

EARLY KHOISAN USES OF MISSION CHRISTIANITY¹

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I. Problematic

It is striking how much faster mission Christianity was adopted by the battered remnants of Khoikhoi communities of the Eastern and the Western Cape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than it was by less politically and economically damaged African societies outside the colony. 'There is at present an amazing eagerness in the Hottentots to be instructed', observed in some surprise Hendrik Marsveld, Daniel Schwinn and Johan Christian Kühnel, the first Moravian missionaries to resume in 1792 Georg Schmidt's abandoned mission of 1737-43. The news of their arrival had, they said, 'spread like wildfire in the country'.² The interdenominational London Missionary Society (LMS) found itself about a decade later in the middle of a war zone in the Eastern Cape where, thrown into acting as political brokers, the founders of Bethelsdorp were inundated with war refugees, many of whom subsequently adopted Christianity.

The primary reason for such apparent early success is self-evident: societies in a state of profound crisis - dissolution even - are far more prone to seek new explanations and meaning systems, than are stable, well-functioning communities.³ However obviously and tragically true, this global explanation is not a substitute for examining the unique local factors which made missionary beliefs or institutions attractive to individuals; nor indeed should it be used to obscure the complexity of religious response, including resistance to the missionary message. Just as, in my opinion, undue stress on the missionaries as 'really' the agents of capitalism, despite the subtlety and exciting insights of many of the writers associated with this position, can make converts appear like the duped and agentless victims of processes beyond their control,⁴ so too does the 'social crisis' explanation, left to stand on its own, risk occluding agency. I balance here between concern that the Khoisan do not appear on the nineteenth-century stage as transitory and faceless victims, and the need to acknowledge that they were

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1. I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding the stay in Princeton during which I wrote this paper. Also, Nathalie Zemon Davis for very gracious hospitality, and Terence Ranger, Stanley Trapido, Richard Elphick, Robert Ross, and Arthur Burns for commentary on earlier versions of material on which this paper is based.
 2. 'First Journal Received from Henry Marsveld, Daniel Schwinn, and John Christian Kuehnel', in *Periodical Accounts relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren, Established among the Heathen*, vol.1 (1790-94), 291, 273.
 3. Compare Mark Nikkel's discussion of contemporary Dinka adoption of Christianity in the face of famine and enslavement, after many years of indifference: 'Aspects of Contemporary Religious Change among the Dinka', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 22, 1 (1992), 78-95.
 4. A criticism I would adduce of Clifton Crais' discussion of Khoisan missions in his otherwise excellent *White Supremacy, Black Resistance: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape* (Cambridge, 1992). Cf also Nosipho Majeke, *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest* (Johannesburg, 1952) and Kate Crehan, 'Khoi, Boer and Missionary: An Anthropological Study of the Role of the Missionaries on the Cape Frontier 1799-1850' (M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1978).

indeed victimized in many ways. Answers to the dilemma must surely vary from place to place and from time to time; all should include, however, a recognition that mission Christianity was used creatively by many individuals seeking positively to reconstruct a broken world, and that the meaning and 'ownership' of Christian texts were constantly under debate. As Dick Kooiman remarks, writing of the LMS in nineteenth-century South Travancore, 'receiving groups could perceive the implications of the Gospel in accordance with their own needs and aspirations, and actively use the mission to serve their own particular purposes'⁵.

This essay will therefore examine some of the early religious, political, and economic 'uses' made of mission Christianity by the descendants of the old Khoikhoi communities of the Cape, and those who came to be associated with them, ultimately subsumed under the rubric 'coloured'. Essentially, I want to know why some people converted, why others found mission stations a useful base even if they did not themselves convert, and how Christianity interacted with older beliefs.

Before launching into the body of my discussion, let me problematise the terminology of my seemingly simple title. First, the vexed term 'Khoisan', about which there is a complicated debate. With some reservations, I use 'Khoisan' as an inadequate portmanteau term in the absence of clear alternatives. Depending on their origin and life experiences, many people in the early nineteenth century Cape identified themselves as 'Hottentots' or indeed as 'Bushmen', sometimes despite mixed ancestry.⁶ At the same time, communities based around mission stations were clearly very mixed, and identities were fluid. I retain the term 'Khoisan' to indicate (1) ethnic heterogeneity coupled with (2) a sense of primarily 'Hottentot' history and identity which seems to me to have characterised mission station inhabitants.⁷ This was particularly true of the earliest years of missionary activity, when many Khoikhoi and San groups were still relatively internally cohesive. Where I use 'Khoikhoi' it indicates individuals allegiance to older, specifically Khoikhoi groupings, like the Gonaqua or Hessequa, or it reflects distinctions made by contemporaries themselves between 'Hottentot' and 'Bushman'. The more innocuous term 'use' is not entirely simple either. Spiritual understanding can also be described as 'use', even though it is a vexed issue whether or not people 'choose' to believe things against their conscious sense of self-interest. Here I include the spiritual 'use' of Christian ideas and texts, as well as the more tangible material 'uses' made of the political and economic opportunities offered by mission stations. On the one hand, spirituality is crucial in its own right. On the other hand, politics and religion were inextricably bound together in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Cape; it is also the case that written religious texts are always subject to conflicting political

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5. Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India: The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi, 1989), 6-7.
 6. For example, Esau Prins of the Kat River Settlement stated in 1834: 'I am a Boor's child, although I had to sit behind the chairs and stools, as my mother was a Hottentot woman, and therefore I consider myself a Hottentot also'. Cape Archives (hereafter CA), A50, Minutes of a meeting held at Philipton, 5 Aug. 1834.
 7. Stanley Trapido, 'The Emergence of Liberalism and the Making of 'Hottentot Nationalism', 1815-1834', in *Societies of Southern Africa: Collected Seminar Papers* (Institute of Commonwealth Studies: University of London, 1992), 34-60.

interpretations, and thus that religious and political 'uses' of a given religion are often almost impossible to disentangle.

As this last point suggests, my understanding of Christianity is relatively fluid. Although it is crucial to define the tenets of evangelicalism, and to take theology very seriously, it is also important that interpretation is bred into the very bone of Christianity - that religion of parable, myth and coded revelation. The fact that meaning is fought over does not mean that there may not be, in fact, a single correct interpretation of Christian doctrine and sacred texts. It does mean, however, that 'Christianity' can never be taken by the historian as a monolithic given.

More specifically, several ways of thinking about the relationship between religion, politics and society faced one another down in the Cape Colony of our period. There were different theologies available, tending to be held by particular social and linguistic groups and more or less coinciding with different attitudes to social order, despite many individual variations. Power relationships were defined in function of religious relationships by all these groups, in a way which made religious allegiance also a political statement.

By the 1790s, there were a certain number of evangelically-minded Dutch settlers, particularly in the vicinity of Cape Town, many of whom became involved in 1799 with the first LMS superintendent, Johannes Van der Kemp, in the foundation of the South African Missionary Society (a relationship which was subsequently to founder in mutual recrimination).⁸ Despite the existence of early settler missions, however, the bulk of Dutch-speaking white settlers in the rural areas of the Cape were opposed to missionary activity among their Khoisan and slave dependents. Jonathan Gerstner, in a recent painstaking, if not unproblematic, investigation of the Dutch Reformed tradition of baptism and its popular interpretation in South Africa, makes a convincing case that most Dutch settlers believed that God's covenant with the elect was extended automatically to their own children, but not to the children of non-Christians. This was expressed in the custom of baptising the infant children of Christians but not those of non-Christians. A theology which began in Holland as an in-group criticism of the non-Reformed and a call against complacency within the Reformed tradition, slipped into racial stratification in a country in which almost all frontier farmers thought of themselves as Reformed, but few blacks were Christian.⁹ Although Gerstner's argument demands a greater attention to economic realities, missionary records bear out his central contention that many Dutch settlers upheld an

8. Van der Kemp termed the slave-holding SAMS members 'a synagogue of Satan', accused them of funding settler churches at the expense of missions to the heathen, and may have believed that the SAMS executive was embezzling LMS money. SAMS members clearly found Van der Kemp a strain to deal with.

