical

85. T.O. Beidelman, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Mission in Africa", *Africa* 44 (3), 1974, p. 274.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

studies of missionaries represent a rather dull form of scissors-and-paste history devoid of the kind of social theory that can make events meaningful, convincing, and relevant to current problems.⁸⁸ And so Beidelman suggests that:

We must examine the culture of the missionaries themselves to determine how they extended their Christian beliefs into a broader framework of social life. The character of such a picture clearly varied not only with the theology but with the class, economic, and national attitudes of the missionaries.⁸⁹

In studying some secular aspects of missionaries, considering missionary groups in terms of their ethnicity, class and economic backgrounds, Beidelman shows that cultural background influenced their behaviour in ways not logically determined by their Christian beliefs and work. For example, CMS missionaries in Ukaguru, Tanzania, were mostly recruited from the working and lower middle class. This resulted in behaviour displaying a narrow view of the roles of men and women, aims and quality of education and, in most cases, they were not so critical of colonial rule when it came to representing the interests of the people they worked and lived with.⁹⁰ On the contrary, missionaries with large international backgrounds, like some Roman Catholic missionaries, and with rich funding like some American, Swiss and German groups, were able to provide capital investments, salaries, and a better lifestyle than the metropolitan, or that which poorer missions could sustain.⁹¹ This had an effect on missionaries' behaviour.

Beidelman argues that most studies of Christian mission consider all missionaries as members of a general class, neglecting the relationship between

88. T.O. Beidelman, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Mission in Africa", *Africa* 44 (3), 1974, p. 236.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

90. T.O. Beideman, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Mission in Africa," *Africa* 44 (3), 1974, p. 238.

91. *Ibid.*

religious beliefs and the organisation and the character of missionary activities. For instance, the greatest contrast in missionary beliefs involves the difference between the Protestants' and the Catholics' perception of a religious leader as a priest or pastor. The Roman Catholic priest has an education equivalent to a college degree, whereas the education of a pastor may vary depending upon their group, from college to primary education.⁹²

The variations also occurred in Africa, where African priests and pastors gained more leadership power from their secular skills and qualities, such as familiarity with European languages, facilities, communication with Europe and Europeanised Africans, and familiarity with modern technology.⁹³ Another aspect is the availability of economic support to carry on the lifestyle of the priests and the pastors: celibacy of the priests versus responsibilities towards European wives and children, entailing more sick leave and absences concerning family problems. Therefore, Beidelman argues that the theological issue of the priesthood, prolonged sacerdotal training, and celibacy led to unforeseen far-reaching developments in secular affairs.⁹⁴ Beidelman concludes that "It is obvious that cultural factors must be considered in determining the full implications and variations in the beliefs and policies of any missionary group."⁹⁵

The importance of studying the background of the missionaries in order to explain the encounter is also observed by Jarle Simensen, who together with Vidar Erynnild, looked specifically at the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) missionaries in South Africa. They assessed the missionary's "organizational background, social profiles and world view."⁹⁶ In Simensen and Erynnild's study it was found that, out of the 102 Norwegian missionaries who came to South Africa and Madagascar, 21 had university degrees out of whom 15

92. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

95. *Ibid.*

96. In J. Simensen (ed.), *Norwegian Missions in African ...*, p. 32.

studied theology. These NMS missionaries' social background was generally high, with only one from the so-called lower class of farming. The remaining missionaries had a specially planned education at the mission school, though the majority came from lower class families.⁹⁷

Simensen and Erynnild observed that what affected NMS missionaries' evangelical work in Africa was the kind of education they were given, especially how they were taught to view the world and world culture. The NMS missionaries were taught that there were two cultural groups of people, the cultured people (agriculturalist, polytheist, and state organized) and the 'savage' (non agriculturalist, fetishist and stateless). Africa fell under the second group, of 'savage' people. Simensen and Erynnild reveal that even in missionaries' text books of geography and histories which were standard in that period;⁹⁸ Africa was depicted as the most primitive of all regions. Furthermore, the worldview that the missionaries were inculcated in made them share the contemporary belief in European cultural superiority and a European civilizing mission. These views contributed to the missionaries not being respectful of the *blue blood*, as they were sceptical of the traditional rulers in Africa. There is no indication that they had a high regard for the values of pre-industrial peasant culture, either at home (as there was a political movement against the hierarchy and the monarch) or in Africa.⁹⁹ So in showing how the missionaries' background reflected the missionaries' ways of thinking and behaving, Simensen and Erynnild show that even political matters at home (Norway), affected the NMS in Africa as they did not show any respect to the African chiefs.

Simensen and Erynnild also observed the NMS encounter at the theological level. The educated Norwegian missionaries who went back home had been

97. *Ibid.*

98. J. Green, *Imugdulaerobog I geografitentil Skolebog*, Kristiania, 1886, p. 374, in J. Simensen (ed.), *Norwegian Missions in African ...*, p. 32.

99. *Ibid.*

influenced in their thinking on the subject of cultural and religious change. Thus, the relationship between Christianisation and civilization was determined by a theological idealistic view of history. Their basic categorization of the analysis of their evangelical mission was that of the Bible, starting with the key concept of sin. Therefore, non-European cultures were seen as the result of the “fall into sin” and thus the only hope for progress, according to this thinking, lay in conversion to Christianity, and not in the simple adoption of the material products and the techniques of European civilization.¹⁰⁰

African side of the encounter

Du Bruyn and Southey’s fifth trend of Protestant mission historiography is classified as the African perspective of the encounter. Robert Strayer is an example of a scholar that discusses the African perspective of the encounter. Strayer was a professor of history who did research in east African colonial history. In his research, Strayer specialised in speculating on how the interaction of missions with African societies affected the changes that happened in the particular society. He observed that African societies did, on occasion, see in mission Christianity symbols, techniques and ideas which they found to be appropriate or useful in coping with the new or wider world that was introduced to and imposed upon them. This was an encounter that happened at several levels of African religious systems.¹⁰¹ For example, among the Kalahari people, the cult of the Supreme Being became more important than ever, and made an easy identification with the Christian God, while lesser spirit cults declined or fluctuated. Moreover, the Christian mode of approach to God, namely church going, has largely replaced traditional means of intercession without implying acceptance of other Christian ideas such as sin, salvation and afterlife. So, it appears that Strayer tries to imply that it was simple to adapt to Christianity during these encounters in the societies

100. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

101. R. Strayer, “Mission History in Africa: New Perspective on an encounter”, *African Studies Review* 19 (1), April 1976, pp. 1-15.

where Christianity resembled some traditional beliefs, and where there was a strong sense of such beliefs.

Strayer further points out that the missionary message of sin must often have sounded like the description of witchcraft, and the invitation to salvation like an alternative to the cleansing ritual designed to rid the community of that blight.¹⁰² According to the research done by Strayer, it occurred among the Taveta people of south-eastern Kenya. There was a temporary heightened receptivity to mission teaching after the application of protective medicine and an anti-witchcraft cleansing ceremony failed to remedy a series of natural disasters including sickness, famine and locusts.¹⁰³ Strayer observes that the response to missionaries varied because what was needed from the Africans in terms of myth and rituals varied also.¹⁰⁴ Strayer further observes that the concept of an Active High God, witchcraft eradication techniques, the meaning of ensuring rainfall, the fulfillment of millennial expectations, as well as differences in social, economic and political circumstances, will need to be investigated in order to explain the African response to missionary intrusion.¹⁰⁵

Other scholars that fit into the category of Southey and Du Bruyn's fifth trend of Protestant mission historiography are Jean Comaroff and John Leon Comaroff. The Comaroffs are both professors of anthropology who also specialise in the writing of missionary history. They have authored and co-authored a number of books including the two volumes entitled *Of Revelation and Revolution*. The books appeared in 1991 and 1997. In these books, the Comaroffs studied the southern Tswana society in South Africa. Among the areas of research was the study that speculated on the encounter between

102. J. Murray, "Interrelationships between Witchcraft Eradication Movement and Christianity in Central Africa", 1970, Unpublished paper referred to in R. Strayer, "Mission History in Africa ...", p. 3.

103. *Ibid.*

104. T.O. Ranger and J. Weller (eds.), *Themes in the Christian History in Central Africa*, California University Press, Berkeley, 1975; in R. Strayer, "Mission History in Africa ...", p. 13.

105. R. Strayer, "Mission History in Africa ...", p. 14.

missionaries and the Tswana. Like Strayer, the Commaroffs also studied the background of both the Tswana and the missionaries so that they could explain how the two sides reacted during the time of the encounter. In this section, only the Comaroffs' view of the African side of the encounter will be visited. The Comaroffs suggest that "although there are no Tswana texts that recount their early perception of whites, it is possible to recover something from the records of their actions and reactions which were sometimes visible and voluble."¹⁰⁶ They cite the example of John Campbell,¹⁰⁷ (a director of the LMS who had been sent to the Cape in 1812 to survey the progress of mission work in the interior). When Campbell entered into the Hurutse capital which, being far north of Kuruman, had not been formerly visited by Europeans before, he observed that:

The street through which we went was crowded with people, and many hastened to their doors to see us pass. The sight of a white man threw them into fits of convulsive laughter; but the young were more seriously affected, they screamed, and in the utmost horror fled to the first place of concealment they could find.¹⁰⁸

The Comaroffs continue that despite the fact that the Tswana are 'read' through the texts of others they are not rendered voiceless. In this regard too, it is to be stressed that in the earliest dialogues between the whites and the blacks, the former were less than fully in control. And so, in their accounts, a counter-discourse might be heard; a discourse which may be illuminated by playing it off against other cultural materials among them, linguistic usage and poetic expression that give insight into contemporary symbols and meanings, relations and categories.¹⁰⁹

106. J. Comaroff & J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

108. J. Campbell, *Travel In South Africa.... Being a Narrative of a Second Journey ...*, 2 Vols., London, 1822. Reprinted 1967, New York and London; in J Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution ...*, p. 189.

109. W.J. Buchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, 2 Vols., London, 1822, in J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution ...*, p. 189.

The Comaroffs further observed that the Tlhaping used the term *lekgoa* (pl. *makgoa*) to refer to whites. The full term was *makgoa ma shweu* literally meaning “white bush lice”, *kgoa* referring to a tick or a louse commonly found on the hind-quarters of domestic animals. This perhaps evokes the notion that Europeans were first sighted clinging to the back of horses.¹¹⁰

In short, the Comaroffs try to show that the African perception of whites at first encounter was of mixed emotions. There were people who admired the whites, while some saw them as funny creatures. It is ironic that, here the Comaroffs observed the ordinary people in their daily lives. So the Comaroffs’ interpretation of the encounter from the African perspective is a good starting point for the current generation of historians who would wish to study other societies.

CONCLUSION

Generally, although Du Bruyn and Southey have divided the protestant mission and missionary historiography into five phases, sometimes the phases overlap. For instance: phase three was concerned with African initiatives and the importance of traditional religion, an issue which is also related to phase four, in the articulation of African traditional religion.

In his ‘third trend’ style assessment of missions Eiselen implied the importance of African religion, an issue that would also be studied in the fifth trend. The only difference is that Eiselen provided a background to African religion, which is related to the fact that the coming of Christianity led to the collapse of some practices of the African religion. On the contrary, the background that is

110. Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: the Culture and History of a South African People*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1985, p. 137.

being cited in the fifth phase shows how the missionaries' social background reflected their practices within the process of spreading the gospel to the people they wished to convert. But in essence, in both trends there seems to be a recognition of the importance of touching on the backgrounds of the various issues they discuss. This also serves as an illustration of how Du Bruyn and Southey's phases overlap.

The fifth phase, which insists on studying the social backgrounds of missionaries and Africans involved in the mission encounter, still seems to have something to yield for current studies. That which can be revealed in the study of those backgrounds, being of the people, or society, or group of people, helps historians greatly in coming to a better understanding of transcultural encounters. This is a viable approach to historical studies as history needs to be rewritten for it to be credible and authentic.

Despite the fact that Du Bruyn and Southey's work can mistakenly be read as neat successive categories, rather than trends that are bound at stages to overlap, they deserve credit for the 'five phases' approach to the historiography of missionary and mission studies they have constructed. It serves as an extremely useful guide for students seeking to understand the changing views of mission history in South Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AMERICANS' MISSION: PERCEPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND PREPARATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at exploring the circumstances that prevailed in America prior to the American missionaries' arrival in South Africa. In short, it will focus on the correspondence that was exchanged between Dr. John Philip of the London Mission Society (LMS) and J.B. Pruney¹ of the American Board of Christian Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Pruney was a young American student at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey. Apparently he wrote to Philip, the LMS Superintendent in Cape Town, on behalf of the Society of Inquiry on Mission, founded at the Andover Theological Seminary in 1811. Basically, the student group was interested in assembling facts relative to the conditions, habits and manners of 'unchristianized' nations. This correspondence is important because it resulted in encouraging the American missionaries to come and work among the people of Mzilikazi and Dingane. The structure of the chapter is based on the first three letters in Kotze's Van Riebeeck Society publication, *Letters of American Missionaries*. The first letter explores why the Americans wanted to work in South Africa; the second letter is a response to the first letter and attempts to provide an answer to the questions asked in the first letter; while the third letter focuses on the instructions given to the missionaries who intended to go and work among the Zulu and the Ndebele.

By the time the American missionaries came to South Africa (early nineteenth century), the American economy had witnessed a transition from a feudal and

1. See C. Northcott, *Robert Moffat: Pioneer in Africa, 1817-1870*, Butterworth Press, London, 1961, p. 153; D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries 1835-1838*, The Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1950, p. 21.

agrarian order to a democratic and industrial society.² Under these conditions “work” was imbued with very significant meaning in Christian society. A life of work was identical in outward action with a life of moral earnestness. In Western Christianity it was believed that work developed one’s God given talent. It amounted to the calling of man on earth. Work safeguarded a man from sin by keeping him busy. In a commercial society work was a means not only to money, but also to success and respectability.³ Coming to Africa with such a background resulted therein that the Victorian Americans, in the course of time came to see the Africans as being lazy and unindustrious. In sum, because of their idleness, they sinned.

As has already been hinted at in the introduction, the coming of the missionaries was preceded with basic preparations. Already in this preparatory phase, even before the American missionaries touched African soil, their perceptions of the Africans had already been recorded in written form. This can be traced in an introductory letter, the very first one, from J.B. Purney to Dr. Philip in which he asks about the possibility of the Americans finding a place to teach in South Africa.

J.B. PURNEY’S LETTER TO DR. JOHN PHILIP

This first letter (1832) was written with the aim of exploring what the need was for the American missionary to spread Christianity in South Africa. In the nineteenth century, American society was also undergoing a stage of national identity building. For the Americans to achieve this, it was their duty to build strong organizations that would cater for their mutual interests. For instance, the numerous small organizations that worked from within America towards the spreading of the gospel, lacked the organizational coherence to make a

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2. W.E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 1957, p. 4.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

meaningful contribution to safeguarding the rights of Americans abroad, or to the abolition of slavery. The issue of identity and unity among these small organizations served as a reason why the ABCFM was established in 1810.⁴

From the nature of Purney's questions in the first letter it is clear that a vast area had been considered for exploration.⁵ The Americans were convinced that the time has come for them to go overseas to 'save' the Africans in their own land. 'Saving the Africans in their own land' indicates that the first American missionaries may have been under the conviction that they were anti-imperialist. They wanted the Zulu to remain independent and sovereign. They aimed to convert whole communities to Christianity and leave them to work out the details of their own salvation. Yet, these missionaries implied a fundamental belief in the African capacity to advance rapidly towards American standards of government, religion and material civilization.⁶ The content of the letter carries a more insidious message than what it may seem on the surface.

