

THE MISSIONARY AS GOVERNMENT AGENT ON
THE EASTERN FRONTIER: 1812-1850

by

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It was hardly coincidental that the investigation of the material for the writing of this thesis should have commenced at the same time when the finishing touches were probably being administered to a little pamphlet entitled "The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest" by Joseph H. Kojak. To those in close contact with the trends of thought which prevail today amongst militant and moderate African Nationalists one of the most striking features is the lack of sympathy with Christian teachings and with those who administer such; and hence institutions which are built on the belief that Christianity should be the foundation stone of education fall into the scope of this antithesis. It was because of this anti-Christian tendency which prevails today in the mind of the African intent upon materializing his nationalist aspirations that I became interested in the roots of the feeling; where did it originate and is there justification for such an attitude? The pages which follow contain a small contribution towards answering these questions.

On reading this thesis and comparing it with "The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest" some significant differences are evident. In the pamphlet these seminal years of contact between the missionaries and the Bantu which I have examined in detail are dismissed briefly. To the best of my knowledge there has been no detailed work done on this topic during this period, and the few references given by Kojak show that his research is very superficial. I felt to see how one can produce a so-called documented presentation of the operations of the missionaries throughout the course of South African History when the first years of contact with the Bantu are virtually neglected. This approach implies that the many currents and cross-currents which emerge therefrom are not fully understood. I also felt to see how a full survey of such a wide topic can be embarked upon when the necessary monographs by competent scholars in this field have still to be written. To subscribe to conclusions from

superficial readings of relatively uncharted areas of South African history under the influence of emotional nationalism tends towards distortion and misrepresentation of facts.

It was Professor Eric Walker who said:

"... the history of South Africa must still be written either from the European or from the Bantu point of view. A good deal has been said is being done from the former standpoint, but Bantu history has still to be written fully and fairly ... But when and if this Bantu history is written we shall have to be prepared for shocks. We shall have to remind ourselves that what is sauce for the white goose is sauce for the swartjy gender. Just as we talk eloquently of our Native Question and are rather surprised when educated Bantu speak of us as their European Question, so we, who have rightly enough described the Bantu in our history as an external force pressing upon our society, must expect to see ourselves portrayed as a force pressing, often with disastrous effect, on Bantu society. The strain of mental readjustment will be heavy, but doubtless very good for us" (1).

It appears that such a movement is already under way, but it is to be regretted that it should take the form of a GROUP DE MYTH, couched in a Marxist framework, against Europeans and the Western Civilization in general and against the missionaries in particular. Emotional reasoning without subscribing to preconceived conclusions is perhaps the only method of establishing a standard of historical scholarship which will stand the test of time.

Two features emerged from the study of the topic of the thesis. The first was that the much maligned Lord Charles Bessborough had certain virtues and was not as short-sighted or as middle-headed as some historians tend to imagine. If I have erred too greatly towards ignoring sanity and foresight to him, then it is in unwitting reaction to the past which has made Lord Charles one of the "bad kings" of South African History. The second feature is that the time has come for a drastic revision of the role played by the missionaries in the history of South Africa. That the latter tendency should have commenced in the form of pamphleteering literature which is bound to have a large circulation amongst a people untrained to distinguish between fact and misrepresentation

/18 ...

(1) "The Critic", January, 1935, p. 69; "A Zulu Account of the Mafeking Massacre" by Eric Walker.

is regrettable. The effect will be that the missionaries (and therefore present church and missionary institutions) will be well-nigh discredited and their work rendered abortive should African Nationalism gain a firm hold on the Bantu masses. If reevaluation must take place it must be that which sees the missionary operating in his historical setting. In a world where very little thought was given to the suppression which is freely heaped about today that the European consciously oppressed the Bantu of their land and reduced them to slavery. Such an attitude presupposes a grave lack of knowledge of historical processes.

I hope, therefore, that this study will be a contribution towards a better appreciation of the problems which confronted the missionaries, a perspective through which the shortcomings of some missionaries must be viewed. It is not an apology for missionary labours nor an attempt to whitewash them; it is an honest attempt to reach some ~~enduring~~ truth about a certain phase of the development of the society contained within the confines of the sub-continent, in which missionaries, the Colonial Government and the Bantu play the leading roles.