9. Gerstner argues that DRC baptismal practice, both in the Netherlands and in South Africa, was in logical contradiction with the theoretical principles of Reformed theology: in theory, election was not hereditary, salvation was through faith alone, and the fact of a child's election could not in any case be known before that child had reached an age at which he or she was capable of experiencing faith. In practice, infant damnation was too harsh a pill to swallow for bereaved parents; pastoral reality and theological arguments in favour of 'seminal' and 'external' holiness combined to urge the baptism of all children of parents who were not definitively not Christian, with the assurance that if the children died before the age of discretion then they were saved. This segued into belief in a 'thousand generation covenant', whereby God's covenant with the elect extended to their descendants for multiple generations. This was the dominant understanding on the South African frontier, according to Gerstner's analysis of sacramental practice, hymns, and the few creeds and commentaries which were actually available to the frontier farming community.

ethnically-based Christianity which associated religion with race. The exclusion of non-whites from the very possibility of becoming Christians was reinforced by a judicial system which gave different legal weight to 'Christian' and 'heathen' testimony in court, as well as by a popular parlance which termed all whites 'Christians'. This makes sense of the protest of the same Esau Prins cited above, child of a 'Hottentot' mother and 'Boor' father, who complained as late as 1834: Men say I have Christian blood in me, but I know only of one blood that God has made. The so-called 'Christenman' steals the name.'¹⁰

The disputed notion that many Dutch Calvinist settlers believed themselves to be saved and the heathen, by definition, to be pre-destined to another place, is similarly lent credence by the missionary archives.¹¹ LMS missionary Van der Lingen remarked in 1802, for example, that he was hindered in his pastoral duties in the Eastern Cape by the number of farmers 'prepossessed with hate against the Heathen Nation', who asked him

whether it became Heathen to be instructed in the doctrine of the Gospel? whether it was possible they could be converted? if they were not damned? and such like questions, where with they vexed me much, as I was asked the same questions at so many different places...¹²

Certainly the doors to family prayer were more often than not firmly barred against slaves and Khoisan in the 1790s and early 1800s, whatever the subsequent mythology of hierarchical and paternalistic Afrikaner piety.¹³ The experience of Diana, a Khoi woman illegally held as a slave near Tulbagh in the early eighteenth century, was typical. The Bible was sometimes read in her master's house, 'but never in the presence of the coloured people'; Diana contrived to hear some of the Bible by carrying in water to wash the feet of family members in the evening just as the reading was taking place. This being discovered, she was forbidden to enter the room whilst the Bible was being read, and driven to the expedient of listening at a place where the threshold of the door was worn down.¹⁴ More tellingly, it was a key demand of rebels in both Swellendam and in Graaff-Reinet, as the VOC ceded to British rule, that missionary instruction to Khoisan cease; the Batavian Governor Janssens would later ban teaching Hottentots to write, as a means of keeping the peace. As we shall see, there were political and economic reasons for Dutch settlers to feel threatened by Khoisan access to Christianity and to mission education. Masters were afraid that baptising their slaves would render them inalienable, for example; Robert Shell argues

10. CA, A50.

11. Compare André du Toit, 'No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideologies', *American Historical Review*, 88, 4 (1983), 920-52.

12. School of Oriental and African Studies LMS archives: London, South Africa correspondence (hereafter LMS-SA), 2/1/A: Van der Lingen to LMS and Rotterdam Missionary Society directors, Graaff-Reinet, 5 Feb. 1802.

13. Here I differ with Gerstner, whose examples suggest that 'family worship' at which slaves and other farm labourers were present was the norm on the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century frontier farm; although joint worship clearly occurred, there are too many counter-examples to admit the generalization until well into the nineteenth century. It is also important that in the ceremonies witnessed by Lichtenstein and cited by Gerstner Khoikhoi and slaves were clearly expected to be present, but not to participate in the worship: as Gerstner comments, 'the Khoi Khoi and slaves were brought to the worship, but not seen as part of God's people'. Gerstner, *Thousand Generation*, 167-170; quote, 169.

14. Barnabas Shaw, *Memorials of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1970; first ed. London, 1820), 237-8.

convincingly that such attitudes were transferred to Khoikhoi and San people fulfilling the function of slaves.¹⁵ Material concerns were nonetheless underpinned by a strong theological conviction that Christianity was the religion of Europeans alone.

A second model of Christianity was the typically late eighteenth-century high church Anglican (and to some extent Moravian) vision of Christianity as an inclusive agent of tranquillity and social order - a vision by no means unique to Anglicanism, and one which would assume increasing importance in evangelical missions. This was the version of Christianity held by many of the British colonial elite based in Cape Town, and it differed considerably from that of the farmers of the interior. Colonial officials were mostly Tory and Anglican, usually of a High Church variety either (like Governor Caledon) oriented towards cautious evangelism within the limits of church order, or (like Governor Macartney) more concerned about offending indigenous sensibilities than garnering converts to Christianity.¹⁶ Both Anglicans and Moravians had episcopal hierarchies and many in both churches believed in the spiritual value of order and submission to authority within the church, reflecting their broader vision of hierarchical social harmony. High Church Anglicans were less intellectually committed to conversion than were evangelicals in general: perhaps belief in the sanctification of place and of the existing order, and in the acquisition of wisdom through education, made the direct communication of the individual with the Holy Spirit of God seem unnecessary, possibly vulgar. Certainly many in the Anglican episcopal hierarchy were disturbed at the disruption of church - and by implication social - order implied by the evangelisation techniques of non-conformists and those whom they perceived as 'enthusiastic' sects springing up from within the church itself. This distaste was fed by a mythologised memory of past European disorders caused by militant Protestantism, including the English civil war and the Puritan Commonwealth. The political position of many British non-conformists was also a delicate issue in the turbulent and mistrustful decade of the 1790s: several founding members of the LMS had cast a cloud over their reputations by supporting the French Revolution in its early days, for example.

A third broad possibility within Christianity was presented by some of the nonconformist British and Dutch missionaries employed by the LMS in its early days: ecstatic communication with God by the individual levelled differences of education and social standing.¹⁷ Again, this is clearly not a necessarily 'evangelical' position; if nothing else, the rapid turn of evangelicalism to social conservatism in early nineteenth century Britain would put the lie to such a claim. The egalitarian possibilities implicit in such typically evangelical claims that God did not need an intermediary, and that book learning did not make for spiritual superiority were seized on more fully in the early enthusiastic days of

15. Robert C-H. Shell, 'Religion, Civil Status and Slavery from Dordt to the Trek', (Paper presented to Conference on 'People, Power and Culture: The History of Christianity in South Africa 1792-1992', University of the Western Cape, Aug. 1992).