The missionaries were aware that their popularity and acceptance amongst the Americans in America depended on how they would use their pen and paper to draw the attention of the readers. The statement that follows was made for the aim of pleasing the readers.⁷ If readers were impressed there was a possibility that they might sympathize with the society and provide them with moral, but more importantly, material support. Although it was a private letter, prior acknowledgement that the press would be used to awaken the interest of the public is indication enough that the letters were written for the purpose of publishing. Because the letter was to be read by the public, the writers were

4. D.J. Kotze, (ed.) *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 6.

5. The basic questions were "Where shall we go?" and "What field shall we enter?" See Letter No. 1, J.B. Purney – Dr. J. Philip, Princeton Theological Seminary New Jersey, 16 March 1832, in D.J. Kotze, *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 21.

6. N. Etherington, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa. A South African Case Study", *Africa* 47 (1) 1977, pp. 32-33.

7. R. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, 1980, p. 157.

expected to be more than careful not to affront the sentiments of the readers, among whom would be the donors of the society. In all probability, the writer would also have considered not hurting the feelings of any group or denomination, or to privilege the convictions of the one over the other. This was due to the fact that the American Board comprised a variety of Christian groups. Two further observations are to be made about Purney's statement. First, he was determined to win the hearts of the people "with various capacities and knowledge". Second, he was trying to please the different conflicting denominations within Christianity. Part of the letter states that:

There is throughout many parts of our happy country a breaking up of the great deep of prejudice of missions and on the subject of slavery and we fondly hope public opinion is coming over to the side of justice and christianity.... We now indulge the hope that in a few years the long enslaved sons of Africa will be liberated and sent home to the land of their fathers, carrying the comforts of civilization, (and) the blessings of a free government.⁸

As historian Andrew Porter points out, to the American missionaries, spreading Christianity in South Africa was meant to compensate for the evils of the slave trade, while to the British, the idea of the missionary activity offered "recompense for earlier wrong done to Africans ...". To them it "was a powerful element in the vision linking Christianity and legitimate trade ..."⁹. The former statement indicates that, regardless of the early American missionaries' sentiments to the contrary, both the Americans and the British were in the imperialistic era, linking the spread of Christianity with the development of free trade for the Americans and legitimate trade for the British. In other words, the above statement indicates that the coming of the missionaries into

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8. Letter No. 1, J.B. Purney – Dr. J. Philip, Princeton Theological Seminary New Jersey, 16 March 1832, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries*, p. 22.
 9. A. Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm and Empire", *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. 3, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 222. Legitimate trade was the concept used to refer to the extraction of raw materials from the African continent, in contrast to human labour, which was brought to an end with the abolition of the Slave Trade by the British in 1810. In this chapter Porter refers specifically to the British Niger River Expedition of 1814-1842. Territory within Africa was now seen as the ideal place for 'new' plantations, given the availability of African manpower on the spot.

Africa had a direct connection with the economic development of American and British societies. Furthermore, the passage above reveals that, in their own time, these missionaries were seen as progressive thinkers, opposed to many fellow Americans who still wanted to continue the practice of slavery.

A further analysis should be made of the statement “...carrying the comforts of civilization, (and) the blessings of a free government”. The observation is marked by cross-cultural error based on the interpretation of the meaning of the word ‘freedom’. By the time Purney was writing this letter, the Americans had already abolished the slave trade, but the institution of slavery was still intact. This was true especially for the American South where the slaves were not yet set free.¹⁰ Yet machines had already begun to replace human labour and more advanced technology had led to economic development. In the growing mining and manufacturing sector (especially in the North) more could be accomplished in a shorter period of time with fewer and fewer human hands. The use of machines would cut the cost of production and the payment of salaries to large numbers of unskilled labourers would no longer be necessary. Because Africans who used to provide for this need for unskilled manpower were no longer needed in the United States, a number of Americans began to reason that they had to go back to Africa, but still adhere to the European way of life through Christianity. Purney does not seem to be aware of his complicity in this prejudice inherent in an early nineteenth-century American mentality.

It is no coincidence that the nineteenth century, generally known to be an imperialist era, was also the time of the “modern missionary movement”, as Porter calls it. The global expansion of evangelical Protestant activity in the

10. The abolition of slavery would only happen in the 1860s with the American Civil War. When Abraham Lincoln was elected the American president in 1860, many hopes for ending slavery began to be felt. There were setbacks to the ending of slavery as some of the states depended to a large extent on the slaves for economic survival. The eleven Southern States seceded from the Union and set up an independent government – the Confederate States of America. This was one of the major factors that led to the outbreak of American Civil War – a four year conflict that left Southern America defeated and ended slavery. “Civil war” 1860-1865, in <http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jb/civil>. Accessed 17 May 2004.

nineteenth century reflected the fact of relative material power. Its geographical reach coincided with its universal creed.¹¹ The American missionaries were agents of imperialism in as far as they believed that they represented a superior power – ideologically and materially. Their actions were driven by a sense of mission which embraced, legitimized and uplifted their private ambitions.¹² It was from such a stance that Purney implied that their missionary enquiry was done for “our own use to enable us to judge of the wants of the world.” The wants of the world could include the introduction of American material culture, Christianity and capitalist ethics into non-American societies. Undeniably, this was one of the features of imperialism. This transmission was achieved through a multitude of agents of traders, officials, missionaries and settlers who made contact with the southern African inhabitants.¹³ While this was facilitated by a British administration, many others nationalities, like the missionaries from the United States, were complicit in the process.

The letter from Purney showed the intense desire of the Americans to come and work in Africa. It was a desire that reflected the actual state of the society they came from. Purney confirmed the view that missionaries came with the idea of conquering the dark continent of Africa for Christ. Whether they came from England, France or America, missionaries were set to accomplish a two fold task: firstly, to uproot heathen beliefs and customs; secondly, to replace these heathen beliefs with Christian ideas and Christian life. But it was easier to accomplish the first task (and herein the missionaries had the ‘assistance’ of administrators and traders and settlers), but the second task was far more difficult, and herein the missionaries were left almost alone.¹⁴

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11. A. Porter, “‘Cultural Imperialism’ and Protestant Missionaries Enterprise 1780-1914”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25(3), September 1997, p. 369.
 12. P.J. Cain & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914*, Longman, London, 1993, p. 43.
 13. C. Ballard, “Traders, Trekkers and Colonists”... p. 106.
 14. I. Schapera, *Western Civilization and the Natives of South Africa: Studies in Culture Contact*, George Routledge and Sons Ltd., London, 1934, p. 65.

DR. PHILIP'S RESPONSE

In his response to Purney's letter in 1833, Philip gave a detailed explanation of the African people and their way of life. In this section I submit parts of his explanation to further analysis. Having lived in South Africa for more than fifteen years, Philip claimed to have observed and witnessed over time the "natural capacity of the African race."¹⁵ He had already opened a number of mission stations and schools. He himself taught the Africans and he eventually launched a programme for teaching the helpers. His observations seem to have been relatively unprejudiced and the evidence he gives seems credible given his first hand observation and personal experience:

So far as my observation extends, it appears to me that the natural capacity of the African is nothing inferior to that of the European. At our schools, the children of the Hottentots, of Bushmen, of caffers, and Bechuanas, are in no respect behind the children of European parents; and the people at our missionary stations are in many instances superior in intelligence to those who look down upon them, as belonging to an inferior caste.¹⁶

The explanation above indicates that Philip seems to exclude himself from those who look at Africans as an inferior caste. In his opinion those people are not making a correct observation. Among them would also count the famous missionary and explorer David Livingstone, who twenty years *later* wrote of the inability of the Africans to understand European ways. When he lived among the Kalahari people of the Matlasi Wells he cited that:

It is difficult to give an idea to an European of the little effect teaching procedures, because no one can realise the degradation to which their mind have been sunk by

15. Letter No. 2, Dr. Philip – J.B. Purney, Cape Town, May 1833, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 27.
16. *Ibid.*

centuries of barbarism and hard struggling for their necessities of life¹⁷

Even though Philip and Livingstone were referring to altogether different groups of people, it is evident that their contrasting assessments of African capabilities resulted from their contrasting views of African people: to Philip they had an equal, or even superior, “natural capacity” to the European, and to Livingstone the capacity there once was, had deteriorated due to their struggle for survival in a harsh environment. What the two had in common in their assessments of African intelligence, is that they both measured it in terms of the extent to which Africans comprehended, embraced or appropriated European knowledge. Of the two, Philip was definitely the more convincing that the missionary presence among Africans was desirable and worthwhile. Philip had proof that there was something the missionary could offer the African.

Besides his own convictions of what a missionary had to offer an African community, Philip also went to great lengths to explain, from the vantage point of the people in the interior, why they wished to have a missionary in their communities. The reasons given for why the Africans desired to have a missionary varied from defence, to pride, to economic gain. In Philip’s observation, the Koranas¹⁸ did not want the missionary for religious reasons. These people had been waiting for him for three weeks on the road he had to pass, with a request to send them missionaries.

When they understood I could not send them a missionary, they requested me to send them an instructed native from one of the missionary stations, that by his superior advantages they might be secured

17. D. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels & Researches in South Africa*. Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd., London and New York, 1857(1965), p. 137.

18. A group of people from the Free State. These were known for their plundering of their neighbours. They for e.g. plundered the Tswana - see D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 30. Their geographical location gave them easy access to the gun and gun powder trade. They were close to the Cape Province.

against the frauds and impositions practiced upon them by the traders from the colony.¹⁹

The Koranas seem to have been aware that missions were popular not only for their teachings, but also for trade they might attract, practical skills they might offer such as medical expertise and their influence with other European and local neighbours.²⁰ From the letter we learn that the presence of other whites (traders who were already trading with the indigenous people) was a cause of concern to the Korana community. Opposed to these traders, the missionaries had a positive image among the Koranas. Their presence was believed to bring relief in terms of trading as this seemed to have been unequal. Furthermore, the Koranas were aware that some Africans were already being taught the European ways. They knew that an ‘instructed native’ would also serve the purpose of familiarizing them with trading skills. This part of Philip’s letter would be a great encouragement to the anticipating Americans. The question they posed was adequately answered: Africans needed the missionaries.

It was Philip, therefore, who introduced the American missionaries to Africa for the first time. He wrote about a number of things concerning his experiences in Africa. Besides having written about how much the Africans desired to have a missionary among them, he also informed them of the condition and character of the Zulu, and about the favourable results of African missions.²¹ He wrote about the difficulties that would be encountered in the process of introducing the habit of a ‘civilized life’. Here Philip insisted that “[c]ivilization is to the Christian religion what the body is to the soul.” He did not forget, either, to write about the importance of raising a ‘native agency’.²²

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19. Letter No. 2, Dr. Philip – J.B. Purney, Cape Town, May 1833, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries* ..., p. 29
 20. A. Porter “Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm and Empire”..., p.339.
 21. Letter No. 2, Dr. Philip – J.B. Purney, Cape Town, May 1833, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries* ..., pp. 29, 31-32 and 34.
 22. Letter No. 2, Dr. Philip – J.B. Purney, Cape Town, May 1833, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries* ..., pp. 36-37, 38.

The ‘native agency’ was the system which the missionaries, and in some cases, the traders and colonists, used to facilitate the communication with the Africans. In most cases, the ‘native agent’ was prepared and instructed by the missionaries themselves. They were also recruited from selected communities where the effect of the white man’s education had already been felt. This education had to begin “as soon as possible”²³. The agents included interpreters (especially those who were sent to interpret the gospel), and the assistant preachers of the gospel in the interior. According to the Comaroffs “[t]hese early Christian interpreters were vectors of communication between whites and blacks”, therefore, they were “the symbol of construction of differences in its objectification and its violation”.²⁴

Philip also wrote about what he called the two powerful chiefs and their people. These were Dingane of the Zulu and Mzilikazi of the Ndebele. About these two leaders he insisted that:

The societies now in operation in South Africa cannot do anything efficiently for these two powerful chiefs and their people. And on this ground should the churches in America think of assisting us in South Africa, I would strongly recommend that they should send a mission to them.²⁵

The American Board therefore followed Philip’s recommendation and prepared to send representatives to South Africa. This letter of instruction the Board wrote to the missionaries who had to go to Africa, will be discussed in the next section.

23. *Ibid.* p. 33.

24. J. Comaroff & J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Vol. 2, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1997, p. 79.

25. Letter No. 2, Dr. Philip – J.B. Purney, Cape Town, May 1833, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 33.

THE LETTER OF INSTRUCTION TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN MISSIONARIES

A year after Philip replied to Purney, the American Board took action. In 1834 the Board set out instructions for the missionaries who were to go to South Africa. They were already assigned this destination while still in Boston where the ABCFM head quarters were located. Those who were to go to Mzilikazi's kingdom, were Reverend Daniel Lindley, Reverend Henry Venable and Doctor Alexander Wilson. The Zulu delegation comprised of Reverend Aldin Grout, Reverend Newton Adams and Reverend George Champion. All the missionaries were accompanied by their wives.²⁶

From the instructions to the two delegations, the American Board's prior constructed knowledge of Africans is clearly apparent. In the Americans' perception, the Africans were "idle" and "not developed". Therefore, the missionaries had to make sure that they destroy the prevailing communities and build another, externally imposed, form of community that, in the eyes of the missionaries, could be "civilized". It is clearly shown that the Americans' goal, however contradictory when viewed with hindsight (to leave the Africans independent, but 'civilized'), was long-term. This was rather typical: Missionary work was often planned as long-term, focusing on setting up schools and introducing English and vernacular literacy – an essential foundation for Bible study – religious understanding and, inevitably, cultural change.²⁷ Back in America the missionaries valued the power of secular skills and qualities such as knowledge of modern technology, an education which would provide the economic support necessary to sustain what was essential for a "civilized" lifestyle.²⁸

26. Letter No. 3, Instruction of the Prudential Committee to the Rev. Daniel Lindley, Rev. Aldin Grout, Rev. Alexander E. Wilson, M.D., Rev. George Champion, Rev. Henry I. Venable, and Newton Adams, M.D., and their wives. Given in Park Street Church, Boston, 22 November 1834, in D.J. Kotze (eds.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 46.

27. A. Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm and Empire," ..., p. 339.

28. T.O., Beidelman, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa", *Africa* 44(3), 1974, p. 240.

In their instructions, the American missionaries were also advised to settle in a viable area. The reference quoted below gives an impression of the American Board's insistence on the vital importance of the economic potential of the chosen piece of land. In other words, apart from converting the Africans, the missionaries were instructed to participate in economic activities to sustain their own livelihood. They were instructed to use Africans as cheap labour on their farms. Somewhat of an American superiority complex is sensed here, with the hard manual labour having been reserved for the Africans. Furthermore, the missionary idea of 'civilized existence' entailed a capability to sustain oneself on the land, by cultivating it and making a living on it. They also wanted this for the Africans. They believed a 'decent' life entailed staying in a fixed abode and providing for one's own needs.

