

# Missionary Colonial Mentality and the Expansion of Christianity in Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1800 to 1900<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Historical evidence shows that Batswana possessed rich cultural and religious traditions that contributed to the rapid spread of Christianity in Bechuanaland Protectorate (the present Botswana). The Western missionaries chose to reject or marginalize these traditions, which were based on the concept of the Supreme Being from time immemorial. The underlying patterns of these cultural and religious traditions and systems of the Batswana provided a firm foundation upon which Christianity was conceived, understood and received. However, some missionaries gave the impression that no such religious traditions and heritage existed prior to their arrival on the African continent. This paper argues that the Batswana, had an absolute belief in a Supreme Being, they referred to as *Modimo* and also points out that the cultural context, which the missionaries rejected, provided important conditions that led to the rapid growth of Christianity among the Batswana. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates that through misconceptions that saw education, commerce and trade as integral to their work, the missionaries tried to impose their Western cultural values on the Batswana. They thus adopted a western superiority complex, which the Batswana challenged and rejected as unacceptable and undermining their integrity. It must be pointed that through their pre-conceived

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ideas and desire to see Christianity dominating the Batswana, they supported and facilitated foreign rule.

**Keywords:** missionaries, religious traditions, Christianity, *Modimo*, colonial mentality

## **Introduction**

The paper mainly focuses on and draws examples from the London Missionary Society (LMS), whose arrival in the early 1800s started the most notable work of missionaries in Botswana. The LMS missionaries were the best known of all the Christian missionaries in Southern Africa especially in present day Botswana. To a large extent the LMS missionaries can safely be presented as having been at the forefront of pioneering missionary outreach throughout much of the area beyond the borders of the Cape Colony during the nineteenth century. Missionaries who were the most prominent members of the LMS were Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, John Mackenzie and William Charles Willoughby.

The paper observes that in introducing Christianity, the LMS missionaries made the mistake of believing that to become a Christian, Batswana had to completely abandon their indigenous cultures. They treated African religions as evil and did everything possible to ensure that it was ousted. The western missionaries believed that traditional religious beliefs and practices were inferior, and together with the traditional customs, had to be done away with before the acceptance of Christianity. However, this was vehemently resisted.

The article also examines the role of the missionaries in the colonisation process of Botswana, which was considerable in terms of cultural and political domination of the people. Although the task of missionaries was to evangelize the people, Christianity was unnecessarily turned into an ideology which was used to lay the ground for white domination. Religion was used to legitimize, sustain and even promote political oppression (Bourdillon 1960: 269).

Regardless of the claims that the missionaries considered themselves anti-colonial, and made sacrifices to fight it, it is evident that they were part of the colonial structure. They did not differentiate between Christianity and their

own culture. Another important observation to note is that, while Christianity was introduced among Batswana in the early 1800s, it was only in the late nineteenth century, when colonialism was advancing, that Christianity seriously increased its presence in Bechuanaland. This article testifies to the relationship that existed between Christianity and colonialism among Batswana of Bechuanaland.

## **Accounts and Beliefs of the Batswana**

The religion of the Batswana was from time immemorial monotheistic. Batswana traditionally believed in a single Supreme Being whom they called *Modimo*, literally meaning the one who is supreme and above. *Modimo* was believed to be the Creator, Maker, Originator and Source of all things, including life (Chamberlin 1969:80; Schapera 1961:63). The word *Modimo* has always denoted a single Supreme Being. Wherever the word is used to denote an ancestor or a spirit of the dead or a living person whom one honours greatly, the word *modimo* (with a lower case ‘m’, a singular word for *badimo*) is used. The idea that the *badimo* stand in an intercessory position between the living and *Modimo* is therefore, not a modern innovation. For centuries, *badimo* have been believed to perform this intermediary role. *Modimo*, a more senior and distant spiritual being is best approached through *badimo*, who are generally believed to be nearer to human beings (Willoughby 1928:206; Pauw 1960:12; Moffat 1842:260-61).

From time immemorial, Batswana have always had knowledge and belief in *Modimo* as the Creator and sustainer of all forms of life. Belief in *Modimo* manifested itself in many Tswana traditional religious practices such as rainmaking, *bongaka* (traditional medicine) and agricultural rites of seed cleansing, first fruits (*go loma ngwaga*) and harvest. Rainmaking rites, which depended on the expertise of the tribal *dingaka tsa pula* (rain-makers), reveal a strong concept of the *Supreme Being*. At the beginning of every rain-season the rainmakers worked hard to combat drought, which was frequent in Southern Africa. John Mackenzie, a London Missionary Society (LMS) agent, describes their activities thus:

At this season the *lingaka* are frequently to be seen on the height of the mountains near to the town, lighting fires, blowing their horns, whistling

and shouting. They have also numerous processions and a multitude of observances, which indeed take up their time (Mackenzie 1871:385).

Although the *dingaka*'s rainmaking rituals seemed to focus entirely on *badimo*, they were ultimately addressed to *Modimo*, the sole giver of rain. Belief in *Modimo* as the ultimate recipient of all prayers and sacrifices performed during a Tswana traditional rainmaking ceremony comes out clearly from David Livingstone's early writings, which make frequent references to 'rain makers' and rainmaking. In one of the most interesting anthropological passages in *Livingstone's Private Journals (1851-1853)* (Schapera 1960:239-43), David Livingstone reports being deeply impressed by the 'remarkable acute' reasoning of the rain doctor, who informed him that the medicines he used in rainmaking were a form of prayer to *Modimo*. In fact, *Modimo* had given traditional healers the knowledge of the right medicine to use in rainmaking. The traditional healer further asserted that *Modimo* was the power that controlled rain and could be coerced by the use of medicine to bring it. Although Livingstone disagreed with this idea, he understood the logical reasoning of the rain - maker. Most importantly, he discovered that the traditional healer had a clear concept of *Modimo*. W.C. Willoughby, another LMS missionary who worked among Bangwato, also made the same observation. He writes:

None but the Supreme Spirit can send rain; but their prayers for rain are addressed to the spirits of the ruling dynasty, who intercede for them at the court of One too great to be approached by mortals (Willoughby 1928:206).