16. On a trade mission to China, Macartney had made it a selling point with the Emperor that the British were uninterested in converting the Chinese or in changing their culture. J.L. Cranmer-Byng, ed., *Lord Macartney, Journal of an Embassy to China* (New York, 1962), 167.

17. Bernard Semmel makes this point with regard to British Methodism: Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (n.p., 1973).

the LMS (when most missionaries were working-class) than they would be later. Missionaries at the first LMS station of Bethelsdorp, established in the Eastern Cape by Johannes Van der Kemp, were thus eager as soon as possible to ordain an African clergy, create African missionaries on a par with whites, and put them in charge of stations - an attitude which was reversed in the early nineteenth century. The prejudice inherent in the early 'Bethelsdorp model' was not so much racial as both cultural and in an extreme sense - religious.

Although on the surface of things LMS evangelicalism was more closely allied to the colonial model, which after all explicitly favoured missions, more of its roots were shared with the 'settler' model than has been recognised. During the LMS' first years in South Africa it was led by Van der Kemp, a man soaked in both calvinist theology and Dutch politics. If the Calvinism imported to South Africa by Huguenot refugees and Dutch peasants and soldiers was the product of popular seventeenth-century Calvinism in an 'extreme' guise, then Van der Kemp represented the riposte offered by the subsequent doctrinal moderation of Calvinism towards a more inclusive vision of the covenant. The broad organizational base of the LMS in England was also calvinist - despite the slow collapse of armenian/calvinist distinctions among British evangelicals in the late eighteenth century, and despite the LMS putative ecumenicalism.¹⁸ In fact, it was the coming to the fore of a moderate calvinist position in late eighteenth-century Britain which had unleashed a storm of evangelical energy among calvinist non-conformists: 'new-style' calvinists believed of course in the certain damnation of non-believers, but were spurred to action by belief in God's potential offer of grace to *all* humanity, which was the duty of human beings themselves to make known, rather than trusting to the unseen hand of predestination.¹⁹ Despite the contrast between Afrikaner farmer and LMS views of who was potentially among the elect, both shared specifically calvinist assumptions such as salvation through faith alone, as well as sharing millenarian beliefs, all of which tended to be removed from the world-view of colonial officials.

This is not to argue for a strong link between something called 'Primitive Calvinism' and apartheid theory; Andre du Toit has well addressed some of the fallacies of this position.²⁰ Du Toit does, however, go too far in downplaying the influence of specifically Reformed theology on Dutch and Huguenot settlers. He also misses the resonance of Old Testament imagery, especially that of the 'chosen people' and of Holland as the 'New Israel' in Dutch political thought, profoundly influenced as it was by covenant theology.²¹ In addition to theological communalities, Van der Kemp and his Dutch opponents at the Cape drew in many instances on a shared repertoire of politico-religious rhetoric, applied by Van der Kemp to the Khoisan, and by settlers to themselves. In other words, the debate over Calvinism was also one over the ownership of language. It was thus Van der Kemp even more than the British missionaries who

18. Roger Martin, *Evangelicals United* (n.p., n.d.).

19. Deryk W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sechriean People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 1988), 14-40.

20. Du Toit, 'No Chosen People'.

21. Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (Berkeley, 1988), 93-125

was most poisonous to the Dutch settlers: in more senses than one, the Dutch missionary spoke, stole, and subverted the language of rural Reformed settlers, in a way which could never have been done by Anglican administrators.

All this is to say that religion, and religious rhetoric, permeated many aspects of life in the early modern Cape Colony, and that Christianity in a variety of guises was a central marker of group identity. In this context, it is wrong to talk of state and religion as a unitary whole: the state was underpinned by religion, but equally, opposition to the state was also couched in religious terms. Consequently, Khoisan conversion to Christianity in many ways permitted entry into debate framed in Christian language, rather than predetermining what converts would be obliged to accept as political and economic corollaries. It would be naive to ignore the tremendous destruction of culture which this process involved: the cost of 'entering the debate' was high. It would also be wrong, however, to overlook the 'rule-governed creativity' (to use the anthropologist's illuminating term) with which many individuals tried to adjust to new life circumstances.

II. Christianity and Khoikhoi Spirituality

Early Khoisan interaction with Christianity was shaped by existing Khoisan beliefs. The contours of interaction were also formed by the fact of many years of contact between Khoisan and white settlers, although the exact extent of existing Christian influence is hard to determine. What is important is that Khoisan converts did not receive the gospel in exactly the way in which European missionaries intended, but 'heard' the message in accordance with their own needs and existing situations. At least some converts, for example, seem to have seen missionary activity as a response by a God in whom they already believed to a crisis situation, rather than rejecting all their old beliefs.

The most startling element in the relatively rapid early growth of the Moravian station of Baviaanskloof (later Genadendal) and the LMS station of Bethelsdorp, was that individuals came and asked to join from quite a wide catchment area. News about the missionaries was spread largely by Khoisan individuals, in other words. Later on, even on mission stations, conversions appear to have been made more often by Khoi than by missionaries. In his private diary, George Barker of the LMS recorded in 1816 that at Bethelsdorp he had heard 'five women examined prior to baptism not one of them attributed the beginning of the work of grace in their hearts to the preaching of the Missionaries but to their own people (Hottentots) speaking to them'.²² He made similar observations at Theopolis, remarking with surprise the fact of a convert, Klaas Windvogel, ascribing his first conviction to the preaching of the gospel by a missionary, 'a thing not common among the Hottentots ... This is a singular instance of one of them laying so much stress upon preaching as a means of their being brought to conviction'.²³ Bethelsdorp early developed a small but devoted

22. Diary of George Barker, 10 Feb. 1816, reprinted in Marion Currie, 'The History of Theopolis Mission' (M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1986), Appendix, 8.

23. Currie, 'History of Theopolis', Appendix, 37.

core of Khoi evangelists, including Gerrit Sampson, Cupido Kakkerlak, Hendrik Boezak and Jan Goeyman, as well as Dyani Tshatshu, son of a minor Xhosa chief.²⁴ They would itinerate in the neighbouring areas or as they carried out jobs which brought them far from home; Boezak, for example, was an elephant hunter who would preach at farms which he visited while on hunting expeditions.

Such itinerant evangelization by laypeople was typical of the culture developed by the domestic wing of the LMS at the same time as it was first sending foreign missionaries. In South Africa, as in England, a theology which stressed the immediate action of God upon the hearts of people, rather than the acquisition of knowledge through education, permitted and encouraged preaching by those who would otherwise have been excluded from public religious speech. In both countries, as evangelical churches became more established they tended to try to regulate the speech, and limit the authority, of those who had originally fuelled the expansion of the movement - often in turn setting off new 'prophetic' movements from below.

Indigenous evangelization at the Cape was all the more important because, given the large number of Dutch speakers among the Khoisan, and given the difficulty of click languages for westerners, European missionaries notoriously failed to master Khoisan languages. In talking to the less acculturated they relied on interpreters. Even when a missionary was present, far more of the actual work of evangelization would have been carried out by Khoisan assistants in the earliest days than was the case later on.²⁵

In South Africa, as in England, it is hard to know what messages were spread by these oral processes, which in many ways were out of the control of European missionaries from the beginning. Indeed, the early history of mission Christianity is one of missionaries slowly struggling to bring indigenous versions of Christianity, and indigenous preachers, back under white control after an early period of expansion fuelled by African preachers and bearers of news. Missionary society reports are very one-sided, and lay undue emphasis on missionary successes; nonetheless mission papers do provide useful insights into the process.