The sites must be selected for the missions where the soil, water, climate, prospect, proximity to the natives, and inducements for them to settle around you and cultivate the land, are all as they should be. Dwellings must be erected, and land brought under cultivation.²⁹

Generally, the American missionaries were given each and every detail on how to live with the Africans. The letter first introduced the geographical position of the Zulu and Ndebele societies. The missionaries were also told how to reach their destination after they had landed from their vessel, the *Burlington*. They were also reminded of the possibility of having difficulties and the separation between couples. Their obligation as missionaries was further impressed upon them – they were amongst others required to learn the language of the natives, realize the importance of employing interpreters, etc.³⁰

29. Letter No. 3, Instructions of the Prudential Committee..., in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of American the Missionaries ...*, p. 50.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-51.

In his study of the Berlin Mission Society's work within the Venda polity,³¹ Alan Kirkaldy points towards the surprising amount of information about local belief structures and the nature of local society in Vendlant that was recorded by the missionaries. Kirkaldy observes that the missionaries' records were used as proof – to their principals in Germany as well as to the wider community of missionary friends – of just how important it was to save the heathens, both for Christ and for their own sakes. They treated this collection of information, Kirkaldy claims, as a form of intelligence gathering in their fight to win people away from tradition and darkness and superstition and remodel them as Christians.³² This thesis also seems plausible in the light of the correspondence of the American Board that had been traced in this chapter. The assignment of the American missionaries to the Zulu and Ndebele corresponded significantly with those of the Berlin missionaries to the Venda. Imperialism was to a large extent *about* knowing the other/subject nations. Change could be imposed through knowing the subject's ways of life. The coming of missionaries had a direct connection to the effects of the Industrial Revolution at its Imperial stage.

CONCLUSION

The general trend of the American missionaries coming to Africa presents a picture of what the Comaroffs called the “encounter between the two worlds”, one imperial and expansive, the other local and defensive. “The encounter” the Comaroffs continued, “presents itself most accessibly in the letters, reports, and published works of missionaries”.³³ Early evangelists came from an age in

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31. Located in what is currently the Limpopo Province of South Africa – from 1860 to 1902 the northern-most part of the Transvaal Boers' Republic.
 32. A. Kirkaldy “Of witchery and witchdoctors: *Vhaloi Dzinang* and Missionaries in the Nineteenth century Venda land” (Unpublished paper, 2002), p. 1.
 33. J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in Africa*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1991, p. 171.

which the notion of economy was central to the ways in which the universe was seen to be constructed, in which human qualities were understood.³⁴

The above explanation will underscore the fact that, in the course of the letters of the missionaries, their historical backgrounds had a direct impact. They wanted the Africans to pass the stage of development with upward mobility, just as it happened in America. The Africans being “poor” and barbarous was because they were not of Christian Godly nature and lazy. According to the missionaries, the evangelization and teaching of American skills of life was an answer to the problems that the Africans had.

34. J. Comaroff & J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African frontier*, Vol. 2, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1997, p. 162.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN CULTURE AND RELIGION

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the first three introductory letters that would prepare the American missionaries for coming to Africa, were examined. The key role played by the LMS's Dr. J. Philip, was considered as well as the way he acquainted them with the Ndebele and the Zulu. In this chapter I trace how the American missionaries represented Africa from their own firsthand experiences. Here, the content of the letters will be analyzed concerning how the missionaries observed African culture, character and traditions in general. The chapter will begin with the observations concerning the Ndebele, then the focus will be shifted to the Zulu. A note should be made here that the first American missionaries to reach their destination were the inland missionaries who went to Mzilikazi. They were also the first to leave this position after the war between the Ndebele and the Boers. As has already been pointed out, they thereafter joined Grout, Adams and Champion and then, together with them, made some remarkable observations concerning the Zulu. Due to the duration of the encounter the character and traditions of the Zulu were therefore more thoroughly described than those of the Ndebele.

The American missionaries wrote in detail about the character of the African people. These descriptions depended on a number of factors: the time of writing; the condition and the circumstances in which the missionaries found themselves; and the place in which they wrote.¹ These factors made remarkable differences as became apparent when the course of the writing of the letters was traced. For instance, at the very first contact most missionaries

1. R. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, 1980, pp. 153-158.

regarded all Africans as barbarous. But as time went on, and as they got to know the Africans better and especially after having lived among them, this perception changed drastically. The missionaries began to write according to what they observed of a certain group of people in a community or of a particular leader. They did not generalize in a broad sense, but they did categorize. Thus, they stereotyped, deciding that being a Zulu entailed being honest and chaste and being a “Caffer” (as they referred to the communities surrounding the Zulu who were not Zulu in origin, like the Xhosa) entailed being a beggar.²

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NDEBELE

The first group of Americans (the “inland” missionaries – D. Lindley, A. Wilson and H.I. Venable) arrived at Mosega in July 1835. Their destination was Mzilikazi of the Ndebele. They were warmly welcomed by Mzilikazi himself and allowed to work within Ndebele territory around Mosega. The letter that follows was the first to be written by the missionaries after they had arrived in the region of Mzilikazi. They gave detailed information concerning, among other things, the location of the country and the capacity of their station:

The natives apply the designation Mosika to a circuit of country which may be twelve or fifteen miles in diameter... The country is broken but produces grass well, and is well watered by a number of small running streams.

Mosika is in the south-west part of Moselekatsi's occupied territory; and our house is within a few miles of the dividing ridge between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.³

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2. Letter No. 32, Grout – Anderson, Port Natal, 16 June 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 114.
 3. Letter No. 35, Joint letter to R. Anderson, Mosega, 18 August 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 125, 126.

The observation above indicates the richness of the soil and the location of Mosega. The presence of a number of running streams called for both animal keeping and agricultural activities. It was argued that, in a stable political environment, these natural features could have supported food production. Abundant food, in turn, could support the growth of the population. So, from the very beginning, the missionaries tried to portray Mzilikazi's land in a rather positive light. In other words, the missionaries indicated that they were somehow hoping to survive and succeed in preaching the gospel. From the outset, climate did not seem to be much of an obstacle.

After observing the climatic condition and soils, the missionaries turned their attention to the Ndebele. The Ndebele people in the missionaries' observation were generally cheerful and appeared to live well. They freely consumed beer as an article of food, which they made from the corn they cultivated. They also used tobacco in the form of snuff.⁴ The missionaries also observed that all classes in the community spent much of their time in what they, from their American background, saw as "idleness". They perceived them as not being as advanced in art as some of the other Tswana communities. This could perhaps be ascribed to the military code they were ruled by and the fact that everything had to be done only by the will and permission of the king. These circumstances could have stifled their innovative skills. Under Mzilikazi's government, the missionaries found it difficult to encourage individual enterprise as all commerce with foreigners has been prohibited, unless by special permission of the king.⁵

The point should be made here as to why the missionaries were so quick to observe "idleness". Again this could have had something to do with the missionaries' socio-economic background. They were coming from a recently

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4. *Ibid.* Also in T. Jenkinson, *Amazulu: The Zulus, their Past History, Manners, Customs and Language*, Negro University Press, New York, 1882 (1967), pp. 49-54.
 5. Letter No. 35, Joint letter to R. Anderson, Mosega, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 131-132.

industrialized society in which time had become a commodity (people were paid for the hours they worked). The Africans were in a pre-industrial pastoral social formation in which time had not yet been commodified. Rural people could literally still afford a “life of leisure” – that which was only the prerogative of the European aristocracy and middle class women in the nineteenth century.⁶

The missionaries also observed that the economic activities, apart from animal keeping, entailed the cultivation of corn in great quantities. As already mentioned, they observed that the place had a lot of resources. This could have contributed to their decision to erect their mission station at the same place where two French missionaries, Samuel Rolland and Prosper Lemue, had commenced with a station back in 1831. This station was however closed in early 1835, when Mzilikazi invaded the Hurutsi, a Tswana community among whom the French missionaries had worked.⁷

Before he met the missionaries, Mzilikazi was visited by European traders who noticed the prosperity enjoyed by Mzilikazi’s subjects. One of the traders, Robert Schoon,⁸ observed that the Ndebele

corn-fields were fertile; their cattle grazed in luxuriant, wooded pastures and there were streams and springs everywhere.... The followers of the Matebele tyrant feasted on the sorghum stored in their grain-pits, on pumpkins, melons, beans and cane, and on the fresh and

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6. W.E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1957, p. 243; J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 81; P. Rietbergen, *Europe: A Cultural History*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 384.
 7. Letter No. 35, Joint letter to R. Anderson, Mosega, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 128.
 8. Schoon was a British trader who made contact with Mzilikazi in 1828. His fellow British trader, William McLuckie accompanied him. See J.S. Bergh & A. Bergh, *Tribes and Kingdoms*, Don Nelson, Cape Town, 1984, p. 54; P. Becker, *Path of Blood; the Rise and the Conquest of Mzilikazi, Founder of the Matebele Tribe in Southern Africa*, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., London, 1962, p. 96.

curdled milk they obtained from the three thousand heads of their cattle-fold.⁹

This observation made by a trader, correlates with the observations made by the missionaries concerning the climatic conditions and productive nature of the Ndebele land. It indicates that the missionaries did not romanticize in the observations they made. At this stage, the missionaries were still in the “discovery stage”, not fully involved with the Ndebele people. Their minds were still fresh and uncontaminated by prejudice and pride.

The missionaries were situated two hundred yards upward from the Makama river, a tributary of the Little Marico River at the nearest point. The physical location helped them to view their surroundings without much obstruction. Their social position, as the welcomed guests of Mzilikazi, conditioned the missionaries even further to observe and report with confidence. In other words, their analyses were likely to be reliable.

The houses of this people are constructed with small poles and rods, crossing one another at intervals of three or four inches...; but none of them have more than one opening, which serves to admit light, allow smoke to escape when a fire is within, and serves for an entrance, by lying almost flat down and creeping in.... The space within the interior fence serves for the cattle kraal.

By ascending a small mountain in the rear of our house, we can count ten or twelve towns; and in the basin there are eighteen or twenty.¹⁰

Even though the explanation seemed to be correct, one should doubt about the accuracy of the number of the towns. They mention ten or twelve, eighteen or twenty towns. The reason for the inaccuracy could be that they paid no attention to the numbers, but rather to what was going on among the people and

9. P. Becker, *Path of Blood ...*, p. 97.

10. Letter No. 35, Joint letter to Anderson, Mosega ..., in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 127-128.

in their lives. In other words, the missionaries chose to write only the details that were associated with what they wanted to grasp from the people. People's way of life meant a lot to the missionaries as their first objective was to "civilize" them.

The missionaries did not establish themselves long enough to see the fruits of their labour. This was chiefly due to the fact that the Voortrekkers had already advanced into Mzilikazi's settlement by August 1836. These Voortrekkers destroyed the Mosega settlement completely on 17 January 1837. This was a counter attack to the one made by Mzilikazi on the Boers' encampments on 15 August 1836, which had resulted in mass killings and the confiscation of the livestock that belonged to the Boers.¹¹ The missionary Dr Wilson explained what the situation was like:

Early in the morning I was awakened by firing of guns; I arose and looked and saw the farmers on horseback, pursuing and shooting the natives, who were flying in every direction. As soon as they had finished the work of destruction at the village near us, the commander rode to the house and assured us that they intended no harm against us or our property; and invited us to leave the country with them, as they thought it would not be safe for us to stay behind.¹²

However, the missionaries' physical location could have helped them to have a good observation of the events that was taking place at Mosega.¹³ Furthermore, Wilson wrote as if he was willing to remain behind after the attack ended. But the destruction of Mosega meant that the place of the missionaries' labour had been destroyed. The Boers, according to the missionaries, would continue to pursue Mzilikazi until they had entirely destroyed his power, or had driven him

11. I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs of Southern Africa*, Firebird Books, Poole, 1994, pp. 115-117.

12. Letter No. 39, A.E. Wilson – R. Anderson, Grahamstown, 17 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 154.

13. The location was about two hundred yards from the Makama tributary of the Marico River, Letter No. 35, Joint letter to Anderson, Mosega ..., in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 127.

far out of his kingdom. In Wilson's estimation "this emigration of the farmers from the colony is going to form a new era in the history of the native tribes beyond the colony."¹⁴ When following the subsequent course of South African history, the validity of his observation is apparent. It is just not clear whether Wilson had anticipated if this new era would be to the detriment of the "natives" or not. What however is apparent is the missionary's ambivalence to European rule: it might ruin African systems, but simultaneously also make Africans more susceptible to the teachings of the missionaries. But then, the Americans did decide to leave once the Boers appeared on the scene – for safety reasons. Surely they did not see the Boers as a direct threat, but with the hospitality of Mzilikazi suspended by the Boer interference, the missionaries could no longer feel safe among his Ndebele subjects. At least in the short run, the heralded Boer era was not beneficial to the spreading of the gospel among the Ndebele.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ZULU

The second group of the ABCFM missionaries - Aldin Grout, George Champion and Newton Adams – arrived at Port Natal and eventually travelled to Dingane's capital in 1836. On their arrival, the missionaries made a number of observations. Like the inland missionaries with Mzilikazi, these missionaries wrote that they were received with "utmost kindness and attention"¹⁵. The description of their reception indicates their positive image of the good character of the Zulu. Grout further explained that: "During that time [they remained at Dingane's kraal for six days] we were furnished with two cows and a goat for slaughter, and night and morning with plenty of milk and

14. Letter No. 39, A.E. Wilson – R. Anderson, Grahamstown, 17 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 159.

15. Letter No. 28, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Bethelsdorp, 12 February 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 97.

poco-meal [a species of millet flour boiled with milk] for pudding.”¹⁶ This observation by the American missionaries implied that the Zulu people had plenty of food. In other words, just as was the case with the Ndebele kingdom, the economic conditions within the Zulu kingdom were good, which could have been encouraged by a stable division of labour whereby each person had a role to play in the production unit.¹⁷ It also signified that the internal condition in the Zulu polity was calm enough to allow the people to engage in agricultural activities. The agricultural food products could not have been there if there had been an unstable political condition.

The above described characteristic of the Zulu reflects their generosity. This was especially evident in receiving and entertaining their guests. The Zulu’s positive response to the missionaries disproved their notoriety for being hostile. But the response could be attributed to the fact that the missionaries’ arrival was expected by Dingane and his people. No danger could have been anticipated from either side. The meaning that the missionaries constructed, based on the Zulu’s behaviour when receiving guests, implied a prosperous future for the missionaries’ work among the Zulu. The readers of their letters in America would somehow see that the Africans had a positive disposition, in contrast to what the American readers at the time would have been brought to believe about a “heathen land” such as Africa.¹⁸

When the missionaries went to see Dingane, they took with them only a few things, leaving most of their belongings behind at Port Natal. It was when they came back that they noted that the Zulu had two most remarkable characteristics for a “heathen community”:

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16. Letter No. 28, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Bethelsdorp, 12 February 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 97.
 17. E.J. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*, Shuter and Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1936, pp. 184-185.
 18. D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 2.