It is not the role of the historian to apportion blame whom he states on what premises he formulates his judgments. In the reevaluation of the role of the missionary on the Southern Frontier during the years 1818-1830 I have tentatively suggested that one may apportion blame in one case only. In the historical process man is constantly faced with challenges which demand decisions. In making those decisions he must be able to reflect upon the ultimate consequences of those decisions with regard to the future well-being of society. For the "good" of society, for its smooth functioning; in short, a choice between "right" and "wrong" decisions with regard to the happiness of one's fellow creatures. Should the person, in making this decision, foresee certain consequences, and still make the wrong decision, he is guilty. If he does not, unwittingly, or cannot, make the right decision, then he is acquitted. Essentially it is a personal choice of action dependent upon the future reactions

of the body social about one.

By this standard, then, do I judge whether a missionary made a "good" or "bad" decision. Did he, in making that decision, provide cause for future "anarchy, trouble and confusion", as Bryant put it. In the ultimate analysis, did he exercise the instrument of forethought with regard to the good of society? Hence the evidence must be consulted to determine whether this conflict which precedes decision took place. Where no such evidence is available, the moral judgment must be suspended, even if indefinitely.

The time-range of the thesis was chosen with regard to the total existence of the office of Missionary as Government Agent in the land to the East of the Cape Colony, commonly referred to by contemporaries as Kaffriland or Caffraria. 1818 marks the year during which John Dwyer was appointed to the newly created office; 1880 is the year when William Michie Thomson (the only other missionary to hold this office), having resigned as Government Agent, took up his post as Minister at the Kat River Settlement. This is the only period during the history of the sub-continent that this peculiar office was operative. It was also the seminal period for the growth of certain attitudes on the part of the Kaffir towards the European, attitudes which still persist amongst the Bantu today.

In conclusion I would like to express my gratitude to the many people who helped, directly, or indirectly, with the production of this thesis: the staffs of the Government Archives and the South African Public Library, Cape Town; the Cory Library, Rhodes University College; the Library of the Students' Union, Pretoria; the Howard Pim Library, Port Harb University College; and the Sublim Library, University of the Witwatersrand. My thanks also go to Professor Hugh Chapman, of Port Harb, who put me on the track of certain material, to Dr R.H.V. Shepherd for free access to manuscript materials in the safe-keeping of the Lovedale Missionary Institution, and Mr. T. Shepherd of Oxford, who is

responsible for the cartography of what we believe to be the first accurate historical map of the Channel area to date. Lastly I must thank Professor J.B. Hearnle for encouragement and exciting demands during many years.

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"I consider them (the missionaries) men like other classes, neither better nor worse. I know some of them to be very foolish and ignorant, apt to deceive you and the public by exaggerated reports of their efforts and their successes, as well as of the virtues and longuffering of the blacks; and the vices and the cruelty of the whites; but I have found some most excellent men among them, for whom I entertain the most sincere respect. In fact, I feel that every attempt to civilize the barbarians and savages without the help of prudent, wise, Christian missionaries, will certainly fail; but they, on the other hand, will not succeed without the cordial co-operation of and with the government; and these two forces, combined, however powerful, will not civilize unless they make the native chiefs the principal levers in the operations on their people. If we gain the confidence of the chiefs, they, with the power of the government, and the efforts of the missionaries, will influence the masses, and improve the state of society; but if you undermine the power of the chiefs you may advance and plan systems, but the end must be the extermination and bondage of the natives."

Andrieux Steekmestrom: Autobiography.
Vol. I, pp. 245-246.

CONTENTSChapter 1Introduction: the relationship between Antagonistic rule.Imperialism and the Demand for Labour at the Cape.