On the basis of parallels with the rapid spread of prophetic movements in better documented neighbouring communities, it is not surprising to find evidence of at least one previous movement of religious innovation, spread through oral transmission among the Khoikhoi. In the Western Cape, two years before the second advent of the Moravian Brethren,

a report prevailed among the Hottentots, that the world would soon be destroyed. In consequence of this persuasion they would do no more work for the peasants, killed their cattle, and went everywhere about among their countrymen to spread the report.²⁶

24. On Kakkerlak, cf V.C. Malherbe, 'The Life and Times of Cupido Kakkerlak', *Journal of African History*, 20 (1979).

25. Compare Tilman Dederling's account of the power of the interpreter in the early nineteenth century LMS mission to the Nama: 'Southern Namibia c.1780-1840: Khoikhoi, Missionaries and the Advancing Frontier' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989), 176-8.

26. *Periodical Accounts*, I, 277-8.

The Khoikhoi leader Jan Paarl attempted to lead a revolt against the colonists, persuading his followers that the world would come to an end on 25 October 1788, and that all Christians must be killed by that date.²⁷ This seemingly millenarian cattle-killing movement appears to presage the great cattle sacrifices made by the Xhosa in the 1850s.²⁸ Without further investigation, it is hard to tell the nature of this activity among the Khoikhoi, whether it was influenced by contact with Xhosa prophets, or whether indeed the Khoikhoi influenced the Xhosa. It does seem likely, however, that expectation of the end of the world indicates Christian influence. The apparent permeability of Khoikhoi religiosity at the Cape is striking, as also is readiness to turn outside influences to 'national' ends.

One also notes the *structure* of the spread of religious innovation by rapid oral transmission. In the same journal by Marsveld, Schwinn and Kühnel, the Moravians account of the spread of Christianity has many parallels:

We are already in great want of room, and hear daily of others, who intend to come to hear the Gospel ... The report has spread far and near, and it is become a common saying among the Hottentots, that God has sent men to teach them the way of salvation, and that whoever now refuses to hear and believe, must expect a heavy punishment from God.²⁹

We have two reports, at least, in Moravian records of Khoisan converts who retroactively incorporated the advent of missionaries into an indigenous prophetic tradition. These moves may reflect traditions of people who had had contact with Georg Schmidt's first mission at Baviaanskloof - or perhaps they should be taken as symbolic ways in which to make Christian missions part of the religion of the fathers. Here are the two relevant passages in full. Caffer Magerman commented in 1806 that

When I was quite young my father used often to address us thus: Children, I have a kind of presentiment, as if some time hence good people would come to use heathen from a great distance, who will tell us, that after this life our souls will go either to a bad or a good place. Now if you should hear that such people are come, do not stay here, but go and hear them. Many years after this, therefore, when we heard of Baviaanskloof we remembered the words of our father, and determined not to rest till we came hither.³⁰

Catherine Pik's recollections at Genadendal in 1808 give an even more powerful sense of Khoikhoi conviction of a particular revelation from *Tsunii//Goam* to the Khoikhoi.

27. H.C. Bredekamp and H.E.F. Plüddemann, eds., *The Genadendal Diaries of the Herrnhut Missionaries H.Marsveld, D.Schwinn and J.C. Kühnel*, vol. 1 (1792-1794) (Bellville, 1992), 58, n.15. Russell Viljoen of UWC will discuss this rebellion in his forthcoming M.A. thesis I would like to thank him for information about Jan Paarl.

28. J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57* (Johannesburg, 1989). Russel Viljoen has uncovered other instances of communal cattle-killing among the Xhosa and Khoikhoi between these two examples (Russell Viljoen, personal communication).

29. *Periodical Accounts*, I, 307.

30. *Periodical Accounts*, IV, 227

I remember what my late father used to say, exhorting us children to take notice and follow those people who would once come from a distant country, and show us Hottentots a narrow way, by which we might escape from the fire, and the true *Toiqua* ... When the first teachers came to show us the way, the farmers were very angry, and told us, that they meant to sell us as slaves. But I remembered my father's words, and would not be prevented from moving to Baviaanskloof.³¹

As these comments suggest, Cape Khoikhoi groups possessed independent ideas about a benevolent and powerful deity, who under certain circumstances could intervene in human affairs. They also believed in forces of evil, often enshrined in the form of a destroyer deity, as well as believing in a multitude of unseen forces. Christianity clearly dovetailed with many of these beliefs.

Before proceeding, I should caution that it is difficult to reconstruct a 'pure' nineteenth-century Khoikhoi religion (leaving aside the issues of reification raised by such terminology), because (a) almost all observations available to us were made after Xhosa and Christian contact, and (b) there were many different groups with somewhat different dialects and possibly variant beliefs.³² One cannot assume continuity, especially as Khoikhoi religious systems appear to have been relatively fluid, and as the individual's primary identification seems to have been with his dialect grouping rather than with the Khoikhoi as a whole.³³ The most extensive recent sources are drawn from the Nama; the Cape Khoikhoi, to adopt Elphick's terminology, had ceased to exist as powerful independent cultural entities by the latest the mid-nineteenth century, and no material as sophisticated as Theophilus Hahn's late nineteenth-century 'insider's' account of the Nama exists for these vanished groups.³⁴ Nonetheless, anthropologists do presume broad cultural similarities across Khoikhoi groups, and travellers' accounts do broadly agree. I draw therefore on sources from quite widely separated groups, and this ought to be borne in mind as problematic, if unavoidable.

The *most* widely used name for the divinity by the Khoikhoi is some form of *Tsuni-//Goam*, 'the name by which the Redmen called the infinite', in Hahn's formulation.³⁶ Even many commentators such as Schmidt who denied encountered them was *Thixo*, an adaptation of the Khoikhoi word which indi-

31. *Periodical Accounts*, V, 10.

32. Isaac Schapera distinguishes four major linguistic groupings among the Khoikhoi, each with its own political subdivisions, in addition to various San groupings; he described these as the Cape Hottentots of the western Cape; Eastern Hottentots roughly in the eastern Cape and including the Inqua, Damaqua, and Gonaqua; the Korana, descendants of the Cape Gorahouqua who trekked inland to the vicinity of the Orange River in the seventeenth century; and the Naman, or Nama, of current day Namibia. I. Schapera, *The Khoisan People of South Africa* (London, 1930), 44-9. Richard Elphick further subdivides the 'Cape Khoikhoi' into Eastern Cape Khoikhoi (Gonaqua, Damasqua, and others), Central Cape Khoikhoi (Inqua, Attaqua, Gorachouqua) and Western Cape Khoikhoi (those within 100 miles of Cape Town, to whom almost all seventeenth-century documents refer exclusively). He also adds the Einiqua to Schapera's list. Richard Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1989), xvi-xvii.

33. Among recent scholars, Mathias Guenther characterises 'religion as anti-structure' and argues for the extreme idiosyncrasy of Bushman beliefs. Alan Barnard, in contrast, finds that Guenther underestimates 'the structural uniformity of Khoisan religions when taken collectively and not, as he does, one-by-one'. Guenther, 'Bushman religion and the (non)sense of anthropological theory of religion', *Sociologus*, 29, 102-32; Barnard, 'Structure and Fluidity in Khoisan Religious Ideas', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 18, 3 (1988), 216-36.

34. Theophilus Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam, The Supreme Being of the Khoi-khoi* (London, 1981). Hahn was the son of a missionary who had grown up with the Nama and spoke their language.