...honesty and chastity. On our journey to Dingane's place hundreds and hundreds came about our wagon and looked over and handled our dishes and our tools, and for some of them importuned us much, and had many chances that they might have stolen them; but we did not miss a single thing. Such crime would have been punished with death.¹⁹

It is noticeable how surprised the missionaries were to have observed good “Christian values” in a “heathen community”. Their surprise could imply that they had encountered other less chaste and honest “heathens” on their way to Zululand, or it could merely be an indication that such characteristics were not expected among non-Christian people in general. But the missionaries were also convinced that the only reason why the Zulu were honest was because in their society no offence could go unpunished. Considering the time when the letter was written, it is unlikely that the writer would not have been honest in his judgment of the habits of the Zulu. Dingane had given them some hope of working with his people. Grout would have had no immediate motive for spreading a negative representation of Zulu character. Here, the circumstances and the time frame (they were not yet very much involved with Dingane), “controlled” the way the missionaries saw the Zulu people.

Furthermore, the characteristics of the Zulu were observed in comparison with the missionary's experience in their own society, America, in terms of the security of the country and its people. Grout's observations indicated that he came from a country where there was little security when women and girls were left alone. The following is also an indication that the Zulu were positively portrayed at this very initial stage of their encounter with the American missionaries. There is no doubt that there was minimal prejudice or

19. Letter No. 28, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Bethelsdorp, 12 February 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 102.

bias in recording the following information. In accordance with Shafer's criteria,²⁰ the observation was first hand and the writer experienced it himself.

So far as safety is concerned, with what I know of the Zoolahs, I would sooner trust a sister or a wife alone, for days and nights, than in my own country. Indeed, I did not apprehend the least danger from them.²¹

This Zulu character appears to have been portrayed positively. But the missionaries were also aware of the fact that the laws imposed by Dingane controlled their way of life. What is noteworthy is that the observation quoted here was made of the Zulu who settled at Natal, who were in fact refugees escaping Dingane's laws. Stealing from the missionaries could mean a breach of trust to the Natal settlers who accepted to live with them against Dingane's will. In other words, the "chastity and honesty" of the Natal Zulu were "made" by a number of factors, which the missionaries, with their aim at the time to portray the Zulu in a positive light, could not see.

The Zulu were not the first natives to be encountered by the missionaries. There was also a community they referred to as "Caffers" (people living on the outskirts of Zululand who were not Zulu in origin). The nature of these "Caffres" was perceived as being opposite to that described for the Zulu. The "Caffers" were described as notorious beggars, both men and children.

Very seldom could we meet, speak to, or come within hearing of one, but the first or second word would be *Bossala* that is "give me something": and when they were paid for an article, they would invariably ask for a present or addition. We often detect them in stealing and deceiving, but in their estimation no shame or disgrace was attached to it.²²

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20. R. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, 1980, pp. 153-158.
 21. Letter No. 28, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Bethelsdorp, 12 February 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American missionaries ...*, pp.102-103.
 22. Letter No. 32, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 16 June 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American missionaries ...*, pp. 114-115.

The contrasting observation that the missionaries made concerning the “Caffers” would further enhance the “romantic nature” of observations that the missionaries wrote up concerning the Zulu. In their effort to represent the Zulu positively to their readers, no negative characteristics that might have existed among them, was mentioned. In the “Caffers” the negative binary opposites that could have made the Zulu look even better, were found. The alleged deplorable character of the so-called “Caffres” may possibly be ascribed to the fact that they could not be held accountable to any strict authority effectively imposing its rules, except for what could be applied within their small family bands. This was indeed in sharp contrast to the centralized authority the Zulu under Dingane’s jurisdiction were subjected to. With such a harsh discipline being exercised, breaking of the law would be the least thing to be expected. At this early stage of observation, however, these underlying currents will have been lost on the American missionary observers.

It is significant to note that what Grout had written so positively about the Zulu was written when he was within Zululand, at Bethelsdorp. The letter that he wrote about the “Caffers” was written at Port Natal. Port Natal comprised of different types of people. Most of them were escaped convicts from both Shaka’s and Dingane’s regime. Could Grout have been referring to the Zulu refugees as “Caffers” or were they people who were not Zulu in origin? Did it mean that the Zulu, once having been freed from a traditionally centralized system, had their “inner evils” now revealed? Or was Grout too sceptical to bother about the origins of the people he met and wrote about? This too could mean that Grout was writing what he thought would please his would-be readers without taking into consideration the details of the people he was writing about.

However, only a few years later, in 1838, G. Champion exposed “begging” behaviour among the Zulu too. By that time Grout would probably have

concurred with Champion because by then two years had passed since he had made his observation of the Zulu. Champion remarked that:

Give them, and they are not satisfied, be the present large or small. Their thoughts seem so occupied with this idea of getting something, that if it is encouraged, there is no room for any other ideas in their minds. A white man is supposed possessor of everything, and is scarcely believed, whatever he may say to the contrary. Even the king does not yet understand this.²³

Champion continued to explain that, on one occasion, when they saw him leave, the Zulu people “began begging with all their might and some of them acted rather strangely”.²⁴ American readers of the late 1830s must have surmised that “begging” was an African habit attributable to them not being “civilized”. But one should ask why “begging” behaviour persisted, or rather, why recordings thereof increased along with the extent of Zulu exposure to white travellers. To a large extent, the “begging” behaviour could be routed back to the missionaries themselves. When the missionaries came to the Zulu, they brought presents as a way of convincing the Africans to be converted. An example could be cited of when the American missionaries visited Dingane for the first time. The missionaries brought articles like a razor, an umbrella, locks, beads, a knife, a tea-canister, a handkerchief and a turning lathe. They all aimed at impressing Dingane so that he would allow them to work among the Zulu.²⁵ Given the structure of the Zulu community, there was little possibility that the “begging” behaviour could have existed before the coming of the whites. This is because, to a large extent, every Zulu possessed the same thing as his fellow, and the ultimate owner of the wealth was the king himself. The petty begging there could have been, would not have stood out as a distinct characteristic as the missionaries had portrayed it. The material things that the missionaries

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23. Letter No 40, G. Champion – R. Anderson, Ginani, 21 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American missionaries ...*, p. 158.
 24. Letter No. 59, G. Champion – A. Grout, Umlazi, 8 March 1838, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 227-228.
 25. P. Becker, *Rule of Fear: Life and Times of Dingane, King of the Zulus*, Longman, London, 1964, p. 188.

brought to the Zulu were indeed more attractive and appealing than listening to the Gospel “stories”.

Did “begging” have a connection with the initial encounter of the natives with whites giving them presents in an effort to attract them towards – bribe them into –conversion? Or was it because of the way the missionaries presented themselves in the native’s land, entering on wagons, full of articles not known to the Africans, wearing different types of attire? Did they present themselves as good people, kind and giving? It is from this perspective that the Comaroffs observed that this first interaction between the whites and the Africans was “based on the exchange of words and things – and on profound misconception all around.”²⁶ The Africans could not ask for baptism because they could not see its immediate value. Material things had more practical and economic value than the “Word”. So it was more likely that the Africans could keep on begging as long as the missionaries would stay around them. In short, there was misinterpretation from both sides on the role each held on their respective sides. What the whites loathed as begging was a convenient method for the locals to procure luxury goods.

The missionaries ascribed the “begging” behaviour to the ignorance of the Africans. This was especially related to what the missionaries called the African perception of the “value of things”.²⁷ This “value of [missionaries’] things” was as much determined by the missionaries themselves. The missionaries did not seem to realize the relativity of a notion such as the “value” of things. In my opinion, the issue of the comparative value of things is twofold. First, there was the discrepancy between what the Africans did and what they were being paid for. According to the missionaries the Africans were demanding too much for minute jobs. What the missionaries saw as minor

26. J. Comaroff & J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. 1. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 1991, p. 171.

27. Letter No. 32, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 16 June 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 115.

errands, were obviously valued differently by those who performed the tasks. The second issue was explained with regard to the evidence given about Faku and the use of a plough.

The Kaffers, ... are a sluggish people. Though they see utility of a new thing, they seldom adopt it. Faku, when he first saw the operation of a plough, leaped and exclaimed, “it is worth six wives” meaning that it would dig up the ground as fast as six wives; but still made no efforts to get a plough.²⁸

Faku is portrayed by the missionary as representative of male Africans who were ignorant of civilisation. In the same paragraph the polygamous nature of the African societies and the need to civilize them and convert them into Christianity are shown. An exploration should be made here into why Faku did not want the plough. The missionary had already provided his explanation: sluggishness. But in my opinion, this is not a reason enough. The refusal to use the plough is to be rooted in the nature of Faku’s community and especially the inherited Nguni social division of labour. In most Nguni societies like the Zulu, the division of labour was based on age and sex. Men did the rougher tasks requiring strength. They also attended to the cattle. Apart from general household management, agriculture was the special sphere of women and so the use of a plough could never have been anticipated on the side of men.²⁹

But the important point to be noted is how the division of labour had a relation to the polygamous situation. In a Zulu household, each wife was provided with her own hut, and often times also with her own family milk-cow, and she was allocated her own separate garden plot. The plot was to be cultivated by herself and her daughters, so as to furnish the foodstuffs for the sole use of her own

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28. Letter No. 32, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 16 June 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 115.
29. E.J. Kriger, *The Social System of the Zulus ...*, pp. 184-185.

family.³⁰ Indeed, the plough issue was of little significance. What would the wives and daughters be doing at the time when the lands were being tilled by a plough? In other words, the denial of using a plough was a way of maintaining discipline in the household. The wives would be kept busy and gossiping would be reduced. Thus, given the social structure of the time, the “value” of the new invention was not very high.

As it has already been indicated, the missionaries’ perception of Africans changed over time. Referring to the Zulu, Lindley thought that there was nothing in the Zulu “but pure, unmixed unalloyed, unmitigated selfishness, and most of the meanest kind”. At that point, Lindley explained, they “have risen a trifle in our estimation”³¹ But later he observed that:

Where seeing only is concerned, first impressions are generally the most vivid, the most easily expressed in proper language, and therefore the best: but where a just description or account of anything depends on information gradually received, first impressions are often the very worst.³²

Lindley seems to be referring to the writings of early white travellers concerning the Zulu people. He grouped the writings of the travellers under three categories: “half true, not true at all, and nonsense”. According to Lindley, the things the early whites wrote, came from partially made observations. Such observers resided only for two or three days with a naked “savage” and wrote according to what they had been told by the interpreters, probably “a Hottentot that can not read”³³. According to Lindley’s

30. A.T. Bryant, *The Zulu People as they were Before the White Man came*, Shuter and Shooter, Pietmaritzburg, 1949, p. 179.

31. E.W. Smith, *Life and Times of Daniel Lindley 1801-80*, The Epworth Press, London, 1849, p. 283.

32. Letter No. 48, D. Lindley – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 21 August 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 199.

33. E.W. Smith, *Life and Times of Daniel Lindley 1801-80*, The Epworth Press, London, 1949, p. 283.

observations, the natives were aware that their superstitions were laughed at by the white man and therefore, instead of telling, they concealed them with all possible care. Lindley commented that the observers should not be in haste to write their reports. He further added that. "... The Zulus from what I learn, are rather unfavorably situated"³⁴ by those who wrote about them. Furthermore, what was superstitious to American/European travellers/observers was, to the Zulu, the way they saw the world; it was what the Zulu seriously believed, valued and lived by.

As has already been indicated, the general idea of the American missionaries was of nurturing the Africans towards "civilization". The missionaries would use any possible means to fulfill this objective. The reference that follows sketches the situation with the Zulu and the "Caffers" in the vicinity of Port Natal.

Most of the white men have under them Zoolahs and control them as chiefs. There are also at and about Natal some two or three thousand Zoolahs and Caffres, some runaways from Dingaan, and some remnants of tribes destroyed by Shaka and Dingaan. They consider themselves under the protection of the whites, who, though few in number, think themselves able with their guns to oppose many thousand Zoolahs with their assegais and shields.³⁵

A further assessment should be made concerning the above paragraph. There seems to be a cross-cultural error based on superiority and pride of Europeans over the Africans. But what has been portrayed here is the presumed tendency of the Africans to consider themselves under the protection of the whites. This tendency of Africans considering themselves under the protection of the whites has a historical link to Shaka's reign that extended till Dingane's era. They

34. Letter No. 48, D. Lindley – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 21 August 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 200.

35. Letter No. 28, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Bethelsdorp, 12 February 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 96.

both ruled under harsh laws that had put a significant number of Zulu to death. Those who were able to, escaped towards the coast, especially after they had heard of the presence of the whites. There was also a possibility that Grout wrote with the aim of showing his would-be readers that the Africans were still using old technology: assegais and shields versus guns. If what the Africans needed was protection, they would be better protected under whites' "rule" than under Dingane's despotism. In short, no matter what type of weapons there were, there was an assumption that the Africans could not function unless they were under some form of control, whether that being a black tyrant or a white benefactor.

Among the things that the missionaries observed, was the state of health of the Zulu people. Adams took time to observe how the indigenous people survived health-wise. He mentioned that disease was very rare among the whites. But "the natives are subject to dysentery at certain seasons, probably in consequence of their manner of living, their diet being vegetable altogether".³⁶ There seems to be insufficient explanation of the purported connection between eating vegetables and having dysentery here. It is not clear why the missionary tried to avoid the point here, as he was living in that area and saw what had been happening. Probably he wanted to show the other part of the world, America in particular, that "civilization" was a task important to the African's health, spiritually and physically.

The initial seeds of missionary labour slowly began to take root in Port Natal. In March 1836 the American missionaries opened a station at Umlazi.³⁷ A school was established and the missionaries decided that Adams was to be stationed there:

36. Letter No. 31, N. Adams – R. Anderson, Butterworth, 11 April 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 111.
37. D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 122.

The school here in Mrs. Adams' hands is succeeding well. It is in English, and bids fair ere long to make the little ones interpreters of the glad news of salvation to their parents and friends.³⁸

Here it is clear that already the “little ones” were used as ambassadors of good news to their community. The missionaries decided to teach the children at a young age in order to prepare them to become their assistants once they grew up. This could be read as the implementation of the advice Philip had given them on how to prepare a native agency:

If the children of parents in such a state of a society are not put under instruction till they are seven, eight, or nine years of age, after all the education which can be given them they will differ very little from their parents.³⁹

The tendency of taking away the children of the Zulu at that tender age signified that, the children were being indoctrinated so as they might grow up differently from the other people in the society concerned. This would make the missionaries rely on permanent assistants who would be dealing with their own people, convincing them to be converted to Christianity.

By February 1837 Adams, Grout and Champion had already begun to reap the fruits of their labour as missionaries. Their achievements were revealed at Umlazi Station. After initially having taught the Zulu boys as day scholars, the American missionaries saw the importance of introducing a boarding school. They began their experiment by taking four young boys to live with them on their station. They took the boys for the purpose of training them to become monitors. But the manner in which the boys were handled at the station is to be questioned.

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38. Letter No. 34, Joint Letter, G. Champion, A. Grout and N. Adams – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 11 August 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 122.
39. Letter No. 2, Dr. Philip – J.B. Purney, Cape Town, May 1833, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 39.