17th-20th

The Imperialist Period results in the arrival of Dr van der Kemp at the Cape and the formation of the first South African Missionary Society. The constitution of this society indicates its adherence to the Government. This is a precedent. The period of Boerish rule causes the Mission of the S.A. Missionary Society to regret their subservience to Government. Van der Kemp's desire to go beyond the frontiers clashes with British concept of the Rule of Law. This thesis is concerned with the way in which an attempt was made to fit missionaries into the growing concept of the Rule of Law and use them for purposes other than their calling. During the nineteenth century the L.M.S. missionaries progressively alienated themselves from Government and colonists. Many motives are sometimes confused. Separation of motives essential for understanding that relationship between missionaries as Government Agents (1818-1850) and the colonial authorities is surely a combination of previous policy. During early years of activity L.M.S. Directors did not throw off subservience to Government. Edwards and Elphinstone the first examples of use of missionaries as political agents. Van der Kemp's visits to Kaffrland create complete attitude on part of those towards missionaries who are associated with the Colonial Government. Prosecution of British governors with prevention of disorder. Generally and on the frontier in particular. Reason for tension between missionaries and Boerish Government is van der Kemp's imperialism. This tendency culminates during the period of second British occupation. Imperialism demands that missionaries go beyond frontiers, but they are relegated to barren areas. Denial of the frontier overrides humanitarian principles. Gradual blighting of authority over L.M.S. stations. Inference is that if missionaries do not trouble to Government, their activity may be curtailed. Difficulty of governors in maintaining balance between administration and religion. The alienation of colonists from missionaries based on fear of labour shortage but this not the motivating force behind Government legislation (e.g. of 1855). Such legislation primarily to promote Rule of Law. Not in least fear of racial equality a constant factor in accounting for alienation of missionaries from Government. The promotion of ideals of humanitarianism as constant factor in rejection did not exist. The Rule of Law is a constant factor because it is the result of the needs of the mission. Gradual fits into this pattern. His preoccupation with desire to promote Law and Order discernable in many of his actions. His opinion on this subject. Even Government desire for missions to foster 'dignity of labour' rests on foundation of desirability for Law and Order. The opinions of Dr Philip and Neede on the topic of the promotion of the Rule of Law p. 1.

Chapter IIThe Prelude to Lord Charles Somerset's system of control
of the Western Frontier through missionary agency

There was an understanding between the L.H.S. missionaries at Kinnair Water and the Government that the missionaries would always co-operate with the Government. In 1814 it became necessary to augment the Gage Corps. A levy from the inhabitants of Kinnair Water is required. Craddock's futile correspondence is continued by Lord Charles Somerset - Somerset's reasons for following an ultimatum - The missionaries want labour - But in ultimate analysis Somerset fears that missionaries have no control over their flocks - He is determined to promote the rule of law on the Frontier - The troubled situation of the Western Frontier justifies this demand - Dr Philip inadvertently admits the fundamental reason - The Indian missions are suppressed for the same reason - The Rindler's 1814 Rebellion reveals previous state of Frontier - Its effect on Lord Charles Somerset's attitude towards law and order on Frontier - Somerset's own's stipulation against Peshwas But also has Somerset's reasons for control as its basis - Anderson's position is difficult - Confronting to Somerset's demands would endanger his life - The meeting of missionaries (August, 1814) supports his response to Somerset's demands - The missionaries have no reason to be faithful to a Government which did not protect them in time of need and yet demands tribute - Somerset threatens to cut Anderson off completely from the Colony - In the ultimate analysis humanitarianism must be sacrificed for the promotion of the Rule of Law - The internal affairs of the L.H.S. play into Somerset's hands - Divided control results in chaos - Somerset's attitude towards missionaries in general unappreciative - His views to Mathurst on origin from - He pays lip-service to missionary endowment and refuses Somerset's view a situation within the Colony - But he can secretly humanitarian as well as control the Western Frontier by allowing missionaries who are well-controlled to proceed beyond the Frontier - Somerset's statement is made to this effect - The missionary must inform the Government of occurrences with which Indian chiefs may be involved - The missionary active behind Williams' appointment essentially political - But Somerset's control over Williams is not complete p. 25.

Chapter IIIThe Prelude to the system (contd.)