35. Schapera, *Khoisan People*, 357-399, discusses Khoikhoi religion as an entity. Cf also Barnard, 'Structure and Fluidity'.

36. Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, 122.

cates the extent of Khoisan influence on the Xhosa in religious matters.³⁷ The term *Tsuni//Goam* contains the sense ‘wounded knee’: *Tsuni//Goam* was believed to have fought against and vanquished the destroyer deity, *//Gaub*, who nonetheless wounded *Tsuni//Goam* in the knee. According to Schapera, *Tsuni//Goam* was ‘essentially the rain God’,³⁸ considered to be the giver of all good things; Hahn’s account seems to me, however, to suggest a broader conception of *Tsuni//Goam* founded in his role as rain-giver but more broadly akin to an abstract monotheistic notion. Beliefs concerning *//Gaub*, on the other hand, were more ambiguous. Alan Barnard claims a variety of possible roles, all connected with evil: *//Gaub*, *G//aub*, *G//amama*, etc. is almost universally among Khoisan peoples a term for the evil god, the evil aspect of the good god, the evil spirits, or the spirits of the dead’. Barnard also cites Schapera with approval: The beliefs regarding *//Gaub* ... are not crystallized into clear-cut conceptions, but are vague, inconsistent, and ambiguous.³⁹ Under missionary influence *//Gaub* became identified with the devil.⁴⁰ Moravian missionaries encountered belief in *Tsuni//Goam*. Schmidt recorded that he asked his interpreter

whether they knew that a great Spirit dwelt above, who had given them their cattle and all that they had. He answered, ‘Yes we know him. He is called *Tui hqua*’. I added, ‘This good Spirit is he alone who can save you, and I am come hither with no other view, than make you acquainted with him’.⁴¹

Dorothy of Genadendal, a ‘skilful midwife’ well known for ‘prudent and orderly behaviour’, informed Genadendal missionaries in 1808 that European travellers were incorrect that the Khoikhoi did not believe in a ‘Divine Being’; on the contrary, ‘Hottentots’, as well as other ‘Heathen nations’

believe on a Supreme Being as the Creator of all things. She said: ‘We have known that a God exists before we came to the land of the Christians’ (by which she meant the snow-mountains on Fish River). ‘We call him *Sita*, which means the God and Father above. If we were in distress, we always called upon him. Only those Hottentots, who have been born and bred among the Christians, know little or nothing of him.’⁴²

This suggests that many Khoi brought up as *de facto* bonded labour in the Western Cape may have been in the position of being cut off from the religion of their forefathers, and yet barred from access to any worship available to, or generated by, the farmers to whose households they were tied. Christian missions may have filled the gap.

37. Janet Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa: A Study of the Origins and Developments of the Traditional Concepts of the Supreme Being* (Cape Town, 1982), 62-3.

38. Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, 385.

39. Barnard, ‘Structure and Fluidity’, 226-7; citation from Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, 396.

40. Hodgson, *God of the Xhosa*, 69.

41. ‘Account of the Voyage of Brother George Schmidt to the Cape of Good Hope, and of his Abode there from 1736 to 1744. Written by himself’, in *Periodical Accounts*, I, 169. See also H.C. Bredekamp, ‘George Schmidt se poging tot transformasie van ’n Overbergse Khoikhoi gemeenskap, 1737-1743’, *Kronos*, 14 (1988), 23.

42. *Periodical Accounts*, IV, 426.

Other comments suggest a stronger sense of continuity between old and new religious systems. Martha Arendse of Zak River testified in London that she was unwilling to believe what the missionary Kicherer told her about Christ until she had consulted God. 'She fall down in the field' (as the missionary Kicherer translated her narrative); 'she cry', 'O God! What your servant say to me, I don't believe it. O tell me if it be your truth.'⁴³ Forms of religious worship remained similar to older customs. Khoisan converts would pray in the bushes at dawn, facing east. This was characteristic of the worship of *Tsuni-//Goam*, considered to be present in the eastern dawn.⁴⁴ There is much evidence of a pre-existing Khoisan custom of direct prayer to God. Hahn, for example, recorded a hymn to *Tsuni-//Goam* in the late nineteenth century, a version of which was sung by many different groups when the Pleiades, a chester of stars, first appeared on the eastern horizon. The invocation began:

Thou, oh Tsui-//goa!
 Thou Father of the Fathers
 Thou our Father
 Let stream - i.e. let rain - the thunder cloud!
 Let please live (our) flocks!
 Let us (also) live please!⁴⁵

The intense personal prayer of many Khoisan converts thus seems to have had deep antecedent roots.⁴⁶

Dreams provided another point of continuity between old and new religious systems. In common with many other African groups - and indeed many European Christians - Khoikhoi and San communities believed that dreams and omens imparted messages from the supernatural to the natural world.⁴⁷ Many British and American evangelicals of the period, especially Methodists, also believed in dreams as a means of divine communication, even if theological leaders disagreed.⁴⁸ The London Missionary Society thus enthusiastically chronicled the dreams of their converts, whereas the Moravians were more sceptical. 'The Hottentots are great dreamers, complained J.P. Kohrhammer of Genadendal testily in 1799, 'and we have much trouble to direct their minds from many

43. *Evangelical Magazine*, Dec. 1803, 595.

44. Hodgson, *God of the Xhosa*, 27. 'Long before daylight, several go into the woods, where approaching in silence (which our Brother Read did frequently) you may daily hear fervent prayers'. LMS-SA 21A/2 Bethelsdorp Annual Account Van der Kemp to LMS, 1802.

45. Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, 58-9.

46. Compare also *Periodical Accounts*, V, 10: Lena Haas testified that her father, although a 'blind heathen', always used to pray with his family. It becomes hard to disentangle Khoi and Dutch religious custom, however.

47. See Schapera, *The Khoisan People* on dreams among the 'Cape Bushmen' and Naron, 200-1, and among the Khoikhoi in general, 393. Compare H.J. Fisher, 'Dreams and Conversion in Black Africa', in N.Levtzion, ed., *Conversion to Islam* (New York, 1979) on the role of dreams in conversion to Islam in West Africa, and, for Christian comparison, Richard Curley, 'Private Dreams and Public Knowledge in a Camerounian Independent Church' and Simon Charsley, 'Dreams in African Churches', both in M.C. Jedrej and Rosalind Shaw, eds., *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa* (Leiden, 1992).

48. E.g. Jeff Butler, *A wash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (London, 1990), 222-3 and 238-9. Even Anglicans sometimes believed in dreams: John Venn, who helped found the British Evangelical Church Missionary Society in 1799, was told of his mother's death in a dream, while his father, Henry Venn, interrupted a trip to return to his dying wife's side, again because of a dream.

deep-seated prejudices, which they have imbibed concerning the interpretation of dreams and visions'.⁴⁹

In many cases, however, dreams and omens were clearly used to validate the adoption of Christianity. I noted two cases above of the advent of missionaries being incorporated 'backwards' into an indigenous prophetic tradition. The first Genadendal missionaries also recorded the case of a man who 'dreamt that three would come to teach them ... They [the Khoikhoi] say that they spoke about it often because they very much wished for it to happen'.⁵⁰

Often, the dreams recorded by missionaries pertained to personal life crises. To offer just one example among many possibilities, Margaret Langoe of Bethelsdorp dreamed in 1804, a few days after her baptism, that she followed Jesus through a desert:

He conducted her to a river, and then said, 'what a privilege is it now, that thou hast taken thy refuge with me?' and then helped her through the river. This moment she started out of her sleep, awaked by a violent pungent pain, she felt in her breast, which soon after proved to be excited by a peripneumony, which in four days [reduced?] her on the brink of the grave.