The missionaries did not seem to be over their superiority complex over the black people. This tendency of the whites to regard themselves as being superior to the blacks might have been imposed by cultural difference and different upbringing. It was to be expected that the missionaries would try to equate the boys' needs to their own. After all, they believed that all people were equal in front of God. However, they extended their confessed belief that African people had the same mental abilities as the Europeans or Americans⁴⁰ into a conviction that the boys would have had the same social needs too. The reason could be none other than the way the missionaries were brought to believe that the Africans were “inferior savages”. Their initial vision was a process of “civilizing” the Zulu in their own environments, but in this particular case instead, they tried to “clone” the Zulu into Europeans or Americans, and in a subordinate position at that. The missionaries began with explaining that the boys’...

progress has been very pleasing, and we are thoroughly convinced of the advantages of having the children constantly near us, that may be removed as much as possible from heathen examples and influence, and that we may bestow upon them all the pains which our other avocations will permit. The expense of their support is but trifling. Indian corn and milk are all they require for food, and their clothing is made of course cotton which is very cheap.⁴¹

Did the removal from “heathenish” examples and influence have any meaning to the missionaries and the boys? The following observations could provide some answers to the question. To the whites, the removal meant the saving of the souls of the Africans in the future generation. They were building a better foundation for the next generation. As for the boys, they felt proud of being raised in American ways. They looked different from the “unfortunate” boys

40. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

41. Letter No. 42, N. Adams – R. Anderson, Umlazi, 15 May 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 175.

who were either day scholars or still had to take care of cows. The boys' parents believed they were investing in a better future for their children, for the betterment of the family – but knowingly they were going against their accustomed social ways. It should be noted that society had already begun to change from 'traditional ways' to the so-called 'civilized life'. In other words, the missionaries were seen as the perfect agents of Cultural Imperialism ("the imposition of foreign culture to an indigenous society"). Their introduction of schools and subsequent alienating of the boys from the traditional deeds performed at their age really signifies "an impact of one culture *over* another."⁴²

Furthermore, there was more to the missionaries' intervention than just removing the boys from what they called "heathen" examples. The missionaries invented two distinct characteristics between the Zulu society: Zulu traditional ways of life that was deemed bad, and Christian civilization that was deemed good. The important question to ask is whether the separation between "bad" tradition and "better" civilization was as fixed and complete as the missionaries have envisaged, especially in the eyes of the Zulu themselves. The fact remained that the missionaries did not succeed in breaking the Zulu's ties with their traditions completely. The Zulu instead, were able to invent ways to merge traditional practices with what was regarded as a civilized life. The contact between the boys and their families and community still existed. As the anthropologists John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff have indicated with regard to the British missionaries among the Tswana, here the Americans too, had indeed tried to seize the "hearts and minds"⁴³ of the Zulu. However, they could not have foreseen or controlled the ways in which the hearts and minds of the people would respond.

42. R. Dunch, "Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Mission, and Global Modernity", *History and Theory* 41, October 2002, p.309. My emphasis.

43. J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, p. 170.

A further sign of “progress” at Umlazi station is explained below. This is with reference to the change of African traditional social life. As has already been explained above, there was a problem with attendance in schools, and so the boarding schools were introduced. Here the missionaries were pleased with the attendance. The schools were regulated in such a way that each and every hour of the day was occupied by missionary activities. One cannot help but wonder whether the Africans still found any ways of maintaining their traditional activities together with those of the missionaries.

Soon after the schools are closed the congregation assemble under the tree ... branches of which cast a shade sufficiently extensive for six or seven hundred hearers.

The people living upon the mission premises and those in our employ assemble every evening for the purpose of hearing the Scriptures read and explained, and to unite in singing and prayer. I generally devote two days in the week to visiting the people at their kraals.⁴⁴

In short, the missionaries were able to introduce a twofold relationship. They visited the Zulu in their villages but also accommodated people on the station. This explanation indicates that at this point the Zulu villages in question were ready to accept the missionaries. The acceptance, by the way, did not mean that the Africans had to abandon their traditional ways of life altogether. Revisiting the quotation above, there is a clear interaction between “traditional” life and “civilized” life. The way the missionary wrote about the people on the station assembling every evening, leaves open the possibility that they could have spent the remainder of the day, after school, more on their own terms, although (out of own conviction?) still in the form of Christian activities. And the missionaries only visited the surrounding Zulu villages twice a week. To deduce from this limited contact time in the communities’ own space that the missionary was in a position to exert full control over the Zulu, would imply an

44. Letter No. 42, N. Adams – R. Anderson, Umlazi, 15 May 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 175.

underestimation of Zulu agency and an overestimation of the missionary's coercive powers. One should constantly bear in mind that the missionary was writing for home publication. He had to show that he was "winning" the Africans – Zulu in this instance – over to a Christian way of life. But in fact, what the missionary intended (to change Zulu "hearts and minds") was confused with what actually happened⁴⁵ (the Zulu's perception of what the missionary was doing and accomplishing). The tendency of uniting in singing and prayer could have meant providing a way in which the Zulu could relax after their daily activities. Hearing the Scriptures read and explained need not have been the primary meaning of the gathering to them. Indeed, the context in which the letter was composed – with the purpose to show the American public the "progress" and "success" of missionary work among the Zulu – should be an instruction to the historian to re-analyse each of the missionary observations for an alternative meaning from Zulu perspective.

Adams gives a detailed explanation concerning the feedback of missionaries' work and that, from his perspective, shows the success of missionary work at Umlazi:

We have a class of adults in the morning at sunrise. These have also made good progress; and both children and adults evince a capacity for learning equal to that of Europeans or Americans.⁴⁶

The progress explained above could not have caused an immediate metamorphosis in the African people. The Africans had lived, generation after generation, attached to their traditional ways of life. The coming of the missionaries could not have made them completely abandon their traditions. This has been indicated by Adams – however, he saw it as a major obstacle:

45. R. Dunch, "Beyond Cultural Imperialism ...", p. 310.

46. Letter No. 42, N. Adams – R. Anderson, Umlazi, 15 May 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 174.

The greatest drawback, in the usefulness of the school is the irregularity in the attendance of many of the scholars. Parents, as may be supposed, do not take sufficient interest in the subject to have their children attend regularly. And during the rainy season, while the women are engaged in planting, many of the older children are required to take care of the younger, or to assist in their gardens.⁴⁷

From the above paragraph one learns that, among the Zulu there was a traditional division of labour based on gender and age. It is clear that agricultural work prevailed among the Zulu, as they also practised animal husbandry. According to the explanations, women were the ones who were engaged in agriculture. Older boys assisted them. But the writer did not mention what the men were doing. There could be a possibility that the men were engaged in increasing the number of stock through raiding, as most of them were recruited as soldiers in the king's regiments.⁴⁸ This social structure, as illustrated in this paragraph, was an intricate and integrated system which the missionaries could not have hoped to overturn single-handedly. The destruction of this social structure was not as simple a job as the missionaries had hoped it would be. Surely, the opposition from the community was indication enough that the penetration of "civilization" into Zululand was to be taken care of with other imperialistic channels associated with Christianity.

As much as the two-sided social bond between missionaries visiting "kraals" and Zulu visiting mission stations⁴⁹ may be indicative that a mutual understanding was found, in the long run, of course, this could only have happened to the detriment of African traditions. This, particularly because the missionaries were not intending to resist the encroachment of colonial administration on Zulu affairs. The Zulu were in a position where they had to

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

48. T. Jenkinson, *Amazulu: The Zulus, their Past History ...*, pp. 50-51; E.J. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus ...*, pp. 184-185.

49. Letter No. 42, N. Adams – R. Anderson, Umlazi, 15 May 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 175.

adapt, let go, and appropriate. While it would not do justice to their history to depict them as inactive victims of the process, it would be wrong to deny that their situation was precarious, and becoming more so as the number of foreign role players in Natal increased. In 1837 the missionaries made the following comments in one of their letters to America, indicating that there was a good prospect for the Christian religion. They stressed that the area should be occupied soon. This insistence shows that there existed rivalry between different Christian denominations for the occupation of the African lands as they further state:

The people, both black and white, are not only perfectly accessible, but all desire missionary labor. So desirous are the children to obtain instruction, and their parents that they may be educated, that children come five and six miles to attend school at Umlazi.... It may be said of all the natives of Port Natal, that they not only are willing to be taught, but manifest a desire for it that is seldom seen in uncivilized people.⁵⁰

In their explanations, the missionaries indicated that, already in that part of South Africa people began to change their daily ways of life. For instance, they did not work on Sundays and went to church instead. This was not taking place before the arrival of the missionaries. Previously they only rested for the whole day during festivals.

The people on every side of the station abstain from labor upon Sabbath. The most that we can say of our station at Ginani is that we have good evidence that some obstacles that were before us are disappearing; that we are gradually coming into confidence with Dingaan and his people; and we labour and pray that Christ's kingdom may soon come with power, and that pride and war may soon have an end among this people, that they may become a people to the praise and glory of God.⁵¹

50. Letter No. 50, General letter to R. Anderson, Ginani, 22 August 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 202-203.

51. *Ibid.*, 204.

VIEWS ON AFRICAN RELIGION

The American missionaries sought to observe African ways of worship according to the forms they had known in Christian religion. The content of the letters of the missionaries reveals how the individual missionaries had observed and written about African ways of worship. In this section, the aim with reading these letters is to try and imagine how the Africans might have perceived the message of the Christian gospel.

The first person to inform to the ABCFM about Africans' religious status was Philip –in his already-mentioned response to the letter from J.B. Purney, a student at Princeton Theological School. From this it seems as if Philip did not realize that Africans too had their own religion. In his mind, Christianity was the only religion. His upbringing and cultural background could have contributed to his belief. One should not rule out the possibility that he wrote this to the Americans, in order to caution them that what awaited them was a big task:

The natives can scarcely be said to have any religion among them. They have no priests nor temples, nor any form of religious worship to oppose Christianity. But they have sorcerers, and rain-makers, and they are believers in witchcraft. The chief difficulties the missionaries have to contend against in their endeavors to bring them over to the truth of the Bible, are their ignorance, their superstitions, and the plurality of wives which obtains among them.⁵²

The passage above portrays the Africans as living in what was known as an unchristian manner. Things like “superstition”, “plurality of wives”, and belief in “witchcraft” stirred into action those who wanted to “rinse” the Africans with the Sacred Blood of Christ. Although this observation was given in the 1830s, twenty years and more later the same comment was still being made.

52. Letter No. 2, Dr. Philip – J.B. Purney, Cape Town, May 1833, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 30.

The comment came from the LMS missionary, David Livingstone. He wrote that South Africa was known for having no formal system of religion, especially those communities south of the Zambezi. “The Bechuanas and Kaffers are the most godless races of mortals known anywhere”.⁵³ The two observations intended to show the would-be readers and benefactors (in America and in Europe) to see the need to contribute more (morally and materially) to the missionaries in Africa. Regrettably, the continuity of this kind of observation also indicates that a very particular image of the “savage African” in need of rescuing was taking hold of the Western imagination.

The first missionary to Zululand (although not representing the American Board) was Allen Gardiner, a retired captain of England’s Royal Navy. He arrived at Port Natal on 10 February 1835⁵⁴ and made the first Christian evangelical attempt to convert the Zulu people. On arrival, he proceeded straight to Dingane’s headquarters where he gained the king’s confidence.⁵⁵ He was given permission to do his evangelical work among the Zulu people. While Philip commented that the Africans scarcely had any form of religion, Gardiner, in his initial assessment of the Zulu traditional religion, judged that the Zulu people had only vague notions of religion. According to Gardiner, the Zulu believed that the universe had begun with the single act of creation and that a divinity named *uNkulunkulu* had divided the first human beings into sexes and colours and had communicated them the mournful knowledge that they must die. Spirits of the dead were to inhabit certain animals.⁵⁶

In other words, Gardiner saw the possibility of getting converts among the Zulu. The observation should be made here that, apart from the possibility of a prosperous future for Christianity, the internal political situation could have

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53. D. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Research in South Africa*, Ward Lock & Co. Ltd., London, 1857, p. 138.
54. P. Becker, *Rule of Fear ...*, p. 163.
55. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand ...*, p. 79.
56. N. Etherington, “Christianity and African Societies in the Nineteenth Century Natal”, in A. Duminy & B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from the Earliest Times to 1910*, University of Natal Press, Natal, 1989, p. 277.

contributed to this conclusion. The Zulu were ruled by Dingane's iron fist. The fact that Dingane allowed the missionary to work among his people could automatically mean that no opposition could be anticipated, at least during this very initial stage of the encounter.⁵⁷

The explanation that follows shows how controversial the interpretation of the Bible was on the African side. Unconsciously, Lindley explained the conflicting opinions about the content and context of Christianity. This is because the difference in culture prevailed between Lindley and the natives. Lindley was introducing a "European" God to the natives, who had their doubts. The natives had to question Lindley on what appeared to them as the insufficient application of his teachings to their daily lives, in their particular tradition and cultural practices. To this Lindley responded that:

I have been tempted not to tell the heathen how long since Jesus Christ was crucified. They ask, If this be true, why is it that neither we nor our fathers have heard of it before? My face has burned with shame while I have answered them, the Church has not cared for your souls. ... Instead of taking heathen home to see Christians, the better plan, perhaps, would be, to bring all Christians out to see heathen.⁵⁸

The passage shows that the natives had not been passive recipients of European civilisation. They critically assessed the situation that they were about to enter. They had to compare the European ways with that of their forefathers and to rationalise it. Lindley indicates that he hesitated to tell the Africans how long since Christ was crucified. He appears to recognize the intelligence of the Africans especially when he decides not to tell them how long ago Christ was on earth. The answer he anticipated from the Zulu was in fact very logical: how can it be that such an important thing has happened here on earth and the Zulu

57. A. Gardiner, *Narratives of a Journey to the Zoolu Country; the Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen, A Missionary with Dingaan in 1837-8*, in N. Etherington, "Christianity and African societies...", in A. Duminy & B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand ...*, p. 277.

58. Letter No. 55, D. Lindley and G. Champion – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 1 December 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 214.

had not heard about it for more than a thousand years? This could have been due to the fact that the Zulu were regarding themselves as they were regarded by others, as superior in all spheres of life. Surely, in their own eyes, they were supposed to be the first to know everything – before other communities.

CONCLUSION

In general, the content of the letters of the American missionaries shows much more than what the writers intended. This is especially true as far as the missionaries' description of African cultural traditions and character was concerned. The missionaries made observations about the Africans' "begging", laziness, chastity and honesty; they also observed the hygiene, which they associated with the occurrence of diseases among the Africans as well as traditions like polygamous practices. They commented on how the Africans made their dwellings and how those dwellings were associated with their cattle economy. Most importantly the missionaries assessed the spiritual capacity of the Africans in comparison with faith in the Christian God. All in all, as it has already been hinted at previously, most of the missionaries' observations and assessments of African character portrayed the Africans negatively. The negative image of the Africans was important, because it justified the Americans' presence on the continent. This was what the American missionaries came to Africa for, to make the Africans' ways of life positive, in the name of Christian civilization.

In the course of their observations, the missionaries as individuals differed in their perception of African character and tradition. While Lindley, after staying for a long time with the Africans, changed the way he perceived them, from a negative to a rather positive image, nothing of the kind can be said of the other missionaries.