Further dependencies on the Western Frontier came Somerset to visit Galla and collect his protection of Joseph Williams - Outfitment of expeditions on military establishment an additional reason for use of Williams to assist in controlling Frontier - The 1818-1819 conflict - Amble, the invasion of the Colony - The northern border also troublesome, Somerset's solution - The settlement of October, 1819 must be executed to ascertain whether Galla is an 'extra-territorial situation' and in order to understand that Somerset's use of missionaries is intimately connected with Frontier control - Some suggested reasons for assuming the Gage the Frontier of the Colony - The Frontier line cuts Galla off from

the Colony - Hamilton's harsh judgment of Somerset the result of preoccupation with the past - Somerset's "Neutral" Territory was not meant to remain so perpetually - Reasons why Somerset did not think in terms of permanent "neutral" belt - Ultimate ideal is to fill up "Neutral" Territory with colonists and Kaffirs - But only after Kaffirs have been civilised through Christianity - More the missionary would play his part - Uncontrolled missionaries could be allowed into Brummoedland to satisfy humanitarian demands, but Masters Frontier controlled for this purpose - Dr Phillips did not believe in his arrival - First and Somerset attempt abolition of all extra-colonial missions, particularly those disturbing the Rule of Law - At this stage it is quite obvious that the mission committee with Government authority and hence are undesirable - Somerset expresses this opinion to Bathurst - But the theory of civilisation through Christianity allows Somerset to use missionaries for Frontier control although they are naturally spreading Christianity only at this stage in the development of the Cape would these eventually be controlled - The experiment a small one - Only two Government Agents - The remainder of this sheet largely concerned with the deeds of one of these - William Nicolson Thomson p. 37.

Chapter IV

The Inception of the Project

Lord Charles Somerset and others expected much from Joseph Williams - Somerset and Gwyler meet Williams - Gwyler shows his impotence of Williams' indifference to Government requirements - Lord Charles Somerset agrees with Gwyler and learns a lesson - He realises his error in allowing missionaries in Gaffaria without sufficient instructions - Death of Williams - John Brummoed is appointed in his place - He is also recalcitrant - The ideal was for the purpose would be one who combines dedication and positivity - Somerset's instructions to Brummoed - Need for civilisation through Christianity to maintain order on Frontier - The rejection of civilisation to the background of thought in Great Britain - Dr Philip differs from Somerset - Kossle's theory - Civilisation first, then settlement - Agreement with Somerset that civilisation starts when artificial units are created - But whereas Kossle believes in Christianity without civilisation first, Somerset believes that the two are hand-in-glove - One must bear in mind Somerset's desire to promote order through civilisation if understanding of Frontier policy is to follow - The difficulty of deciding whether Somerset genuinely believed in Christian values or such - The missionaries hold the same views as Somerset on civilisation, but differ on the subject of Government control - Brummoed of Brummoed's instructions - Somerset's line of Williams' lack of co-operation - Issues spiritual matters to Brummoed's discretion - Must forward to Government information of various kinds - The missionary virtually a relay station to assist Government in controlling tribes - Brummoed never acknowledged sequelences to demands - Government favour apparent in Brummoed's first settlement - Dr Philip accepts the position of no entry into Gaffaria without conditions of service - During Bathurst's regime there was continuing of policy largely due to Goleadoff, Secretary Sir's influential position - Hence Somerset did not object to Bathurst lifting prohibition of missionaries going into the interior in 1861 - Somerset's silence may also be due to his encounter with Moffet and Afrimaneer in 1860 p. 50.

Chapter V

The Development of the System

Brownlee's lack of response to Somerset's demands - William Noble Thomson is selected as an additional missionary to Caffraria - His tenure of office depends upon his willingness to comply to certain requirements of the Colonial Office - On arrival at the Cape Thomson asks for specific instructions - Bird ensures perpetuation of Somerset's missionary policy - A later definition of Thomson's official position - Dennis accompanies Thomson - Both are virtually Government servants - Brownlee defends himself against charges that he has failed to correspond regularly - Thomson's arrival at Chumle - Meeting with Galka - Thomson's uncompromising attitude towards Galka - Inqusa attacks the native inhabitants of Chumle - Captain Alphonson arrives after Thomson negotiates with Galka for return of the stolen beasts - Thomson's warning to Somerset not to use force to regain the cattle - Galka already has the impression that Chumle is under Government protection - Galka's arguments in favour of mission natives being his subjects - The fundamental issue at stake is the Dinka fear of Colonial encroachment on their land - The institution regarded with a "jealous eye" - Somerset's commands of February, 1883 - Increased enmity and misgivings of Galka towards Galky - Thomson's attitude of self-congratulation at castigation of Galka not merited in view of growing danger to Chumle - Thomson's first misgivings about the duality of his task - Government protection for Chumle becoming more obvious - Galka issues veiled threats to the missionaries and tension increases ..
..... P. 67.