As Willoughby points out, the concept or knowledge of *Modimo* was clearly distinguished from that of *badimo*. Batswana knew him as the Supreme Being: 'One too great to be approached by mortals'. Despite the existence and elevated role of the ancestral cult among the Batswana, Batswana were not polytheistic in their beliefs and practices. Furthermore, the absence of the cult of the High God (*Modimo*) does not suggest that Batswana do not have the concept of the Supreme Being. *Badimo* were only seen as intermediaries and functionaries of the Supreme Being, who came into existence to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of *Modimo*. The early missionaries' failure to properly grasp this

intricate relationship between *badimo* and *Modimo* could have misled them into thinking that Batswana had no concept of God.

In the following section, we show how the missionaries responded to the beliefs, customs and practices of the Batswana.

### ***The Accounts of Travellers and Missionaries***

The accounts of the early European travelers and missionaries, unreliable as they are, are a useful source for the study of Tswana traditional religious beliefs and practices. These sources generally reveal the cultural bias of Europeans. They were sometimes based on inaccurate information and cultural prejudice. They made Tswana religion to appear to be a morass of bizarre beliefs and practices of a people generally believed to be savages and primitive (the opposite of the missionaries who represented European civilization). It is therefore, not surprising that John Campbell, the pioneer of Tswana missions, saw the ‘great end’ of the London Missionary Society to be ‘the conversion of the heathen and the promotion of their civilization’ (John Campbell 1815:viii). As a result, missionaries came to Africa expecting to find pagans and heathens who knew nothing about God. Such expectations greatly influenced their attitude towards African way of life, African mentality and what missionary work was going to entail. Robert Moffat (1842:236), who claimed that the Batswana ‘never had the slightest idea of idols, or of idol service, could have no notion whatever of the object of missionaries, beyond that of secular interests’ interpreted this to mean a total absence of religious structures and a concept of the Supreme Being. Describing what he saw as a ‘hotchpotch of ridiculous and harmful superstitions’, he wrote:

Satan is obviously the author of the polytheism of other nations. He has employed his agency with fatal success, in erasing every vestige of religious impression from the Bechuanas .... Leaving them without a single ray to guide them from the dark and dread futurity, or a single link to unite them with the skies. ... Their religious system, like those streams in the wilderness which lose themselves in the sand, had entirely disappeared ... (Moffat 1842:224).

Whatever this means, this shows that there was unwillingness on the part of some missionaries to honestly search, and be open to Tswana beliefs and prac-

tices. They failed to approach them with open minds.

Another problem was that the missionaries came from a society where religion was reflected by church buildings, and represented religious beliefs and practices. The absence of these structures among the Batswana was an attestation of the Tswana ‘heathen’ life (heathenism), lack of a concept of *Modimo* and the total absence of religious beliefs and practices. Influenced by this sort of understanding, Moffat further presented the following picture about the Batswana:

This may be so; but during years of apparently fruitless labour, I have often wished to find something, by which I could lay hold on the minds of the natives, - an altar to an unknown God, the faith of their ancestors, the immortality of the soul, or any religious association; but nothing of this kind ever floated in their minds. ‘They looked on the sun’, as Mr. Campbell very graphically said, ‘with the eyes of an ox’. To tell them, the gravest of them, that there was a Creator, the governor of the heavens and earth, of the fall of man, or the redemption of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and immortality beyond the grave, was to tell them what appeared to be more fabulous, extravagant, and ludicrous than their vain stories about lions, hyenas and jackals (Moffat 1842: 245).

Moffat’s descriptions of ‘Native’ beliefs and practices are on the whole, sketchy and prejudiced (a product of his strong belief in the superiority of his own European culture). He was obviously more interested in the Setswana language than the customs of the Batswana (see Schapera 1960: xix). He does not seem to have been a good observer of how the people lived. This is understandable because he was not anthropologically trained. He also had no prior knowledge of African life and ways. He was not trained to ask the right questions. His only cultural model was European. He therefore failed to ask the right questions in his investigations of the people’s practices. He seemed to have quickly drawn conclusions about Tswana religion before he had been among the people long enough to have an intimate experience of their culture. Consequently, his view of the indigenous beliefs of the Batswana lacks depth. The cumulative effect of all these limitations led to his failure to discern even the slightest evidence of Batswana’s belief in *Modimo*, the Supreme Being.