When scrutinizing the American letters, one finds that the Africans' economic progress was indicated. The letters showed the level of economy in both the Zulu and Ndebele communities, which was basically of the same capacity. The men were associated with cattle economy and women with agriculture. This means that these two African societies practiced a mixed economy, the advanced stage of development of African communities at the time (early nineteenth century). Trading activities also took place. Furthermore, the letters showed the Ndebele and Zulu were war-like kingdoms, associated with raiding. This tendency for raiding was prevalent in most societies with a cattle economy, like the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania in east Africa. The only difference is that the Zulu and Ndebele were in a centralized political organization and practiced agriculture, while the Maasai led a nomadic life. Moving from one area to another in search of pasture, they did not do agricultural work.

The letters also show how the American missionaries introduced "progress" to the Africans, especially in the Zulu's way of life. Although there were some obstacles in inviting the missionaries to work with indigenes, the missionaries saw the obstacles as challenges to their success. The missionaries used two important devices to "civilize" the Africans, the building of stations and churches and the building of day and boarding schools.

To the missionaries, progress implied that they were able to make the Africans gather on their stations in the evenings for singing and prayers and that they had succeeded in admitting some adults and children to schools. This was "civilization" to the Americans. To the Zulu, this was rather the incorporation of the missionaries' teachings with their traditional ways of life. Although attending schools and uniting for prayers and singing during the evenings did entail some elements of explicit social change, it did not necessarily mean the abandoning or uprooting of their core traditions altogether.

CHAPTER FIVE

REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the discussion was based on an assessment of the missionaries' representations of Ndebele and Zulu culture and religion. It was indicated that in most cases the missionaries' letters portrayed the Africans in a negative image. In this, the missionaries were the victims of their own time. With all the efforts that the missionaries had invested in 'civilizing' the Africans, the Africans were still in touch with their own traditions and customs in many ways. They rather incorporated what they learnt from the missionaries into their own traditional ways of life.

The chapter that follows turns the attention to the African leaders, Mzilikazi and Dingane. In this chapter I shall concentrate on how the missionaries observed the individual character of the leaders (Mzilikazi and Dingane); how the leaders presented themselves to the missionaries; what the leaders did to their people and to the missionaries and how the Africans perceived their leaders. Attention is first turned to the Ndebele ruler.

MZILIKAZI OF THE NDEBELE

Mzilikazi, as the leader of the Ndebele, was the first to receive the American missionaries. The American missionaries came at a request that Mzilikazi made to his friend Robert Moffat. Before going to Mzilikazi's land, the missionaries passed through Kuruman, the station of the LMS which Moffat had established. After the missionaries had reached Kuruman on their way to Mzilikazi's land, they decided to part. Lindley and Venable proceeded to Mzilikazi's to prepare

the dwellings, while Wilson remained behind with the women (Mrs. Lindley and Mrs. Venable). While at Kuruman, Wilson wrote the following letter to the Board, in which he explained the difficulties that the missionaries faced. This included the mode of communication between the missionaries themselves. The only means of communication was sending a messenger. Wilson represented Africa to American readers as the darkest area of the world with Mzilikazi as the symbol of barbarism. The accounts that he gave were primarily based on hearsay. The source of the information he related was equally doubtful. It is possible that he obtained the information from the remnants of people who had earlier been conquered and dispersed by the Ndebele. No wonder that they would not praise Mzilikazi:

Three weeks after their departure (from 22 January to 9 February 1836), I dispatched an express to Moseko, the principal resident of Mosalekatsi. The messengers have been returned and brought us a good account of them ... and that they had not seen Mosalekatsi. He was absent beyond Moseko ... Before they reached that place they sent messengers forward, who, not finding Mosalekatsi at Moseko proceeded to where he was.¹

The indication above portrays Africa as not having had advanced communication facilities compared to America. From the very beginning of their contact, the missionaries showed that Mzilikazi was a man who could move from one area to another, he was a leader who made sure that his autonomy was felt by all his vassal chiefs. Concerning the Americans abroad, they would begin to portray an image of Africa, probably of the bushes and the tall trees, a 'wilderness' where advanced communication could be a nightmare.

According to Wilson, Mzilikazi rejoiced after receiving the news about the arrival of the missionaries. They expected Mzilikazi to be happy because he was aware of their coming. But it is important to ask why he wanted a

1. Letter No. 29, A.E. Wilson – R. Anderson, Kuruman, 21 March 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 103-104.

missionary. While the missionaries anticipated easy work and total acceptance from Mzilikazi, Mzilikazi thought rather of ways of using the missionaries to his own benefit. This motive will be revealed in the course of discussing the missionary letters. From the explanation that follows, the intention of the missionaries is revealed – to show that the Africans were in need of salvation:

The brethren at last perceived from his conduct, as also from that of Mosalekatsi, that he was unwilling the brethren should visit him at that time. In this opinion they were confirmed by afterwards learning that Mosalekatsi was at that time engaged in putting to death a number of his people – men, women, and children – on account of death of one of his own children, which he alleged had been produced by witchcraft.²

The picture of Mzilikazi portrayed here was one inculcating fear. The brethren tried to show the readers how unchristian Mzilikazi was. Their first meeting is associated with the cruelty of Mzilikazi. The account is based on hearsay, because no one among the missionaries witnessed the killings. The explanation indeed shows the missionaries' need to justify their entry into Ndebele land. Already, at this early stage of the encounter, the signs of sin were shown to its greatest extent. Witchcraft and killings among the Ndebele under the order of Mzilikazi were what the American population was meant to learn about the Africans.

At this early stage of their encounter with the African leaders, the missionaries were in no position to show any signs against the will of the Ndebele leaders. If the missionaries dared to stand in the way of the community's local interests, the resentment and resistance from the local leaders would be the expected outcome.³

2. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

3. A. Porter, "'Cultural Imperialism' and Protestant Missionary Enterprise, 1780-1914", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25(3), September 1997, p. 387.

The missionaries observed that the Ndebele kingdom's political organizational system was one of absolute monarchy and military despotism. Although the missionaries were actually reporting on the political order of the Ndebele, what they had to say reveals a lot about Mzilikazi's leadership. From their observations one can deduce how Mzilikazi was able to exercise his power over the Ndebele. The missionaries wrote that "The king's word is law, and his command promptly must be executed, be they ever so capricious"⁴. They also observed that the king's assistants, or the *indunas*, were both civil and military officers and held the kingdom under strict police order. The missionaries further observed that the Ndebele people were restricted from some crimes, which prevailed among the Tswana and other tribes, the authority of whose chiefs were comparably weak. "Things like stealing are unheard of, although they are accustomed to plundering on large scale"⁵. Mzilikazi was portrayed as a leader who commanded a strong position among his people. The strict police order that was maintained was seen as a vehicle towards disciplining all "unauthorized" human behaviours. The missionaries' observation that the Ndebele would not steal from one another, but only on a large scale from others, refers to the Ndebele's notorious relationship with their neighbours. Here the image of Africans as great sinners, which the missionaries were trying to impress upon their American audience, was brought to the foreground again by concentrating on their large scale plundering.

Observations about Mzilikazi can also be found in the writings of traders who visited him. Among the early traders to meet Mzilikazi were the Britons Robert Schoon and William McLuckie.⁶ These traders preceded the missionaries in making an appearance in Ndebeleland. Most of the observations they made correspond with those of the missionaries. The traders observed that Mzilikazi was known for his cruelty as his stories spread in the area that surrounded

4. Letter No. 35, Joint letter to R. Anderson, Mosega, 18 August, 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 129-130.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See chapter three

Matebeleland. The traders therefore expected to meet a stern, unfriendly man. To their surprise, “Mzilikazi was jovial and dignified, young and exceedingly handsome, a man of medium height and excellent physical proportion ... a man of exceptional intelligence, black shining piercing eyes”.⁷ In honour of his visitors, Mzilikazi had prepared a feast that included a regimental dance, which Mzilikazi himself joined in.⁸ The traders observed the variety of ghastly sentences the king passed on subjects found guilty of murder, witchcraft, treason, adultery, theft, cowardice, disobedience and negligence. For example, a man who attempted to rape a Matebele woman had his ears and genital organs sliced off. He would have been killed if he had succeeded in raping the woman. Furthermore, Schoon noticed that the king was exceptionally wealthy. He enjoyed sole ownership of all the harvests reaped between the Magaliesberg and the Limpopo River.⁹

The missionaries too observed Mzilikazi’s character, but the observation was tainted with religious prejudice. The emphasis was put on the fact that Mzilikazi was a heathen and his life style full of sin. The missionaries were brought up under the impression that the Africans were barbarous and savage by nature.¹⁰ No wonder they were so outspoken when they described Mzilikazi’s character. The following letter of theirs answers a lot of questions that had been asked about African leaders. The would-be readers of this letter, if published, could confirm their already existing beliefs about the dark side of the African continent, and “join hands” with the missionaries’ ideas of civilization:

His appearance is rather effeminate, and indicates that he leads a luxurious life, in his way. He is a very heathen. He idolizes himself, and causes himself to be idolized by his people.... He has men who are his praisers by

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7. Schoon as quoted by P. Becker, *Path of Blood; the Rise and Conquest of Mzilikazi, founder of the Matebele Tribe of Southern Africa*, Longman’s, Green and Co. Ltd, London, 1962, p. 99.
 8. *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 100.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
 10. Refer to the Letter No. 1, J.B. Purney – Dr. J. Philip.

profession.... Yet he is superstitious. Alas! how ignorant and inconsistent is that wisdom which knows not God? ... The power and grace of God are sufficient to imbue even his dark and vain mind with that wisdom which cometh from above, and cause his proud heart to bow to the scepter of Immanuel.¹¹

The observation was made at Mosega after the missionaries had already visited Mzilikazi. But cultural differences could have contributed to the conclusion that the missionaries made about Mzilikazi and his praisers. The issue of Mzilikazi having praisers seemed strange to the missionaries, who were not aware that it was within the inherent tradition that the African leaders had their own praisers. In Zulu, the praiser was known as *Imbongi*. “An *Imbongi* was one of the characteristics of the old Zulu chief’s retinue. He sang at every public function. ... The greater chiefs having greater *imbongi* and the lesser their small fry”.¹² The missionaries wrote only what they thought would be of interest to their readers. They did not take time to investigate the deepest side of the matter. Given their Christian way of life, the only one to be praised was God, and not a political leader like Mzilikazi. This description of Mzilikazi gives the impression that the African leader was seen as a stumbling block, not a potential aid, in the work of the missionary.

Both the traders and the missionaries wrote on how they observed Mzilikazi – and their explanations differed remarkably. The differences can be ascribed to the position that the two groups held among the Ndebele, i.e. as traders and as missionaries. They came to Ndebeleland for different reasons. While the traders saw Mzilikazi as their fellow trader, both looking for profit, the missionaries saw Mzilikazi as their “client” whom they would mould and civilize. The missionaries saw Mzilikazi with spiritual eyes while the traders saw Mzilikazi with trading eyes. The traders saw Mzilikazi as friendly to

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11. Letter No. 35, Joint letter to R. Anderson, Mosega, 18 August, 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 130-131.
 12. T. Hugh, “*Lalela Zulu*”, African Music Society, Johannesburg, 1948, p. vii.

whites while the missionaries did not; all they saw in him was heathenism and barbarity. This has perhaps been illustrated best with the contrasting ways the missionaries and the traders had described Mzilikazi's physique, as quoted in the above paragraphs. While the trader's Mzilikazi was "exceedingly handsome", the missionaries viewed their adversary as "rather effeminate".

As much as the missionaries differed from the traders in their views of Mzilikazi and their approach to the Ndebele, they, too, partook in trading with the indigenous communities. The missionaries did not depend entirely on the Board for their survival in Africa. They were instructed to find ways of making their livelihood less dependent on the Board. The missionaries used to trade the goods they came with as one of the sources of their income. On their arrival, they could trade directly with the people. But soon Mzilikazi realized that direct contact between the missionaries and his people could weaken his throne, he thus prohibited trading directly with his people. The law applied to both missionaries and traders. It was at this stage that the missionaries turned more attention to cultivation. The passage below explains the greed of Mzilikazi as far as trading activity is concerned. The missionaries observed that:

Remotely situated as we are from any civilized community, to produce the means of living, we must cultivate the soil. We are not allowed to trade with the people, and it would not do to be dependent on Moselekatsi. In exchanging commodities he shews himself independent of all equitable rules of dealing; and never fails to set a high value on whatever belongs to himself, while he cannot be taught the value of what belongs to others.¹³

The missionaries associated the greed of Mzilikazi with his ignorance to value trading terms. This coincides with the broader meaning of the image of

13. Letter No. 35, Joint letter to R. Anderson, Mosega, 18 August, 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 141.

Mzilikazi the missionaries were constructing: his inappropriateness applied to all spheres of life. He was “heathenish” in words and deeds. Not knowing the value of things, he was ignorant, the ignorance that was ascribed to his being “heathen”. But what the missionaries did not notice was that Mzilikazi invited them for the sole purpose of using them, as diplomats and as a cover towards other whites and as his underdogs as far as trading was concerned. Now it was clear that for the missionaries, their continued presence and success in Africa, or anywhere else, depended on their value and usefulness. It also depended on the willingness of local leaders and their people to cooperate with them, and the possibility of Christianity being construed in a manner answering to local circumstances.¹⁴ In this case, the prohibition of missionaries to trade meant the missionaries did not impress Mzilikazi as a leader, it endangered his political existence, and he made it very clear to them that this would not be tolerated.

The following is an account of despotism exercised by the king based on both eyewitness accounts and hearsay. Champion explains how everything belonged to the king and that:

Cases of individuals put to death are almost constantly occurring. The people are shy to talk about the subject, after they have told you it was by the order of the king. It is almost always because they “*takata*” (to practice witchcraft) that is, inflict some evil or another, how, or where, or when, no one can tell; only as they say often, when reasoned into a corner, “The king knows”. Always it is “*Yeebo baba*” Yes, father, it is all right, - when even son, mother, father, or brother is slain. The particulars of many cases make one feel that truly “these dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty”.¹⁵

In observing the character of Mzilikazi, Champion tries to construct the meaning of what he saw as “habitations of cruelty”. He describes how

14. A. Porter, “Cultural Imperialism ...”, p. 386.

15. Letter No. 40, G. Champion – R. Anderson, Ginani, 21 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 159-160.

Mzilikazi was able to control the mentality of the Ndebele using his “intelligence” by accusing them of being witches. The Ndebele were only allowed to talk about anything that could not pose danger to the king. They could hardly whisper because it would mean planning a plot against the king. The situation described above shows the highest stage of mental dependency as far as freedom of expression was concerned. The missionary here portrays Mzilikazi as the master and the Ndebele as his slaves. So the missionaries were there to save both the slave and their master. They would only do that by the grace of God and through “civilization”.

Here again, the impact of the arrival of the Boers in the Ndebele territory has been associated with how Mzilikazi behaved. The details of the incidences associated with the coming of the Boers appeared in individual and collective letters of the missionaries. Wilson explained how the Voortrekkers destroyed their Mosega station. The observations that Wilson made will help to understand how other writers, who were not missionaries, related the incidences (of the coming of Boers) to the relationship between Mzilikazi and the Boers. This is particularly relevant in trying to ascertain who was to blame as the instigator of the conflict between the two sides: the Ndebele or the Boers. Wilson gave a detailed explanation of the emigration of the Dutch farmers from the Colony and why they decided to move. The explanation seems to have come from a credible source as it correlates with many others of this type.¹⁶ He further gives a detailed explanation of Mzilikazi’s attack on the farmers. However, although Wilson sets out the reasons why the Boers were attacked and the passage is concerned with the coming of the Boers, Mzilikazi was implicated as the source of conflict between the respective sides.