Chapter VI

The Extension of the System, the North-Eastern

Frontier, a comparison

After 1883 the O.R.S. extends its sphere of influence - Establishment of "Old Lovedale" - Increased Pongoleyn activity - William Shaw is permitted to proceed to Caffraria (1883) under same conditions as previous Government missionaries - He is under Thomson's authority - He is settled at Pato's - Galka's reactions unfavourable - Somerset's view of Shaw's purpose - Other O.R.S. missionaries are about to call for the Cape - They are subservient to Government wishes - Increasing Government confidence in Thomson as the centre of a central system of missionaries - Thomson's relationship to the other missionaries - The pattern for control of the Eastern Frontier as envisaged by Somerset has two facets - "Interior control" - "One system" - The relationship of his scheme to the dissemination of Christianity - The formation of the presbytery assists his plan - Brownlee refuses to associate himself with this or the Government Agency - He resigns his office but is still regarded as part of the scheme - The North-Eastern Frontier: a comparison - Turbulent conditions and Anderson's failure to maintain order lead to John Kelwill being sent to survey the position - The nature of his "secret" task is known - He is eventually appointed as "secretary" Government Agent - Similarity of his instructions to those of the missionaries on Eastern Frontier - The difference is due to the degree of British authority already established at Griqua Town - The dependence of the office on personnel - Jealousy of the natives forces Kelwill to resign (1884) P. 78.

Chapter VII

The Failure of the System

Gomeret's missionary structure continues to be apparently consolidated - Thomson seeks a redefinition of his powers - These remain as previously but for Wesleyans proceeding to interior there are certain alterations - Important reports must now be sent directly to Government - Less exacting demands - Yet instructions to Clarke (1885) show rigidity - Difference due to fact that system is being made more flexible - Alternatively Thomson may have delayed correspondence and this results in alterations to direct transmission of important reports - Thomson's position amongst the Kaffirs grows more and more untenable - Hidden opposition in spite of friendly reception in places - Fundamentally the opposition is caused by Kaffir fear of colonial encroachment disrupting tribal system and displacing them of their land - Because of this hostile opposition Wesleyan and Glasgow Missionary Society work rendered largely abortive - The Wesleyans suspected of being Government Agents - In actual fact they showed unwillingness to co-operate with the Government - Their personal belief and possible Wesleyan dislike of Thomson as a Presbyterian may have undermined cohesion of Gomeret's system - The appointment Acting Governor Bonte and Sir Henry Cole initiate the break-up of the system - But disintegration begins under Gomeret - Some reasons for growing sterility - The political and administrative changes of the middle twenties - Bird's disclaimer - Thomson's attempts to consolidate the missionary structure by submission of annual reports - Reasons why Thomson may have done this - Sincerity or envy of the Wesleyans? Further dealing of Government with Gaike (with the assistance of Thomson) increases distrust of Thomson - Lieut-Colonel Bird's publication makes it necessary for Thomson to counteract any harm which may come therefrom with regard to restlessness on the part of Gaike - Thomson's admission that his influence is almost non-existent - Suggests referring task to Officer Commanding at Fort Willshire - Further unrest on the frontier leads to attack on Chumbe - The twofold importance of this event - It illustrates the fundamental nature of the struggle between black and white - It is the testing time for the inhabitants of the institution who are alienated from their own people - They seek to become British subjects - But the missionaries refuse to associate the institution any further with the Colony - Thomson's association with the Colony forces Thomson to resign because of hatred on the part of the Kaffirs - His poor state of health the result of tension - Contemporary opinions condemn Thomson's fruitless efforts - He resigns as Government Agent at the Chumbe but wishes to remain in Christian service ...

..... P. 94.