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What Moffat saw as, ‘A profound silence [that] reigns on this awful subject ...’. was, for instance, interpreted differently by the earliest European explorers, such as Dr. Lichtenstein (in 1803 - 1805), Burchell (in 1812), and John Campbell (1812 & 1815). They all reported the existence of religious practices (Lichtenstein 1815; Campbell 1815:245 & Mackenzie 1871:67-68). Contrary to Moffat's views on the Batswana, David Livingstone, another LMS missionary among the Batswana, who was also Moffat's son-in-law, came to realise that Batswana indeed possessed religious beliefs and practices (Schapera 1959:193). He wrote at length about these religious beliefs. While he was very skeptical about Batswana's religiosity in his early writings, he later wrote more sympathetically and positively about these people. For example, just after his arrival among Batswana in 1842, when he was still unfamiliar with the Tswana beliefs and while still heavily influenced by what he heard from those he found in Africa, Livingstone wrote thus:

I could not ascertain that they had the least idea of a future state. And though they have some notions which seem to us to be connected with a belief in its existence, I have not met one who could put the necessary links together in the chain of reasoning so as to become possessed of the definite idea. Indeed, they all confess that they never think of anything connected with death, and do not wish the introduction of that subject. Their conceptions of Deity are of the most vague and contradictory nature, and his name conveys no more to their understanding than the idea of superiority. Hence they do not hesitate to apply the name of God to their chiefs, and I was every day shocked by being addressed by that title, and although it often furnished me with a text from which to tell them of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, yet it deeply pained me, and I never felt so fully convinced of the lamentable deterioration of my species before. It is indeed a mournful truth that ‘man has become like the beasts that perish’ (Schapera 1961:18).

A few years later, however, David Livingstone's views had drastically changed. He found that Batswana were clearly and most positively asserting ‘that of old, before they ever heard of white men, they were in the daily habit of speaking of God and referring certain events to his will. All those who possess intelligence speak in the same strain’ (Schapera 1960:301). He only came to this realization after spending time with the people and after becoming

acquainted with their beliefs and practices. In 1856, he came up with a definite conclusion that the people had a clear belief in a Supreme Being. This conclusion was poignantly captured thus:

There is no necessity for beginning to tell even the most degraded of all these people of the existence of a God, or of the future state, the facts being universally admitted. Everything that cannot be accounted for by common causes is ascribed to the Deity, as creation, sudden death etc .... On questioning intelligent men among the Bakwains as to their former knowledge of good and evil, of God, and the future state, they have scouted the idea of any of them ever having been without a tolerably clear conception on all these subjects. Respecting their sense of right and wrong, they profess that nothing we indicate as sin ever appeared to them otherwise, except the statement that it was wrong to take more wives than one, and they declare that they spoke in the same way of the direct influence exercised by God in giving rain in answer to prayers of the rain-makers, and in granting deliverance in times of danger, as they do now, before they ever heard of white men. The want, however, of any form of public worship, or of idols, or of formal prayers or sacrifice, make ... Bechuanas appear as among the most godless mortals known anywhere ... that some have supposed them entirely ignorant on the subject (Livingstone 1857:158-9).

Moffat himself actually amended or withdrew many of his earlier statements, as he came closer and closer to the people and gained a better and intimate understanding of their cultural beliefs and practices. The image of *Modimo* that eventually emerged from Livingstone's writings was later reproduced and confirmed by modern African scholars of Tswana traditional religions such as Setiloane (1976). According to Setiloane, Batswana believe in a Supreme Being called *Modimo*. *Modimo* is believed to have created all things, the One who penetrates and permeates all things and the One who is the Creator and the Source of all life (Setiloane 1976:78). When Moffat began to translate the Bible into Setswana in 1828, he had no other indigenous name equivalent to that of the God of the Bible. He therefore had no choice but to adopt and use the same Tswana name, *Modimo* to designate God or the Supreme Being. Concerning this, Mackenzie says that the idea to use this word came from the Tswana interpreters. He writes:



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Morimo (God) has not been mentioned in the preceding description of native worship and superstition. When missionaries first met with Bechuanas they addressed them through the Dutch language. They found Bechuanas who could already speak both languages, and who therefore acted as interpreters. At Griqua Town there were (and are still) regular services in both languages. The invariable equivalent for God in Dutch, given by all the interpreters, was Morimo. It was no suggestion of the missionaries: the Bechuana interpreters, after hearing concerning God in the Dutch language, said that their name for Him was Morimo. .... But the Bechaunas would seem never to have entirely forgotten God. His name was found by the missionaries still floating in their language (Mackenzie 1871:394).

This also was the case in their teaching and preaching. Right from the onset, their Batswana interpreters used the name *Modimo* for the Supreme Being, because he was the Supreme Being for them (Pauw 1960:12). In this way, missionaries were constantly confronted by the Tswana way of life, which Willoughby, describes as follows:

Bantu life is basically religious ... Religion so pervades the life of the people that it regulates their doing and governs their leisure to an extent that it is hard for Europeans to imagine (Willoughby 1928:1).

In the heart of their beliefs and practices, as Willoughby points out, was the concept of *badimo* and *Modimo*. Everything for them revolved around *Modimo*. They did not know how to live without these spiritual entities. Everything for them, be it politics, economics or social, revolved around the religious beliefs and practices.

### **Missionaries and the Batswana Traditional Way of Life**

As Willoughby has stated above, Batswana had a strong religious and cultural tradition of their own.

Though the missionaries found this very rich African background, most of them had an attitude of contempt for the African way of life. They considered it to be backward and inadequate. Some alluded to the fact that Africans were heathens and almost irreligious. Robert Moffat, He talked about

a total absence of religious structures and a concept of the Supreme Being (Moffat 1842:224-245). The missionaries usually equated non-western cultures with degradation, barbarism, ignorance and darkness (Moffat 1842:224). They wanted Africans to denounce their culture and adopt western ways. Concerning this missionary attitude, J.J. Freeman writes:

They must be secluded not only from the heathen portion of the community but from their home habits, customs and occupations, even though their parents may be Christian, lest they imbibe that love of a life among the flocks and herds by which natives seem so (Mackenzie 1887:264)

The desire of the missionaries was that the Africans abandon their religion and culture and adopt western religion and culture, which they hoped would facilitate the extension of colonialism. The motive was, therefore, to prepare the Africans mentally for the takeover by colonizers (Magorian 1964:17).