Dutch farmers, becoming dissatisfied with the government, removed to the northward, far beyond the limits of the colony, and not very far distance from the

16. See P. Becker, *Path of Blood ...*, and I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs of Southern Africa*, Firebird Books, Poole, 1994.

country of Moselekatsi. These farmers had numerous flocks of sheep and cattle. Moselekatsi, for the purpose of plundering them of what they possessed, made two attacks upon them.¹⁷

Wilson seemed to side with the Voortrekkers. This could be due to the fact that he already had negative experiences with the Ndebele people. For him, the Ndebele under Mzilikazi's command were the source of conflict. He further explains that he "... would state that these attacks of Moselekatsi were unprovoked on the part of the farmers. They had not done, nor do I believe they intended to do him any harm."¹⁸ The missionaries blame Mzilikazi for causing war as he attacked the Boers first. "The emigration of the Boers was the thing, we believe, unthought of, when we first came into the country; and a thing by which we would have been in no way affected, had Moselekatsi not attempted their entire destruction".¹⁹

However the details that were given here seem controversial, given the evidence of how the war between Mzilikazi and the Boers began. Considering the historical background of the Boers and their coming into Mzilikazi's land, a more detailed explanation is needed since the missionaries seem to have had insufficient information of Mzilikazi's attack on the Boers. The main reason for Mzilikazi's aggression was the Boers' trespassing in Matebeleland. The historian Ian Knight observed that the Voortrekkers had been camping along the Vaal while their leader, Hendrick Potgieter and a few others, went hunting game. They failed to observe the etiquette by asking Mzilikazi permission to cross into Ndebele territory.²⁰ In other words, the Boers were to be blamed as the cause of the war between Mzilikazi and the Boers.

17. Letter No. 39, A.E. Wilson – R. Anderson, Grahamstown, 17 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 153.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

19. Letter No. 41, Joint letter to R. Anderson, Grahamstown, 2 May 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 173.

20. I.J. Knight, *Warrior Chiefs ...*, p. 116.

Furthermore, historian Kent Rasmussen observed that Mzilikazi did not have any special hostility towards the Boers, since he seems to have known nothing about who they were before August 1836.²¹ He simply regarded all who entered his territory from the southwest as enemies. He insisted that friendly visitors first obtain clearance from Moffat at Kuruman, and that they then approach his kingdom from the southeast.²² Rasmussen is convinced that the Boers did not bother to obtain Mzilikazi's permission to cross the Vaal even though they had been warned by others to do so.²³ The position that the missionaries found themselves in made it difficult to side with the Ndebele. The missionaries were the victims of war. They had a rather unstable relationship with Mzilikazi even before the Boers' attack.

However, it was clear that the Boers too had nothing against the missionaries. They were aware of the presence of the missionaries among the Ndebele, especially after they had been attacked by Mzilikazi's warriors. In the passage quoted below, Wilson refers to the Boers as "white men" which implies that he thought in terms of their racial category when it came to contemplating whether they were to be saved by the Boer attackers and what Mzilikazi would make of that. The capacity of the army of the Boers was an indication that Mzilikazi would eventually be defeated. Wilson further gives a detailed explanation justifying their decision to leave Mosega.

These white men had come to our house and treated us kindly and spared our property, while they had destroyed the lives of the natives and captured their cattle. There was some reason to fear that Moselekatsi and his people would no longer regard us as their friends our field of labour was destroyed...we have every reason to believe that the farmers would continue

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21. C.H.S. Stab, "Notes and other papers", (1875) NAR, ST, 12/4/2-represented in *Africana Notes and News* 17, 4, 1866, in K. Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom: Mzilikazi's Ndebele in Southern Africa*, Collins, London, 1978, p. 119.
 22. H. Caborat, "Moffat Missionary Labours", footnote no. 146, in K. Rasmussen, *Migrant Kingdom ...*, p. 119.
 23. *Ibid.*

their hostilities until they had either destroyed the power of Moselekatsi, or else had driven him far out of his country, so that it was plain that we should have to leave...²⁴

However, the experience that the inland missionaries had from their first contact with Mzilikazi – how they were welcomed by Mzilikazi and were ordered by him (like not to trade directly with his people); how they saw him attack the Boers and the Boers counter-attack the Ndebele, how Mosega was destroyed; how they fled from Mosega for Port Natal – made Wilson to draw a remarkably telling conclusion from the whole situation:

This emigration of the farmers from the Colony is going to form a new era in the history of the native tribes beyond the Colony... We have our fears that the farmers and Dingaan will come into conflict in a few years.²⁵

Indeed, the Boers would enter Zululand and did make the history of the South African people change over the subsequent years.

DINGANE OF THE ZULU

In the previous section we have seen that the general trend of the inland missionaries' observation of Mzilikazi's behaviours and character was centered on a negative image. The discussion now turns to Dingane, the king of Zululand. The missionaries' representations of Dingane appear to have been more detailed than those of Mzilikazi. While Mzilikazi's character was observed by inland missionaries only, descriptions of Dingane's appeared in both inland and maritime missionaries' observations. The inland missionaries went to work with the maritime missionaries in Dingane's land after fleeing

24. Letter No. 39, A.E. Wilson – R. Anderson, Grahamstown, 17 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 155.

25. *Ibid.*

Mosega. There, they were able to work as missionaries until the Boers invaded Zululand in 1838.

Just as was the case with the missionaries who had met with Mzilikazi, Grout wrote about the life of Dingane. He wrote on behalf of his fellow missionaries about the incidents that involved them all. The character of Dingane is referred to here, but it also relates more generally to Zulu traditions of receiving their guests. There could be no doubt that the observation was first hand. Grout shows how kindly they were received by Dingane and his people. There is no bias to this comment, probably because it was a very first encounter. On the other hand, judging the way the situation was described, Grout tried to show the ignorant and “heathenish” life that the king and his people were leading. He tried to show his would-be reader how the king practiced a polygamous life; this could in turn make the reader see how the Africans followed an inherently traditional system of polygamy and therefore needed to be “saved”:

... and when he learned that we had a turning lathe, he requested that it might be brought up and see it work. He was so delighted that he called out all his women to see it, and then his chiefs and his brass-smiths - all of whom, of course, did not fail to express a great deal of wonder and delight.²⁶

A note should be made here on the use of the words “his women”. It is obvious that the missionary made this reference while he was aware that those women were the king’s wives. The reason for making this comment could be due to cultural differences. In Christian Europe/America the word “wife” was only used to mean a woman who got married in the church. And because no Christianity was then available in Dingane’s era, all married women were simply not legal wives. There is both cultural and religious prejudice here.

26. Letter No. 28, A. Grout to R. Anderson, Bethelsdorp, 12 February 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 98.

Following the nature of the description of the ways of polygamous life made by Grout above, the need for a missionary saving the souls, was crucial.

Furthermore, Grout showed that Dingane was not totally ignorant for he succeeded, through several attempts, to work on a turning-lathe. The observer witnessed, and closely examined what was happening. But a further question should be posed here as to why the missionaries went to see the king carrying the turning-lathe with them. No doubt the missionaries had anticipated that the king would ask for it, and after they had given it to him, he would soften his heart and welcome them to work in his kingdom. The missionaries made several attempts “to interest and enlighten him upon various points of civilization and religion, we expressed a desire, at a proper time, to explain more fully our object in visiting him.”²⁷ The attempt failed to win the kings’ permission. The failure of the missionaries’ attempt was indication enough that their hope for evangelizing Dingane had already begun to take a rather complicated course.

In other words, the tendency of Dingane’s denial of the missionaries’ request shows that he was a man of his word. He told them that he could not allow them to work in his kingdom because he had already promised Gardiner that he would be the one to work among his people. It is not surprising that a man of Dingane’s intelligence could have suspected that the presence of two different groups of missionaries working among his people could lead to conflict between the missionaries and divide his people. It is not clear if Dingane knew he was dealing with missionaries from different nationalities, Gardiner of English origin and the other missionaries of American origin. He could also have been wary that the two missionary sides might join forces and fight against him. Not being ready with answers to give the missionaries, Dingane decided to give the American missionaries another appointment for a second visit.

27. *Ibid.*

When the American missionaries arrived at Dingane's they talked to him about educating him and his people. The missionaries had in their mind the idea that Christianity especially in its Protestant form was a religion dependent on literacy (for the converts to read and study the Holy Bible). Literacy was dependent upon instruction and Protestant evangelists therefore readily turned to teaching.²⁸ So it was in the interest of the missionaries to convince Dingane of the need to teach him and his people. Meanwhile, the maritime missionaries observed that Dingane was ready to accept new challenges, but only if they would not pose any danger to his throne. This is especially true as he instructed the missionaries that "If you succeed in teaching my people to read and write, you must come immediately to me and teach me and my chiefs to read and write, then I should want schools in all my country".²⁹ In further observations Grout explained the incidence where the reader would see the prospect of the missionaries in spreading civilization in the name of education among the Zulu. He cited that,

[a]t present it appears that, if Dingaan's people are capable of learning to read and write, he will want schools in all parts of his dominions; and if he once says the word, he will be almost out of patience if he can not be almost immediately supplied. And if he once sees the utility and practicability of the thing, he will be greatly impatient till all his chief people have been taught.³⁰

The observation was similar to that of Gardiner who had made the same comment on Dingane's readiness for new challenges.³¹ The observation here is positive and well detailed. Apart from all the bad images that the missionaries

28. A. Porter, "Cultural Imperialism ...", p. 382.

29. Letter No. 28, A. Grout – R. Anderson, Bethelsdorp, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 98.

30. *Ibid.* p. 99.

31. A. Gardiner, *Narratives of the Journey to the Zoolah Country...*, in N. Etherington, "Christianity and African society ...", in A. Duminy and B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand ...*, p. 279.

had produced about Dingane (“despotism”, “tyranny”³²), Venable explained that Dingane had “an inquisitive mind”. He was “pleased with the inventions of civilized men”, and he was positively disposed towards having his people acquire knowledge of using “the handwheel and loom.” According to Venable, “I doubt not he would most readily assent.”³³

The passage cited above shows how the missionaries were eager to become “an important part in the imposition of western power”³⁴ to the Zulu. Dingane did not seem to be an obstacle. Their civilizing mission was about to be accomplished.

The following extract from the missionaries’ letters to be discussed, contains a reference to Dingane’s character based on eyewitness observations. In their second visit to Dingane the missionaries detected a difference in his demeanor, which betrayed somewhat of a hidden agenda in his inner thoughts. The missionaries explained that Dingane had just returned from a successful expedition against Sopolu (Sobhuza) of the Swazi.³⁵ This decisive victory can explain why he had been in such a good mood, even arranging that the missionaries should not be disturbed on the Sabbath.³⁶ During this second audience the missionaries once again explained their desire to work among Dingane’s people. Dingane told the missionaries to wait until his chiefs and people returned from the raid, and only then would he give them the name of a place to stay. On this the missionaries made the following comment:

His mind is evidently in a waiting posture. He is but partially enlightened in regards to the nature of our work,

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32. Letter No. 40, G. Champion – R. Anderson, Ginani, 21 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 158.
33. Letter No 56, H.I. Venable – R. Anderson, Umhlatusi, 5 December 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 219.
34. A. Porter, “Cultural Imperialism ...”, p. 368.
35. Letter No. 34, G. Champion, A. Grout, and N. Adams – R. Anderson, Port Natal, 11 August 1836, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 121.
36. Letter No. 34, Joint Letter to R. Anderson, Port Natal, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 121.

but judging from the confidence he reposes in us, and the character of his mind, we should think that, if tolerable success attended our incipient efforts, it will not be long before the whole country with its thousands is thrown open to the efforts of Christ's servants.³⁷

The missionaries imagined also to have heard the inner voice of Dingane's heart, apart from what he told them. They made the correct observation that he was partially enlightened, which could be the reason why it took him so long to make the decision. It is also probable that he took so long to make the decision because he wanted to impress upon them how much they were dependent on his goodwill. The missionaries wrote with the aim of showing off to their readers how successful they had been in persuading Dingane to support their work, as they were instructed to by their board.³⁸ But they admitted that Dingane was not the only problem; his chiefs too were reluctant to work with them. For example "...The chief (of Umlazi), has erroneous views in regards to our work. But we believe him to be a reasonable man in many respects."³⁹ Champion at Ginani (one of the settlements within Zululand) was full of hope that they would succeed as the opening of a missionary station was at hand. In keeping their hopes high the support from Dingane was notable, as this last visit to Dingane's palace was indeed pleasant:

The king seemed to confide in us as his friends, and well-wishers to his people. ... Some children have already begun to come to school, and are under the care of Mrs. C... At each visit Dingaana has manifested a desire to learn to read. At last he was told that to effect this we must reside with him; and was asked if he wished us to send home for a missionary for that purpose. He replied instantly "Yes"...Let the king be taught aright, and, with God's blessing, he would take the lead in civilizing and Christianizing his people.⁴⁰

37. *Ibid.*

38. Letter No. 38, Circular, Boston, 8 March 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 147.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

40. Letter No. 40, G. Champion – R. Anderson, Ginani, 21 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, pp. 161-162.

Here again the missionaries portray Dingane in a rather positive image. While he seemed to be an obstacle to the missionaries at Port Natal, he was at peace with the missionaries working at a distant place like Ginani. One should ask why Dingane wanted his people to be taught to read and write, while he was reluctant for them to trade with the missionaries. The reason could be that he did not anticipate any threat from his people for just being taught by the missionaries. He underestimated the power of missionary teachings to pose any danger to his supremacy, as would be the case if the Zulu acquired material things like guns and gunpowder. While the missionaries saw Dingane as “compliant to their plan of educating the Zulus”, Dingane looked at material benefit. His decision to let his people learn first was carefully related to his propensity not to allow his political supremacy to be threatened. The missionaries knew that they were “creating religious organizations as frameworks for individual advancement and the acquisition of wealth or social status.”⁴¹ In short, this was ‘civilization’. And at the individual level, Dingane was an important person to begin with.

As has already been hinted at, the American Missionaries were not the first group of whites to visit Zululand. The former groups included traders and missionaries from other societies, like the Anglican CMS. Their observations of Dingane is important because it corroborates what the American missionaries would experience and report on in their letters later on. One of these earlier missionaries was a certain Rev. Frances Owen⁴², whom Dingane was not ready to allow to preach. Dingane explained it as matter of revenge, because other whites were denying him what he wanted. On the Sabbath of 26 November 1837 Dingane told Rev. Owen that he might preach, but it should be the last time. He alleged that the white men in Natal had refused some of his

41. A. Porter, “Cultural Imperialism ...”, p. 370.

42. It was a CMS missionary, Allen Gardiner, who introduced Francis Owen as a missionary to South Africa in 1836. Owen unsuccessfully attempted to preach in Natal between July 1837 and May 1838. In 1839-1840 he attempted to establish a station at Mosega and did not succeed. He went back to London in the same year. J. Laband, *Rope of Sand ...*, p. 76.

requests (referring to an application for gun powder), and that in return he would refuse the teachers some of their requests. He accused Owen with the other white men. And like them, when Owen attempted to preach, there was an effort, both on the part of the *indunas* and the king, to turn the whole matter into ridicule.⁴³ Dingane and the *indunas* did not want the presence of the missionaries in Zululand for the same reasons they anticipated. Dingane merely accepted the missionaries in the hope that he would be able to use them to produce the things he wanted – gunpowder in particular.