During Langoe's illness she saw a black spider climbing up by a thread towards the roof.

She asked the Lord What this meant? and he answered that she in the same manner was to be taken up to him! This determined her to reflect upon the vileness of her heart, but found herself assured that Christ would give her strength to ascend to him by the thread of her faith fixed in heaven. She then ordered her arm rings to be taken from her wrist, and after they were made narrower, to put them on the arms of her three little children.

She said that she was not worried about her children, because God had told her He would give them to Van der Kemp to take care of. Having previously declared that she wanted to go to Christ, she then decided that she did not after all want to die, and miraculously recovered.⁵¹ It is suggestive that a spider brings news of Langoe's death: in both Khoikhoi and San cosmology, animals brought information of the death of relatives and friends, as well as of one's own death. Here, a Christian message, brought through 'traditional' structures, eases Langoe through a time of crisis

It is further noteworthy that Langoe interprets her own dreams and visions, rather than taking them to an intermediary. One would want to know more about whether or not Khoikhoi culture accorded authority to interpreters of dreams in an organised fashion: in other words, were dreams a personal experi-

49. *Periodical Accounts*, II, 368.

50. Bredekamp and Plüddemann, *Genadendal Diaries*, 11 Sept. 1793, 134.

51. LMS-SA 24/E, Bethelsdorp Annual Report Van der Kemp to LMS, 1804.

ence, however open to public discussion, or were they embedded in a power network? Knowing this would help one to understand what roles missionaries were taking over. My hunch is that dream interpretation was only weakly linked to existing authority networks, such as those formed by healers: dreams seem to have been perceived as a means of direct communication between the individual and the supernatural world. Consequently they were available as a spiritual technique which could be used across what a western missionary would have perceived as doctrinal lines. Certainly, missionary accounts of the dreams of converts frequently suggest that converts saw these dreams as comprehensible messages from God or Jesus, or as predictions of the future, which did not require further interpretation by designated experts. On the other hand, it must be added that converts obviously reported at least some dreams to missionaries, and sometimes asked advice about how best to fill their prescriptions. It is also striking that converts sometimes dreamed that *missionaries* were giving them messages. One woman at Genadendal

dreamed that we had told her that when she died - which she believes won't be long now - we were going to give her a letter which would be bound underneath her head, and when she came to heaven she should give this letter to her child. This child was buried four days ago and was still feeding at her breast. Her child would take the letter to the Father in heaven.

The diarists added that '[t]hey dream about us everywhere and tell us strange things. But in their dreams we usually direct them to the dear Saviour'.⁵² There are many levels of mediation at work in a dream such as this one about a written letter to God, delivered by the spirit of a dead child. Even here, however, the authority roles are relatively ambiguous and the lines between Christianity and earlier Khoi beliefs are blurred. The missionaries provide the power of the written word, but it is the dead Khoi child who brings the letter to God, possibly illustrating the persistence of the Khoikhoi belief in the mediation of the recently dead between visible and invisible realms.

Other dreams touched directly on conversion experiences, and thus served an overtly integrative function. As late as 1975, Jane Sales remarked that she knew of 'coloured' churches where young people in catechism classes were asked if they had a vision or dream to authenticate their conversions, and where old people talked of the days in which the church was strong as the time when dreams were commonly part of people's Christian experience.⁵³

Side by side with continuities such as the spiritual use of dreams and omens, dualism, prayer and worship techniques, must be placed examples of converts abjuring elements of their old religion. The missionary James Read's Khoi wife, Elizabeth Valentyn, may have deliberately violated taboos associated with birth, without the observer Van der Kemp understanding the implications of

52. Bredekamp and Plüddemann, *Genadendal Diaries*, 186.

53. Jane Sales, *Mission Stations and the Coloured Communities of the Eastern Cape 1800-1852* (Cape Town, 1975), 40-1.

her actions: she did not undergo purification rituals or observe a period of seclusion, but ran to the river immediately after giving birth, possibly proving that she was not *!nau* and could safely have contact with cold water.⁵⁴ Cupido Kakkerlak used to scatter twigs and stones placed by believers on the graves of *Heits-eibib*.⁵⁵ Moravian missionaries noticed, without understanding why, that early arrivals at Baviaanskloof refrained from dancing at night - although certainly at Bethelsdorp and probably elsewhere all-night sessions of communal hymn-singing and mutual exhortation would become an integral part of Christian worship.⁵⁶ In all these cases converts symbolically rejected older beliefs without missionary direction: many missionaries were simply too ignorant of Khoikhoi and San customs to know how to instruct their converts. An internal set of distinctions were clearly being made, however. The elderly 'Bushman' Jacob Adams of Genadendal was quite clear about distinctions between Christian customs and those of his boyhood. After relating through an interpreter several San and Khoikhoi beliefs such as that in the supernatural sympathy of individuals with particular animals, Adams refused a missionary request for more information, saying 'that he did not like to remember and relate such bad things, having at his baptism renounced the devil and all his works, and therefore wished to have nothing more to do with his old customs'.⁵⁷ Distinctions were crystallized in the contrast between the songs of Jesus, and Hottentot and Bushmen's songs: before his conversion, Hendrik Boezak said he had two hearts, at war between them. The violin became a particularly potent symbol of conflict: healers used in their ceremonies, while we have several examples of converts, abjuring all use of it, without missionaries understanding why.⁵⁸ To show their rejection of Boezak's preaching, Khoisan farm workers came to where he had laid himself down in a hut, and they played on the violin and danced about him. Enraged, Boezak 'was not satisfied until he had broken the violin to pieces and dispersed these disturbers of his rest.'

It is risky to generalise about very different groups and individuals, especially given that these individuals in fact came from fairly diverse ethnic backgrounds. There does, however, seem to be a general pattern to testimony about the relationship between Christianity and previous religious beliefs among mission converts. In contrast to the mostly entirely sceptical Nguni, many Khoisan attracted to Christianity at the turn of the century tended to see Christianity as a particular revelation from a God in whom they believed already, whom they already worshipped and whom many thought could and did intervene in the affairs of humanity. What was new was a set of ideas about Jesus. These beliefs

54. LMS-SA 2/4/E, Bethelsdorp Annual Report Van der Kemp to LMS, 1804 Bethelsdorp Annual Report; Winnifred Hoernle, 'Certain Rites of Transition and the Conception of !Nau among the Hottentots', in Peter Carsten, ed., *The Social Organization of the Nama and Other Essays by Winnifred Hoernle: Centenary Volume* (Johannesburg, 1985), 57-74; Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, 263; J.G. Grevenbroek *An Elegant and Accurate Account of the African Race Living Round the Cape of Good Hope, Commonly Called Hottentots*, in I. Schapera, ed., *The Early Cape Hottentots* (Van Riebeeck Society no.14: Cape Town, 1933), 202-5.

55. John Campbell, *Travels in South Africa* (London, 1812), 82; on the graves of Heits-eibib, Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, 372-4 and 385-6, and Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, 112-3.

56. *Periodical Accounts*, I, 307.

57. *Periodical Accounts*, IV, 423.