The aim was to have Batswana children grow up being ignorant of their African identity and then becoming Europeanized in their ways and thinking, thus softening their hearts to embrace the European colonial takeover from a tender age. For European missionaries there was a thin line between westernizing the world and converting it to Christianity (Latouche 1996:28). Influenced by that understanding, missionaries spread Christian values and western civilization simultaneously. Western civilization, Christianity, commerce and colonization were believed to be inseparable. On the other hand, African traditions and cultural practices were perceived to be inferior, uncivilized and primitive. Reproducing their culture and imposing it on the Africans was therefore seen as part of the missionary mandate to 'civilise' Africans. God was thus presented to Batswana in a foreign idiom, as if the indigenous people had no language of their own (Amadiune 1997:98. Seeing this as part of their mission work, therefore, missionaries co-operated with the colonizers in weakening the religious institutions on which the Tswana ancient cultures were founded (de Vries 1978:2).

The missionaries targeted the rulers for conversion, hoping that once the Chiefs were converted, their subjects would follow suit, thus preparing the ground for the colonial government. It was for this reason that David Livingstone believed that the missionary work had an important cultural role,

that is, 'to leaven the alleged primitiveness of African society with Christian western culture' (Martin 1989:7). In fact, most missionaries in Southern Africa believed that their way of life represented values of universal application. They saw it as their moral duty to 'civilise' Africans. Civilization in this case referred to European values, standards and way of life. They also regarded themselves as chosen by God, in terms of their religion and their nations, with a duty to retrieve Africans from backwardness, heathenism and superstitious influences. They aimed at bringing these customs into conformity with western standards (Martin 1989:8). The weakening power of the chiefs (*bogosi*) was understood as a destruction of Tswana political and cultural systems. The failure of the missionaries to make many converts during Sekgoma's reign (1835-1870) was, for instance, seen as a good reason to destroy powers of the chiefs. Tswana chiefs who resisted Christianity, were removed with the assistance of the colonial government (Moffat 1858:B31). Wookey, for instance, advocated for the removal of Sekgoma Letsholathebe of the Batawana from the throne because of his refusal to embrace missionary teachings. Missionaries advocated for a direct British rule, hoping that the system would make it easy for them to spread western culture, which in their view, was superior and friendlier to the spread of Christianity. Through the weakening of the powers of chiefs they hoped that they would be able to impose rulers who would readily support this process. This partly explains their taking sides with Christian rulers in cases of dispute with their non-Christian counterparts. Among the Bangwato, for instance, the LMS supported Khama in his dispute with his father Sekgoma I in the early 1870s, because the former had openly embraced Christianity, while the latter had openly rejected it, Sekgoma saw Christianity as a foreign religion that was against traditional values, beliefs and practices (Tlou & Campbell 1984:133).

Evidently, the efforts of the missionaries were to work towards weakening the traditional authority, its values, being and potential. And thus, in their evangelization drive they supported the colonial process. They, for instance, insisted that their converts to Christianity should also adopt the western cultures as part of their religious life. In doing this, the missionaries did not only violate the key teachings of Christian religion, but also compromised its message. Toyin Falola argues that even the missionary campaign against such things as polygamy was part of the strategy to force Africans to adopt a western style of life, which was seen as part of the larger vision of seeing indigenous

people completely sold to their colonizers (Falola 2000:159). Tlou and Campbell argue that Livingstone supported colonialism because he persuaded Sechele to abandon his many wives except one. This was so because the abandonment of polygamy by Sechele with the influence of the missionary led to a revolution that upset the traditional political, social and economic life of the people, and created an environment that supported the western way of life (Tlou & Campbell 1997:187).

### **The Bible and Evangelisation**

The missionaries are also alleged to have used the Bible as a tool to colonise the minds of the Africans (Dube 2000:4). It is argued that the Bible was presented in such a way that it painted everything associated with African practices as pagan in order to promote western ideologies, values and practices. The missionaries particularly disliked such practices as rain-making rites, initiation ceremonies, *bogadi* (bridewealth), and polygamy, because they viewed them to be contrary to the teaching of the Bible and also a hindrance to the spread of missionary teachings. The missionaries are accused of having used the Bible to colonise Batswana politically, culturally and economically. The Kutlwano, for instance, observes that: ‘At the initial stage, the aim of these missionaries was to Christianize Africans and change their way of life which was then regarded as primitive by settler Europeans’ (Kutlwano 2003:14).

Musa W. Dube relates a popular story about the Bible and the white man as follows: ‘When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us: ‘Let us pray’. After the prayer the white man had the land and we had the Bible’ (Dube 2000:3). Dube explains that this is how Africans connect colonialism to the Bible. By cooperating with scientists and explorers, missionaries are seen to have acted as agents of imperialism. Andrew Walls also suggests that there was very little or no dividing line between missionaries and their colonizing counterparts. He notes that:

‘The missionary pioneer was spoken of in the vocabulary of the imperial pioneer. Sometimes missionary occupations preceded annexation or political penetration and sometimes it followed, as in Uganda,

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Nyasaland and Bechuanaland. It was intimately associated with the establishment of British rule (Walls 2000:4).

Dube speaks of Livingstone as a good example of a divinely commissioned genius in colonizing Africans, and a shining example of a missionary who openly championed colonial domination in sub-Saharan Africa, especially through his declaration that civilization, Christianity and commerce should always be inseparable (Dube 2003:4-5). She further accuses Livingstone of having capitalized on the rampant, human trade in the interior of Africa to appeal to his compatriots to colonise Africa. She also points out that Livingstone successfully stimulated the interests of traders, geographic societies and missionary societies, that is, various colonial agents, to open western commerce, civilization and Christianity to occupy and 'civilise' Africans (Dube 2000:4-9). Quoting Mudimbe, she asserts that the missionary is the best symbol of the colonial enterprise. She further supports her argument by quoting Pringle,

Let us enter upon a new and noble, career of conquest. Let us subdue savage Africa by justice, by kindness, by the talisman of Christian truth. Let us thus go forth in the name and under the blessing of God, gradually to extend the moral influence ... the territorial boundary also to our colony, until it shall become an empire (Pringle 2009:9).