Chapter VIII

The Failure of the System (cont.) I some aberrations in the problem of intercourse between Colonists and

Kaffirs

Thomson meets Colonel Gomeret in October, 1886 and explains part of his situation - Gomeret agrees that Thomson's work will be rendered abortive under the circumstances and suggests to Government certain changes in methods of communication with the Kaffirs - Colonel Gomeret believes that remaining missionaries will continue to carry out their required task of reporting - Thomson suggests

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that the Government Agency be completely severed from missionary enterprise - A civilian agent should reside outside Gaffraria - Thomson and Lord Charles Somerset were both interested in the problem of intercourse with the Bantu - Khamilian's judgement of Somerset is harsh - Somerset never envisaged enduring separation of cultures - His scheme for interpreters an indication of this - Somerset's statement of 1888 on the "Neutral Territory" must be seen in the light of his scheme for "interior control" - with the appointment of Bonte an era of greater intercourse was actively inaugurated - The missionaries played an important role in building up interdependence - Khamilian underestimates this role - Thomson is forced to differ from Lord Charles on the subject of the role of missionaries as Government Agents after his experience at Chumle - His proposal for a "liberal institution" - Underlying ideas: missionary activity must be separated from temporal authority - But his own previous statement seems to negate his theory - Thomson interviews Sir Levey Cole in June, 1889 - Expulsion of Kagame arouses feelings which make Thomson's return to Chumle impossible - Thomson's last official circular - The formation of the Kat River Settlement - Thomson appointed to report on it - Read's infiltration into the settlement forces Government to appoint Thomson as minister there to counteract Read's influence - Last vestiges of Somerset's scheme of the missionary as Government Agent disappear - But failure of scheme not dependent upon resignation of Thomson - Other factors would probably have brought about its downfall - The passing of the autocratic regime - The passing of the sponsor of the system - The disavowal of the Kaffirs - Joyce's comments on what he believed to be the causes of the breakdown of missionary agency - Actually he was observing the effects of the breakdown - The experiment of missionary as Government Agent must be viewed as part of an evolution, from segregation to subjection of the Kaffirs by the Colony and ultimately by the Western European Civilisation ..
..... p. 115.

Epilogue

A review is necessary of the relationship of the missionary to secular Government - Problems of opening years of nineteenth century on Eastern Frontier due to clash of rival cultures - Missionaries the representatives of another culture - He is a citizen of the world but has to rely upon the grace of secular Government authority - He is not only a missionary but the representative of an advanced civilisation - Thus he has to occupy himself with secular affairs in the process of integrating the two cultures - By organising tribes to accept the Gospel the missionary is securing himself with secular affairs - To what extent must he owe allegiance to temporal authority in return for its co-operation? - In Thomson's case Government support welcomed - While missionaries rely on temporal authority it does not justify temporal authority making demands on missionaries - The missionary an ambassador of an advancing culture - But on the Eastern Frontier (1818-1880) missionaries were resented by virtue of mere fact of propagating Christianity - Underlines tribal authority and breaks down Kaffir institutions - There was on the other hand no need for the missionary, already unpopular, to make himself more so by alliance with Colonial Government - Missionaries are people apart, and this should have been realised by the Colonial Government - Has temporal authority the right to limit operations of missionaries to benefit society as a whole? - Solution appears absorption of missionaries, not limitation beyond the frontier - There is also the personal choice involved - Should Thomson have accepted the Government Agency

in order to preach at all - Half a leaf is better than none at all - Moffat's disapproval of the missionary as Government Agent - The Government had no interest in the Christian aspect of missionary work - But in last resort Kaffir reactions on the Western Frontier were due to personal notions of the missionaries themselves - Rejection of Government demands and inactivity would have been preferable - The missionary as Government Agent was an office which Thomson and Brewster could have rejected - In accepting it they invited their respective fates - Thomson's attitude in terms of modern theology - A last judgment on Thomson P. 137.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Maps

(In folder at the end of the volume)

- A. South Africa (adapted from Philip's "Ressources in South Africa", Vol. II) showing the principal mission stations of the L.M.S., Glasgow Missionary Society, Wesleyans and Moravians in 1880.
- B. The Western Frontier of the Cape Colony showing the frontier, the Ceded Territory and the missions established by the Glasgow Missionary Society and the Wesleyans by 1880.