58. E.g. LMS-SA 3/5/B, Read to LMS, 30 Aug. 1808.

were particularly clearly expressed by western Cape converts. This raises the possibility that beliefs about God may well have been influenced by long contact with European settlers and possibly even by earlier contact with Schmidt, whose teachings were kept alive by Vehettge Tikkuie ('Helena') and others of his converts. It also suggests, however, that the Khoikhoi may have held religious beliefs, such as those in a creator and a destroyer divinity, which dovetailed with evangelical Christian beliefs more readily than did Nguni systems.

On the other hand, a number of converts, particularly those who became most active in the new religion, such as Valentyn and Kakkerlak, applied Christian dualism to their own old customs, classifying some as evil and as the work of the devil. The missionaries established the dualist distinction, but converts supplied the content. How far older beliefs in //Gaunab themselves permitted this dualism remains to be determined.

III. Religion and Politics

The above comments have been made in a political vacuum. It is of course impossible to explain why adherence to Christianity, or residence on a mission station, seemed attractive without taking into account the profound political upheavals occurring in the Cape, as well as the struggles for power occurring between ethnic groups. This is particularly true of the foundation of Bethelsdorp by politically activist missionaries, in an area which is now on the fringes of Port Elizabeth, but was then in a turbulent frontier zone. We also have more data about the political situation of this station, precisely because of the extended conflicts in the region, generating documents as wars in the flesh came to be fought out on paper as well. Thus the political ramifications of Khoisan claims to membership in the Christian community are hinted at in the records of Genadendal, but brought out much more clearly in the uniquely violent circumstances of Bethelsdorp.

There is no space here to recount the fascinating early history of Bethelsdorp, which has already been told elsewhere.⁵⁹ Suffice it to say that the pioneer missionary, the Dutch philosopher, ascetic, theologian, doctor, soldier, Orangist and general eccentric, Johannes Van der Kemp, found himself inadvertently acting as go-between in negotiations between Khoi rebels and the government. He persuaded several rebels to abandon war in exchange for land and the promise of future good treatment. The foundation of Bethelsdorp was thought of by Van der Kemp as part of the package: he was under the erroneous impression that the government had promised amnesty and a safe passage to any rebel or former farm-worker who wished to abandon a bandit life over the Fish River and come to Bethelsdorp. Presumably because the station weakened the Khoi war effort, a number of rebels were hostile to it, and even attempted to destroy the nascent settlement (then based at Botha's Farm) and to assassinate Van der Kemp

59. Susan Newton-King and V.C. Malherbe, eds., *The Khoikhoi Rebellion in the Eastern Cape (1799-1803)*; Ido H. Enklaar, *Life and Work of J.Th. Van der Kemp, 1747-1811: Missionary, Pioneer and Protagonist of Racial Equality in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1988); Sales, *Mission Stations*; Elizabeth Elbourne, 'To Colonize the Mind': Evangelical Missionaries in Britain and the Eastern Cape, 1790-1837', (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1992).

should be added that he thought the Khoi war effort was hopeless and that hold-outs were doomed to be hunted down.

In any case, the station was hardly politically innocent. Within a period of several years after the third frontier war a number of former war captains had come to live at Bethelsdorp. Resentment against the station persisted for many years among the local Dutch-speaking settlers, who claimed that Bethelsdorp was harbouring criminals. This resentment was particularly virulent because the Khoisan had flocked to the British standard as imperial soldiers arrived and began to put down a rebellion against VOC, and subsequently British, rule among malcontented Dutch-speaking settlers. Throughout the third frontier war, Van der Kemp was vitriolically opposed to 'boer' interests, claiming that God was on the side of the indigenous peoples. He transposed Dutch calvinist rhetoric about the nation as Israel onto the 'Hottentot nation', for example, using a language which ran parallel to that employed in a different cause by his pro-Batavian cousin, the revolutionary predikant Francis Adriaan Van der Kemp. As is well known, although the details have been clouded by generations of myth-making, a number of Bethelsdorp missionaries remained involved in political activity even before the advent of the famous John Philip: saliently, Read and Van der Kemp attempted to establish a circuit court of appeal in the frontier districts to bring to justice local farmers who had murdered or otherwise abused Khoisan workers, including carrying out revenge killings for involvement in the 1799-1802 rebellion. For all these reasons, Bethelsdorp played an ambiguous but compelling role in Khoisan politics of the period: it began by being strongly opposed by some on political grounds, and as fervently embraced by those who saw it as a way out of a debilitating set of relationships with local farmers. Later the station garnered further support because of the anti-Afrikaner stances of many of its missionaries.

Many more people attempted to come to Bethelsdorp than the local farmers, through their control of the local administrative apparatus, permitted to come. There were strong economic reasons for Khoi adherence to a station and for white opposition. The core quarrel running through all others was over control of Khoi labour and mobility: stations were a threat because they seemed to threaten a supply of labour to white farms conceived of as slave-like and bonded to particular places or people.

At the most basic level, the community function of the station ran parallel to that filled by missionary institutions in less damaged societies: at the beginning people tended to come to it if they were marginal or outcast, in need of concrete protection, rather than because they necessarily wanted to convert. At the outset, Bethelsdorp functioned as a political asylum from the aftermath of war. It continued to fulfil the role of haven for people escaping difficult situations with local farmers. The Khoi man whose actions precipitated the Boer rebellion of Slagter's Nek tried to escape to Bethelsdorp in 1816, for example.⁶⁰ A mission station might also be used as a base from which to seek legal redress

60. Diary of George Barker, 9 Jan. 1816, 7.

in a crisis, however small the chance of obtaining justice. Two weeks after the above case, George Barker witnessed the arrival at Bethelsdorp of a 'Hottentot' woman:

she had resided a long time with a certain Boer and had co-habited with a slave of his, by whom she had several children. The Boer had driven her away & deprived her of the man with whom she had so long lived that he might take a slave woman to wife, that the Boer might gain slaves (The children of the Hottentot being free). Her children were obtained by the Boer and apprenticed after the usual manner.

Four days later this woman travelled to the Landdrost to complain, in company with another woman 'who had been shamefully beaten having large wounds on her back from the sambok'. When, however, 'these poor creatures arrived at the drostdy, the Landdrost ordered the people who had accompanied them from Bethelsdorp to return and put the women into prison without giving them a hearing.

In addition to being short-term shelters, mission stations also had long-term attractions as a means to improve economic and social status. Bethelsdorp, and later Theopolis and Hankey, provided a longterm economic base from which a Khoi labourer in the Eastern Cape could hire him or herself out if financially pressed (as almost all the inhabitants of mission stations were forced to do in the early years), with the chance of escaping serfdom. The nub of the problem was the assumed incapacity of a Khoi to own land, enshrined in colonial custom if not in law. In theory all the land of the Uitenhage and Graaff-Reinet districts had been divided up among white farmers; in practice, farmer's 'places' were so large that groups of Khoisan survived in the interstices of white property, castigated as bandits at the time and more or less ignored by history. All such independent existence, however, theoretically constituted trespass and vagrancy. The LMS was the nominal owner of all mission station land; inhabitants might have custodial use, but could not alienate land. Thus, if a Khoi were nominally registered at a missions station, even if very rarely living there, he or she had a place to which legally to return on the expiry of a contract, rather than being given a maximum of three days in which to find a new employer and place of residence. Without an attested residence under the direction of a white person, and a pass signed by a white indicating the destination and purpose of his journey, a Khoi or free black on the road could be arrested by any white, thrown into jail, and hired out to a white employer at the whim of local officialdom.