We can therefore conclude that missionaries appropriated and interpreted the Bible in order to fulfil the aim and objective of colonialism in all spheres to make colonialism a reality in various ways. The Bible became the basic text for the missionary schools. Through the Bible, they psychologically made Batswana humble and passive, thus making encroachment of the colonizers easy and acceptable. The missionaries also used the Bible to seriously weaken the traditional culture, by describing it as evil.

### **The Missionaries versus Traditional Authority**

The situation among the Bangwato during the second half of the nineteenth century and into the first quarter of the twentieth century reveals several of the dynamics that are unleashed when a foreign world-view intersects with the

indigenous culture and particularly, where civil and religious authority overlaps. The important point here is that London Missionary Society (LMS) activities inevitably affected many aspects of the social life of the Batswana, such as religion, health, education, economics and political structures. From the indigenous cultural set up, these aspects were under the political authority of the king. But with the establishment of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885, the missionaries began to challenge the legitimacy of kingly power and increasingly allied with the colonial administrators.

Their European superiority mentality was inspired by their anti-African cultural institutions. For example, they saw the cultural systems of the Batswana to be a hindrance to the spread of Christianity, and consequently felt that colonialism was justified. The best example on this was Robert Moffat a missionary of the LMS resident among the Batlhaping. Moffat was not only critical of the alliance between the church and politics, but also contributed to the weakening of the Batswana kingship structures. In 1858, he was involved in the Ngwato political events which led to the overthrow of Sekgoma and his replacement by Macheng. He hoped that the latter would facilitate a massive spread of Christianity in the region. He informed the LMS that: ‘Macheng had willingly submitted to my suggestions that he should be instructed in reading and writing; and soon as all his public affairs were settled he would ... avail himself of the services of a native teacher’ (Moffat 1858:B3)

This reflected a strategy that realised that kingship structures were the most effective channel for dissemination and establishment of Christianity and other missionary interests among the Batswana. J.D. Hepburn, another L.M.S. missionary at Shoshong, the capital of the Bangwato until 1889, admitted that the LMS missionaries tried to weaken kingly power (Hepburn 1880:B40). However, he agreed with Moffat that political involvement of missionaries led to a poor response to Christianity (Hepburn 1875:B38). Other LMS missionaries however ignored this warning by continuing to perform political activities on behalf of their home government in northern Batswana kingdoms. In 1868, for instance, John Mackenzie encouraged Macheng, the then Ngwato king, to invite the British Government to occupy the Tati Gold area as a way of preventing the Transvaal Government from occupying the field (Mackenzie 1902:124). When the British Government did not respond to the request, Mackenzie suggested that a special council of Europeans be established which would deal with European matters at Shoshong. This council was eventually formed with Mackenzie himself presiding over it. Through all this Mackenzie

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saw a very close connection between the progress of Christianity and the English law. Thus in 1876 he wrote:

On the whole, the feudal power of the native chiefs is opposed to Christianity; and the people who are living under English law are in a far more advantageous position as to the reception of the Gospel than when they were living in their own heathen town surrounded by all its thralls and sanctions.

It was for this reason that the missionaries wanted to destroy the cultural institutions.

Anthony Sillery (1954:44) has along these lines observed that the acceptance of Christianity always led to the breakdown of the cultural institutions of the Batswana, yet the Wesleyan missionaries, working among the BaRolong, the southernmost Tswana people at about the same period, complained that kingly power was opposed to Christianity (Comaroff & Comaroff 1986:4-6). In fact most LMS missionaries in the Bechuana District Committee (B.D.C.), the highest authority of the Society in the region, saw the declining power of the kings as a happy development. They believed that kingship structures were less responsive to the evangelization process. Calling for the replacement of Ngwato political structures with British rule the B. D.C. in 1878 openly wrote that: 'as for the waning of the power of their chiefs, they will grow accustomed to that also, provided a good position is secured them as respectable subjects of the Queen' (Chirenje 1977:152).

It was with this understanding that LMS missionaries played a leading role in the formation of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885.

The indigenous leaders, however, held the view that Christian moral standards of the white community were incompatible with the values of the Batswana. Referring to his own Christian morality, Khama challenged their deceitfulness and treacherous conduct as follows:

... you call yourselves Christians, and I also am a Christian, a member of a Christian Church. I am doing all that lies in my power to lead my people to give up their old and sinful customs ... to serve the living God and His son Jesus Christ, who I believe died for white and black ... My missionaries have never taught me, and God's book does not teach me, that a man may write anything he likes today and do any

other thing he likes tomorrow (Holub 36-37).

As part of his response to these developments, Khama adopted a radical position and enforced his authority. Writing about his reforms and capability as a leader, Mrs Knight - Bruce told the *Times* in 1893 that:

He [Khama] is a radical reformer who yet develops both himself and his people on the natural lines; he has made himself into a character that can be spoken of as a 'perfect English gentleman', but without losing for a moment his self-respect as an African; he has kept his position as a disciple, not a mimic, of white civilization and he has shown how such a man can raise a nation. He has done it all as he would tell us, because he is a Christian (*The Times* 1893:3).