From the above explanation one could conclude that the American missionaries were not the only ones who had a problem with trusting Dingane. The relationship between Dingane and the CMS missionaries too, had not been peaceful. Even though Owen, for not being an American missionary, does not fall under the main focus in this work, what Dingane did to him, was significant in that it explained how Dingane behaved. In short, the American and European presence in Zululand did not seem to bring any value and usefulness to Dingane and his people.

In most cases the missionary letters indicated that kings were a problem to the evangelizing work. In a rare case their observations alluded to opposition experienced by African kings from their juniors. In this case, even though Dingane was said to have had the final say in matters concerning the Zulu, it was not the case with all his *indunas*. For instance, the two Zulu *Indunas*, Umhlela and Kogela, showed through the writings of the missionaries that they did not like the presence of the missionaries at all. When Umhlela saw Brother Wilson for the first time, he plainly told him that he was opposed to the

43. Letter No 56, H.I. Venable – R. Anderson, Umhlatusi, 5 December 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 219.

missionaries coming into the country. He remarked that he was angry with the king for allowing Mr. Owen to settle at their capital.⁴⁴

The second piece of evidence came from Kogela. Dingane gave his *Induna* a special order to collect the people to mass and send their children to school. However, Champion complained that although Kogela had professed great readiness to help them, (“and very lavish of promises”), nothing came of it. For instance, “when we have seen him the children are always coming to-morrow, but to-morrow has never come, except in one or two cases”.⁴⁵ From this description given by Champion, it is clear that not all Dingane’s chiefs were happy with the decision he made of receiving the missionaries. He himself once said “It was in my heart to let you stay and teach when you came before, but the *indoonas* were against it”.⁴⁶ The controversy appears to raise questions as to who really made the final decisions on matters concerning the Zulu.

Kogela was aware of what might happen now that the missionaries were to be allowed into Zululand. He insisted that he only accepted a missionary because it was the order from the king. The reluctance to send their children to school was probably an indication of their resentment of the missionaries’ intrusion in their (Zulu) traditional life. Kogela seems to portray an awareness that their society was invaded and they were heading towards a new system of life. This could mean that they would no longer be able to give their children what they were given by their forefathers. Instead of the “little ones” helping their parents with domestic chores, they would now spend most of their time in schools. This could mean a problem in the family productive system.⁴⁷ The dissonance

44. The controversy indicated that the Indunas had to obey the king’s order to avoid punishment. Letter No. 56, H.I Venable – R. Anderson, Umhlatusi, 5 December 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American missionaries ...*, p. 218.

45. Letter No. 40, G. Champion – R. Anderson, Ginani, 21 April 1837, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 157.

46. A. Gardiner, *Narratives of a Journey to the Zoolu Country ...*, entry dated Saturday 9 May 1835, p. 131.

47. E.J. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*, Shuter and shooter, Pietmaritzburg, 1929, pp. 184-185.

between Kogela and the missionaries was symptomatic of a conflict of interest. While the missionaries aimed at converting the Africans from their “unchristian” ways, Kogela saw the missionaries as the traitors and intruders of traditional social life - which he indirectly tried to preserve. Another thing to observe is that, through the whole course of missionary correspondence, it does not become clear who really had the final say in matters concerning the missionaries’ presence. At first, Dingane was shown as the centre of decision making. Later, Dingane himself admitted that his chiefs should make the final decision about the missionaries’ request. Then the chiefs admitted that they only accepted the missionaries because Dingane said so – meaning, they did not make the final decision as Dingane had claimed. But there was also the possibility that the missionaries were to be handled with care, as any decision that would not please them would cause their leaving, and Dingane would not have accomplished what he planned with the missionaries: to be of value and use for him. But all in all, it seemed that the missionaries were not wanted by the Zulu. All the festivals and kindness shown was a mere formality. It did not mean that the missionaries were welcomed among the Zulu.

The presence of the Boers in Zululand caused disruption and led to the end of Dingane’s supremacy. Just as was the case with Mzilikazi, the Voortrekkers entered Zululand in search of an area to settle. Dingane decided to kill the Boer delegation who was trying to persuade him to give them a piece of land. The detail of how the Boers were killed by the Zulu follows below. Champion was not at the scene, but had received information from Venable, who was not at the scene either, but arrived a few hours after the incident, wanting to see the king for private purposes:

When he arrived he found the saddles and guns at the gate, but saw no white man. On enquiring he was told that they had gone to hunt... At last Umhlela came and said they had killed the Boers because they designed to

make war on the king. But he assured him that they intended no harm against us.⁴⁸

One should ask why the Zulu lied about the whereabouts of the Boers. It was only after the *induna* came that the truth had to be revealed. The reason could be their fear of the king, who reportedly restricted them from expressing themselves freely, let alone talking to the strangers.

Just as was the situation with Mzilikazi's American missionaries, Dingane's missionaries too had to quit their field of labour. They went to work at Port Natal. After Dingane had killed the Boers, the missionaries were not sure about their fate in the hands of Dingane. This was with regards to the fact that Dingane was known to be a man with a chameleon-like character, changing his colours with the environment that surrounded him. The one moment, he was charming and friendly, the next, he was murderous. The missionaries observed that Dingane first welcomed the Boers with feast and dance of the regiment,⁴⁹ and later Owen told the missionaries that:

The Boers were taken most unexpectedly. The king had shown great friendliness; had given them a dance; had declared their country from Tugela to the Umzimvubu....(later) they were taken, carried out, and executed at Matiwana's hill.⁵⁰

The missionaries also feared that if they had to be captured by Dingane "we were to be nothing but the 'king's dog' ... I confess I had feared some plot to confine us there, and make us hewers of wood and drawers of water to the majesty..."⁵¹ From the description given above one could conclude that

48. Letter No. 59, G. Champion – A. Grout, Umlazi, 8 March 1838, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 224.

49. Letter No. 60, General Letter to R. Anderson, Port Elizabeth, 2 April 1838, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 235.

50. Letter No 59, G. Champion to A. Grout, Umlazi,...., in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 224; Letter No. 60, General Letter to R. Anderson, Port Elizabeth ..., in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 235.

51. Letter No 59, G. Champion – A. Grout, Umlazi..., in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 227.

Dingane wanted to defend his sovereignty with all his might. In Dingane's perception, the Boers had lost their respect for him, so they had to be killed. The missionaries, on the other hand, would not like to be held captive in Dingane's country. They were eyewitnesses of what was happening with war captives in Dingane's hands. They were of the opinion that should Dingane find them, they would be treated the same. Although Umhlela assured the missionaries of their safety, their hope in and friendship with Dingane had faded out. They were miserable and in a dilemma. Whether they would remain in Zululand depended on Dingane's decision making - and more importantly - on the decision of the other Boers to counter attack the Zulu.

It is curious that at this very point in time the alleged propensity of the Zulu – in this case Dingane himself – for begging, features again in the missionaries' writing. Champion...

thought then if there was any sincerity in his professions of confidence in me, and (as he) was so full of begging, and apparently wished to keep me for that, I might as well leave and test them as stay and wait for more formal permission, which perhaps he would not grant, or if he did, it might be at as much expense of property as would now result.⁵²

The character sketch of Dingane as a beggar was penned down by Champion at a time the missionary was at a crossroad. He did not know whether the king would let him leave his premises after the Boers' fate. Champion would not dare to leave because he feared Dingane would intercept and kill him. In other words, Dingane, the "mighty beggar", still wanted things from the missionaries but the missionaries were overwhelmed by fear.

Unlike in the case of Mosega, there was already progress in mission works among the Zulu when the Boers confronted Dingane. The missionaries

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

commenced their work in 1836 and the confrontations happened in 1838. Two years of hard evangelism and what missionaries saw as civilizing work had already passed by. The missionaries explained the detailed incidences that surrounded the hostility between Dingane and the Boers. Because the explanations appeared in a joint letter, it meant that the missionaries corroborated the evidence that was at hand. They wrote this in their place of refuge, Port Elizabeth, while waiting for things to calm down in Natal after Dingane's war with the Boers, so that they could resume their field of labour. The missionaries' accounts became crucial primary source material for future historians who tried to reconstruct and interpret the events.⁵³ A very brief summary of the well-known events follows below – without venturing into the almost equally well-known controversy about its meaning.⁵⁴

While Mzilikazi reacted immediately to kill the Boers, Dingane did the opposite. Unlike Mzilikazi who knew nothing of the coming of the Boers, Dingane knew of the Boers' coming and they negotiated on giving the Boers part of the land they asked for. The second time when the Boers visited Dingane claiming their promised share of land, Dingane ordered his young soldiers, who were in readiness and at hand. The emigrants were to a man instantly seized, overpowered by superior numbers, and borne off to the hill where criminals were executed (*kwa Matiwane*), there to be devoured by vultures and hyenas. According to the missionaries, the particular mode of their execution is not certainly known.⁵⁵ The killing of Boers was also extended to where the main party were encamped.⁵⁶

53. See, among others, J.S. Bergh & A. Bergh, *Tribes and Kingdoms ...*, p. 34; J. Laband, *Rope of Sand ...*, p. 59.

54. See J. Naidoo, *Tracking Down Historical Myths. Eight South African Cases*, Ad Donker, Johannesburg, 1989, pp. 106-119.

55. Letter No. 59, G. Champion – A. Grout, Umlazi ..., in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American missionaries ...*, p. 234. While the missionaries did not know the particular mode of execution, Becker explains that they were clubbed to death. See P. Becker, *Rule of Fear ...*, p. 91.

56. Letter No. 6, General Letter to R. Anderson, Port Elizabeth, 2 April 1838, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 235.

The circumstances regarding the relationship between Dingane and the Boers were rather complicated. However, the following observations have to be made. Firstly, the economic life of both the Zulu and the Boers was centered on the same needs. They both lived for agriculture and animal keeping. This meant that they both needed the land that was fertile with constant availability of water. Without these needs, they would not survive. Politically, both parties had experienced wars. Dingane and his people conquered their weaker neighbours and established the Zulu identity. They enslaved their captives of war. To the neighbouring communities, the Zulu were superior and feared. The Boers too, had experienced the frontier wars. They were the masters of the blacks whom they enslaved while at the Cape. They migrated taking along some of these people. The Boers, different from the Zulu, migrated from the Cape with the aim of escaping what they saw as their own “enslavement” by the British authority. They saw themselves as the superior race. With such a background, it was impossible for the two sides (the Zulu and the Boers) to live together. All that Dingane, as an individual and as the king of the Zulu did, was show his resentment at the intrusion of the outsiders who were threatening his might as the King of the Zulu.

After assessing and experiencing the situation of the relationship between Dingane and the Boers, Lindley remarked that there were no way that the natives would destroy the colony, and making it very clear to his intended American audience, added “just as probable that the abused western and southern Indians will destroy the United States”. This is a very interesting parallel drawn by the missionary. It says something about how they experienced their work in Africa in terms of what was going on in their own part of the world. Lindley thought that the Boers could not be stopped while others thought they might. As he saw it, the only salvation for the savages was to be Christianized because: “A speedy destruction awaits the Africans, unless

the means employed for this salvation shall be soon tenfold multiplied”.⁵⁷ Lindley’s observation here is rather superficial. What the Boers needed from the Zulu was a piece of land. Dingane was reluctant to give his piece of land to the Boers. Being Christianized would not have made any difference, unless it would provide the means to prevent the Boers from demanding the land from the Zulu. There is no doubt here that Lindley revered the Boers. He was writing unconsciously romanticising the Boers in the face of Dingane’s actions, and in a sense reflecting similar views as those he held about the “Indians” in America, his own personal fears.

CONCLUSION

The perception of the character of the African leaders varied with the prevailing circumstances. When the missionary had a desire to gain a certain favour from the particular leader, the image portrayed would be rather “positive”, or less aggressive. But when the wants and needs of the missionaries could not be achieved, they would write demeaning things, condemning what they termed as the sinfulness and the barbaric nature of the Africans. All in all, the general representation was negative, which was, of course, in line with the American missionaries’ purpose, “to change the “negatives” in Africa into “positives” – in accordance with the Christian civilizing mission.

57. Letter No. 61, D. Lindley and G. Champion – R. Anderson, 3 April 1838, in D.J. Kotze (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries ...*, p. 214.

CONCLUSION

The study has been an investigation into the activities of the American missionaries who lived amongst the Ndebele and Zulu communities of South Africa in the early nineteenth century. The major purpose has been to unravel the ways meaning had been constructed in the letters of the early American missionaries. Several parties were involved in the whole process of bringing about this crucial piece of historical observation of African traditions and culture. These were the American missionaries themselves, the Boers, the Zulu and the Ndebele. Therefore, it was important first to explore the historical background of the parties mentioned above. This has been done in the first chapter - in the hope that, what could be observed and concluded concerning the traditions and culture of the African societies, would also reflect the background of the particular observer.

In any piece of historical writing, a historian follows a certain historiographical trend –which eventually frames all the ideas she/he wants to express. This mini-thesis is guided by the analysis Du Bruyn and Southey provided in their evaluation of mission and missionary historiography of South Africa. Their essay, “The treatment of Christian and Protestant Missionaries in South African Historiography”, was published in 1995 in the book *Mission and Christianity in South African Historiography*, edited by H. Bredekemp & R. Ross. Of the five trends the two authors have considered; the earlier, reverential historiography is particularly applicable to this study. As late as the 1950s, this was still the tone in which the American Missionaries’ correspondence was published by the Van Riebeeck Society. But tendencies in historiography have changed over time. Among the things that changed, was the recognition of the importance of African traditional religion. This was not the case with either the American missionaries themselves, or the editor who prepared their correspondence for publication. However, a close reading of the published correspondence does yield significant

information on observations about African religious views that had been made by the missionaries regardless of their conviction that these views were not correct in the eyes of the 'European God'. This was further explored in the second chapter of my study.

Chapter three dealt with the perceptions, expectations and preparations of the American missionaries for their African mission: to spread the word of their God. The fourth chapter was more concerned with the writings that involved daily activities of the Ndebele and the Zulu – in other words, the missionaries' presentation of African culture and tradition. The missionaries generally portrayed the traditional customs of the Africans negatively. However, in the course of their writings, as they began more closely to observe a particular group of people, they no longer generalized about their character to the same degree as about 'other' Africans. It has been explained in this chapter that the Zulus could be defined as honest and chaste by the missionaries, while the 'caffers' could not. These observations showed some preference of the missionaries for one group of people over another. Through observation, perceptions could change from negative to positive and *vice versa*, depending on the prevailing circumstances.

Chapter five deals with the writings of the American missionaries concerning the prominent African leaders of the Zulu and the Ndebele. In the observation of Mzilikazi and Dingane's behaviour, the missionaries provided a negative image. It was important for the missionaries to portray the two African leaders negatively because it served the purpose of their presence in Africa: "to save the lost souls".

All in all, letters serve as an important source of historical writing. From the letters, the historian may be able to discover, among other things, how the Africans responded to the treatment they received from the missionaries. From that response, one will be able to rewrite the Ndebele and Zulu history of their contact with the American missionaries from a more critical angle.

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