The LMS missionaries were on the other hand happy to have the British Protectorate administration and saw this as a divine appointment. They hoped that this would create a conducive environment for the spread of Christianity in the region. In 1884 for instance, the *Chronicle* of the LMS stated: '[The Directors] yield[ed] to what seem[ed] to be a providential indication of the will of God in the services of Mackenzie and allowed him to join the new administration' (*The Chronicle* 1884:19-120). LMS missionaries were, however, divided over the issue of church-state relations. They held the view that colonial officials wanted to use the missionaries as instruments for their political interests. On this issue Ashton wrote to the LMS as follows: 'I think both the missionary position and influence of both Mr Mackenzie and all of the rest of us would suffer by his accepting office' (Ashton to LMS 1879:B41; Mackenzie 1879:B41). A.J. Wookey, another L.M.S. missionary among the Tswana at Taung in the 1870s wrote to the Directors: 'I have been told again and again that we are deceivers and only trying as agents of the government to get the country' (Wookey 1878: B40). Khama felt that traders were exploiting his people, and that led to a decline in agricultural productivity. He also noted that it encouraged Europeans to violate his political and religious laws, thus subverting his authority. Thus in 1876 he addressed a group of dissident white traders, saying:

You think you can despise my laws because I am a black man. Well, I am black, but I am chief of my country. When you white men rule the



country, then you may do what you like; at present I rule, and I shall maintain the laws you insult and despise. ... I am trying to lead ... according to the Word, which we received from you white people and you have shown us an example of wickedness. You know that some of my brothers have learned to like drink, and you tempt them with it, I make an end of it today. Go! take your cattle, leave my town and never come back (*The Chronicle* of the LMS, 1880:1215-9; *The Scottish Temperance* 1880:286).

### **The Christianization of the Batswana Institutions**

Khama regarded this as an attempt by the missionaries to impose foreign political ideas on the BaNgwato. Hepburn's view was that those who had become Christians were to be cut off from their cultural duties and be let free to identify themselves with the European colonial power. Khama insisted on the fact that there was no separation between the church and state, while on the other hand, Hepburn advocated for separation between church – state. The tendency of the missionaries to try to alienate individuals from their traditional loyalties, forced Khama to conclude that missionaries were friends and supporters of the colonial government. Hepburn's brand of Christianity, for instance, seemed to erode the traditional loyalties of the people and thus break up the *bogosi* (kingship or kingly power) system. The native *bogosi* saw no incongruity in fusing political and religious matters under Khama's authority. For example, Khama sometimes ordered his regiment to cut logs or to make bricks for church buildings regardless of their personal preference in the matter. Khama, therefore, envisaged a time when the Bangwato church would progress towards self-governing institution and be able to run its own affairs. Thompson later described the proceedings of the meeting:

Then I dealt with the more serious question of principle, expressing as emphatically and distinctly as I could the opinion that the Christians were subjects of the State, bound like others by its laws and called to prove their Christian character by being the most loyal and obedient of all the people. At the same time I pointed out that there was another voice, the voice of conscience, which chief and the people alike must listen to, and another law, the law of God, which must be supreme. I dwelt upon the spiritual independence of the church in its worship and

work, and pointed out that if a Christian chief was allowed, as chief, to interfere with the liberty of the church a bad chief might claim the right to do so also. I told them that we in England had in past times suffered much from the attempts of our rulers to interfere with our freedom, and that it was only after a long severe struggle that we obtained the recognition of our liberty. And I reminded them that times might come in the life of a man, or in the experience of the Christian (Lovett 1899:640).

Although Khama expelled Hepburn, for opposing the development of a self-governing church, he found that some of his people were influenced by the missionary. They refused to give their loyalty to him. For instance, Thompson informs us that during their interview with the Bangwato:

At once Raditladi, the chief's brother and a deacon of the church, responded to this that they were well aware that the church was not to be under the control of the State, and that if the chief, as chief, attempted to interfere with them in their Christian life and duty they would speedily let him know that he was interfering in matters beyond his province (Lovett 1899:640-641).

In 1896 Khama blamed John Moffat, a LMS missionary who became the Assistant Commissioner at Palapye (1892 to 1896), for meddling in internal political matters and thus encouraging Khama's opponents to resist his authority. While Hepburn had challenged Khama for claiming authority over the church, Moffat was now aiding Khama's political opponents, who consulted him because of his ecclesiastical status as a former missionary and in his capacity as the senior colonial authority at Palapye. Khama subsequently got rid of him especially for conducting secret prayer meetings at his magistrate's house at the end of 1894. The prayers were aimed at undermining Khama's authority. To start with Khama had opposed Moffat's appointment to Palapye, together with his duties: to levy taxes, issue trading licenses and hold courts etc. Khama objected since this undermined his kingly position, but the Cape Government simply imposed the office on the BaNgwato (Parsons 1972:20).

## **Missionary Education, Western Cultural Values and Colonialism**

Education was another very important instrument that was employed to bring the Batswana under the influence of colonialism. It determined the course and nature of African responses to colonial conquest. Its impact softened the hearts of Batswana towards Europeans and consequently brought them under their power and influence. Missionary education was used as a great weapon to confuse the people's minds. It undermined African culture and the general way of life of the Africans (Nkomazana & Lanner 2007). In preparation for the colonizers, the missionaries taught English to those who were to be colonized by the English, so that they could later provide the needed service as officers.

Tlou and Campbell state that when colonizers arrived, they used educated Batswana to gain control of the people. They also point out that missionary education aimed at producing young Batswana who would accept the supposed cultural inferiority of the Africans; accept the settler colonialism as a fact of life; and admire the white man for his power, wealth and technology (Tlou & Campbell 1997). It also made communication between the colonial master and the Africans easier and thus created a positive environment for colonialism. Missionaries taught their converts to associate colonialism with Christianity, civilization and the overwhelming superiority of European weapons and warfare (Boahen 1985:198). Missionaries such as W.C. Willoughby, believed in the unquestionable superiority of the white race, culture and religion. They viewed colonization, commerce and religion as inseparable allies. They also emphasized the need for imperial responsibility (paternal guardianship) over the Africans. They sought to smooth cultural contact between the colonizers and the colonized and to 'protect' and 'civilise' the African in an effort to make him a more useful member of the new colonial community. Returning back to Willoughby, it must also be mentioned that he rejected any idea of social and political equality between the Bantu and the Europeans. His notion of equality, in fact, affected his interpretation of the Batswana and their culture. He argued that Africans in general could not be treated as equals, by Europeans, before they were socially and politically upgraded. It is only after that development, which he argued, takes many years to mature, that they could be seen as occupying the same status. He further pointed out that their brotherhood with whites was only on the basis of being 'children and adolescents' or 'younger brothers' of the British and not on equa-

lity (Willoughby 1923:159-160, 229). He further wrote:

If we could take ideal into our dealings, it would crown our strength with patience and gentleness, and we should become redeemers of Africa. But that means keeping very close to the Greater Paternal Heart of the World – or maternal if that is a better metaphor (Willoughby 1923:230-231).

He held the view that the Bangwato, the people he served as a missionary, were backward and slow in learning. He pointed out that localization or transfer of political or religious power and leadership or government, to Africans was a farfetched possibility. Because of their slowness in learning and development, the process of handing over government was expected to take a very long time.

While missionaries were responsible for introducing young people to reading and writing skills, as well as teaching women sewing, baking, hygiene and the nursing of the sick missionary education contained within it many negative aspects (Tlou & Campbell 1997). Those educated in missionary schools received a western styled education which did not aim at preparing them to be political leaders of their country, but at taking up subordinate positions in a colonial system. Tlou and Campbell (1997) for instance, note that the objective of missionary education was not to develop the socio-economic needs of Batswana, but was for purposes of Bible reading and evangelization. However, Mgadla notes that: ‘By the middle of 1880 western education was no longer a *bogosi* privilege (Mgadla 1989:44). It was being made available to many Africans as possible to maximize that impact and influence.

Missionary education was presented as a tool to weaken the influence of the indigenous religion and replace it with Christian values. The purpose of missionary education was to merely open the minds of Batswana to Western influence.

Access to missionary education was controlled by the missionary bodies themselves. To receive education one had to become a Christian and adopt western values of dress etc. Western education opposed the traditional schools of *bogwera* (for boys) and *bojale* (for girls). It was also against *bogadi* (bridewealth), rain-making rites and traditional medicine and its related practices (Tlou & Campbell 1984:135). Missionary education, therefore, was firstly used as an agent of change. It was to reconstruct African culture.

Secondly it was used as a vehicle to import and impose western values on Africans. To missionaries, western education represented modernity and civilisation. It was used to spread western social, cultural and economic value systems. It favoured western values and completely rejected the African cultural environment and cultural values. It failed to appreciate any culture other than its own western culture, which was considered superior and of a higher level of civilisation. Thirdly, in many different ways, it facilitated European control over Africans and consequently reinforced colonisation. To achieve that goal missionaries opened mission schools among the Batswana and demanded that candidates had first to convert to Christianity. Gray Seidman captures this influence as follows: ‘Africans learned about European culture. They read European books and learned about European ways of doing things’ (Seidman 1985:95). Moshoeshoe I of the Basotho Kingdom told the French missionaries that: ‘It is enough for me to see your clothing, your arms, and the rolling houses in which you travel, to understand how much strength and intelligence you have’ (Ibid). Moshoeshoe, like many other African leaders, understood the influence of European missionaries to be closely related to the factors that promoted colonialism.

Missionary education, therefore, did not only reinforce colonialism, but also became an instrument which was used by Europeans to destroy the people’s cultural values. Its main aim was to convert ‘heathen’ to Christianity and introduce them to the skills of reading the Bible. Its focus was not on practical subjects such as carpentry, building, etc, but stressed reading, writing and scripture. This was important for the colonial process because Batswana had to learn to speak and read English (Mgadla 2003:38). Gradually this form of education replaced indigenous education. The young became more interested in western education rather than the initiation schools. The Tswana practice of rain making, initiation rites and *bongaka* (medicine) and other beliefs were discouraged and said to be contrary to Christian moral codes (Amanze 1998:52). Through education, missionaries worked hard to replace Tswana culture with western culture, which they expected Batswana to adopt. All these created an atmosphere that presented little resistance to colonisation. They were taught to believe that almost everything about western cultures was superior and good, while African culture was barbaric (Tlou & Campbell 1984:187).

Another important observation to be made was that missionaries saw their major role as agents whose fundamental duties are to spread Christian

values and western civilization; these were seen as sides of the same coin. To effectively do this, missionaries introduced Christianity to the Africans within the western cultural context, which specifically supported the establishment of a colonial order. According to C. Kein missionaries also reinforced the idea of the primitiveness of Africans. Shillington brings in another aspect to this (Kein 1999:22). He points out that the response of Africans to this was resolute. He says that: 'They did not want new ideas that threatened to undermine the traditional religious basis of their authority' (Shillington 1995:289).

### **Missionaries, Commerce and Traders**

The second half of the nineteenth century brought new external threats. One such new external force was trade, which was favourably used for colonizing Batswana. The trading of fur, ivory and ostrich feathers, which were conducted through external links for a long time, was intensified by the presence of western traders (Parsons 1977:292). An important point to make here is that the establishment of missionary work became the beginning of modern trade. Missionaries came with traders, or rather attracted traders who sold items which were used in winning the hearts of Africans. They also brought new European items such as clothing, food (e.g. sugar, tea, bread), all of which were used to demonstrate European superiority or power, thus making colonialism, or foreign power a desirable thing. Through trade and commerce, missionaries, directly or indirectly, participated as agents of their home governments. David Livingstone is quoted as saying:

I beg to direct your attention to Africa: - I know that in a few years I shall be 'cut off in that country, which is now open; do not let it shut again! I go back to Africa to make an open path to commerce and Christianity; do carry out the work which I have begun. I LEAVE IT WITH YOU!' (Monk 1860:24)

Livingstone further points out that he was going back to Africa with a botanist, artist, naval officer, moral agent and mining geologist, all of which were together seen as going to Africa to promote civilization, trade, commerce, Christianity and colonialism (Mourhouse 1975:135). According to O'Toole the British missionaries were also actively involved. He writes:

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‘The warm welcome they gave him [Livingstone] stemmed more from a hope of getting European weapons than from an enthusiasm for Christianity. Besides their religious purpose, British missionaries also wanted to explore undocumented areas of the continent and to encourage Africans to trade with Britain’ (O’Toole 1994:24).

Trade was a factor that was used to bring about European dominance over Africans. It was used to make the idea of colonialism very attractive. The missionaries came at a time when there were tribal wars, of which the Mfecane (Tlou & Campbell 1997) was the most well-known. At that time, guns and ammunition became very much needed commodities for defense purposes. The missionaries themselves came with wagons, guns and ammunition, which were highly desired by the Batswana. Later on they persuaded traders to bring these useful European goods to Batswana. The traders took this advantage and used the missionaries to gain access, control and friendship with rulers and their communities. Trade became an important factor in the lives of the people. It introduced people to a new lifestyle which became one of the many doors the colonists used to gain control of Batswana. They also had contact with the government of Cape Town (source). Missionaries were seen as forming part of the new trading and political network that was spreading from the south. The mission stations themselves became trade centers. It was also here that the traders left their wagons and stock with chiefs while they traded in outlying areas. These stations were usually in the same place where the chiefs were based.

The export economy established by Europeans meant that Africans extracted raw materials while Europeans returned manufactured goods. The trade, which was oriented toward the west, advantaged Europeans at the expense of the indigenous populations. Tlou and Campbell, for instance, allude that:

‘The Batswana were generally suspicious of the missionaries in those early days because they spoke about bringing a new way of life. For this reason missionaries encouraged traders to trade with the Batswana. They hoped that this would indirectly help the spread of Christianity’ (Tlou & Campbell 1984:129).

Trade rather than Christianity became the primary means by which missionaries introduced European material and cultural values. Gray Seidman points out that: ‘Missionaries often insisted that their converts adopt their style of life even where it had no obvious religious implications. They should wear European clothes and live in European style houses’ (Seidman 1990:92).

They aroused in Africans, the desire for European manufactured goods. This was so because Africa was viewed as a potential market for European manufactured goods. In this way missionaries used trade to advance Christianity and colonialism. They saw these as sides of the same coin. For British missionaries, it was the British traders who were invited to participate in the process of colonization.

### **Missionaries and the Establishment of the Protectorate**

John Mackenzie, another LMS agent who worked among the Batswana from 1858 to 1879, had developed the interest of Batswana in being protected by the British and also of the British interest in Batswana. He, for instance, became the closest European friend, confidant and foreign minister of Khama III, who had accepted Christianity and at times proved to be more devout than the missionaries themselves. Khama did not only abandon his traditional religion, but also used his political office to impose the tenets of western civilization and Christian values on his people. The more he alienated his people by the enforcement of such measures, the more he was forced to rely on missionaries. On the other hand, the LMS, in relating to the Tswana rulers, adopted very strategic measures. Its missionaries befriended the chiefs, who were central figures in the political affairs of their people. They believed that this approach would make their work a lot easier, as the chiefs would influence their people to accept Christianity. This would also provide security for the missionaries, as they would freely spread the Gospel among the Africans under the protection of the chief. However, this became a strategy which the missionaries used to weaken and usurp the powers of the chiefs. In 1892, Khama expelled Hepburn from his country for interfering in tribal affairs and, in 1913, he removed Edwin Lloyd from Shoshong for the same reason. Through their relationship with Tswana rulers, especially as political advisers, missionaries desired to exercise considerable influence. Many a time, they even tried to go against the wishes of the Tswana rulers (Hepburn 1895:1). Alfred Wookey, for



instance, supported the removal of Kgosi Sekgoma Letsholathebe from kingship because of his refusal to accept missionary teachings (Tlou & Campbell 1997:193).

## **Conclusion**

The article has demonstrated that the western missionaries undermined cultural and religious traditions of the Batswana. It also pointed out that despite this tendency; the indigenous form of Christianity was based, conceived and understood within the cultural tradition of the people. The missionary approach was to impose western education and other western values which missionaries regarded as superior. They adopted a western cultural superiority thus undermining the cultural, religious, social and political independency of Batswana. They insisted that to become Christians, Batswana had to completely abandon their culture and religion, which without any consideration were believed to be evil. In the process these missionaries become part of the colonisation process the Batswana and contributed towards the political domination of the people. Christianity was turned into an ideology used to legitimise colonial oppression by the west. The article has therefore demonstrated that there was a relationship between Christianity and the colonisation that existed in Botswana between the years 1800 and 1900.

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