In addition, having a legal base meant that a farm worker could leave his family and any cattle he might have at the mission station while he was away doing longterm contract labour. He was also enabled to take short-term contracts. Both of these capacities lessened the master's leverage; cattle might otherwise be impounded for debts of food and drink incurred by the farm worker, for example, while children born and brought up on a farm became 'apprenticed' to the farmer until the age of twenty-five or eighteen. Consequently an entire family could become immobilized on a farm. On the other hand, a farm worker's hire often

included some maintenance for his family if his wages were insufficiently high to buy them food;⁶² it was therefore an ideal situation for them to receive the maintenance without the legal ramifications of a longterm stay on a farm. In the 1810s and 1820s Bethelsdorp always had a much higher percentage of women, children and elderly people actually living at the institution, while the bulk of young men went out to work at a distance in a small-scale precursor of the migrant labour system of the so-called 'homelands'. In a further parallel with the bantustans, the dependent population left at the station experienced immiseration because the land was relatively infertile and the station had few productive resources. This group was heavily dependent on the earnings of the male household head; when men were conscripted to perform public labour at very low wages or forced into the army for no pay during wartime, their families starved.⁶³ Nonetheless, these families clearly chose the uncertain economic situation of the mission station, which offered a greater shot at economic well-being accompanied by greater risk, to the loss of independence as de facto bonded farm labour.

For those who were in a position to grasp economic opportunities, especially those who believed in material accumulation, mission stations could offer a minimal and precarious prosperity. The San convert Andries Pretorius told John Campbell in 1813

that when he came to Bethelsdorp he had four oxen, and has now ten and a waggon, and one horse, besides four stolen by the Caffres. He stated, that from childhood until he joined the Institution in 1806, his thirty-third year, he had served a boor, for which long service he had received one heifer and six ewes. Being asked how he had four oxen when he came to the settlement, since he had received only one heifer from the boor; these oxen, he said, he procured by making iron rings at leisure hours in the evening. In one year at the Institution he earned two hundred dollars, with which he purchased a waggon from his former master. He has large fields and a plough; and provides for a wife and eight children of his own, and two orphans.⁶⁴

Campbell investigated colonial charges that the inhabitants of Bethelsdorp were 'idle, lazy - that they did no thing', and that individuals had brought some 6,000 head of cattle to the station and had reduced them, through improvidence and idleness (i.e. consuming and selling their stock) to 2 000. Presenting the colonial Khoisan as, on the contrary, effective economic and therefore moral agents, Campbell pointed out that Bethelsdorp had extensive cultivated fields hidden from the eye of the visitor, and that cattle ownership had risen in the last few years from 218 to 2 206, of which very few were slaugh-

61. Diary of George Barker, 25 Jan. 1816, 7.

62. CA, A559, 'Statement of Missionary Grievances'.

63. CA, A559, Statement of Missionary Grievances. On hardships faced by the dependents of military conscripts, LMS-SA 5131A: James Read, Answers upon Mr. Thom's conversations with the Missionaries at Bethelsdorp, Cape Town, 25 Jan. 1814 on the 1811-12 war; Public Record of fice, London, CO 414, vol.9, 610, John Philip to Rufane Donkin, 28 April 1821, on the 1818-19 Fifth Frontier War.

64. Campbell, *Travels*, 89.

tered for food.⁶⁵ People were therefore coming to Bethelsdorp in a state of poverty and using it as a base to acquire stock. In sum, mission inhabitants were for the most part extremely poor during the period of Dutch hegemony in the Eastern Cape, before the advent of the 1820 settlers. Residence at Bethelsdorp nonetheless offered a better economic bet than a hand to hand existence as a fugitive. It also provided some guarantee of independence, particularly for men made vulnerable by the possession of families and stock.

The ways in which mission stations could be used to economic advantage changed under the British, as the economy of the Cape became more market oriented. It rapidly became the British who posed the greater threat to Khoisan economic well-being, in many ways into which there is not space to go at the moment. The crucial point is that quarrels still tended to be about the control of non-white labour and mobility, particularly as local administrators sought to limit Khoisan economic options by imposing large cash tax burdens as well as obligations to perform extremely ill-paid public labour. By the 1820s and 1830s, the British were trying to use Christianity and ideas about 'civilization' to make the Khoisan voluntarily discipline themselves in order to fulfil certain labour roles in a liberalised market economy.

As I have argued above, however, in those early years of the century with which we are primarily concerned many rural Dutch speakers, not themselves culturally committed to ideas of 'work discipline' and market forces, saw Khoisan access to Christianity as more threatening than helpful: it turned status relationships upside down, in a hierarchically-organised society. Religious change and political struggle thus came together in contestation over the ownership of Biblical texts and the social implications of allegiance to Christianity.

Farmers would go to considerable lengths to prevent their farm workers from preaching, or from becoming Christians. In the Eastern Cape in 1803 or 1804, for example, a 'licentious' man called Jocham, for whom the missionaries feared when he went into service at Graaff-Reinet, instead assembled the heathen together residing there and made known unto them the Gospel of Christ. The 'Christians' were very displeased and had Jocham and his assistant Abraham thrown into 'the cage', where Abraham was flogged. Both were forbidden to preach. The district veldcornet, however, refused to countenance this and ordered the two released, whereupon they began again and 'numbers attend them'.⁶⁶ At some later point before 1809, Jocham was deliberately given a false pass by a farmer at Elephant's River. He was taken up as a vagrant, given several floggings for preaching to Khoi farm workers, and thrown into gaol for two years. He was finally released by the Landdrost of Swellendam, and found his way back to Bethelsdorp - where he regretted the spiritual decline which he thought had taken place whilst he had been imprisoned.⁶⁷

In other cases, initial opposition by farmers to Khoi preaching or access to services was overcome; sometimes, Khoi preachers found themselves filling

65. LMS-SA 5121B: Campbell to LMS, Bethelsdorp, 1

66. LMS-SA 2/4/E: Annual Report of Bethelsdorp, 1804.

67. LMS-SA 4/1/E: Annual Report of Bethelsdorp, 1809.

the void created by the lack of regular priests, while others were invited to serve as schoolmasters to white children. On one occasion, Hendrik Boezak was on a tour of farms where he had previously evangelised,

in which he found great opposition, and in one place in particular where it was told him that it was the intention of the farmers to kill him, accusing him of persuading their people to go away. No sooner did he hear this than he entered the house against the persuasion of mother and wife, who advised him to run away. He attacked his enemies in the name of the Lord, and continued till he had gained the victory. They confessed their guilt, and acquiesced in his words as truth, and gave him full liberty to instruct the people. He gained such an influence that they were afterwards afraid to drink a dram in his presence.⁶⁸

As these competitions imply, Khoi preachers and converts contested both explicitly and implicitly the settler model of the racial exclusivity of Christianity - and sometimes broached the defenses of resistant white settlers. A Mozambiquan slave named Sapphire held prayer meetings on the farm of a settler. Initially furious, the man's wife was convinced by his speaking and invited him to hold regular meetings in the house.

Read reported that she 'told me with many tears in her eyes what the Lord had done for her, and begged to be informed if there was that difference between them and the Heathens as the Christians insisted upon for that she was convinced from the conversion of Sapphire that God were no respecter of the person'.⁶⁹

Tensions around such activity were most intense at times of open conflict over other issues. At the Tarka River in 1799 as Van der Kemp travelled towards the court of Nggika and as tensions built towards the outbreak of war, the Khoikhoi to whom Van der Kemp was preaching were reluctant to worship together with their masters. Instead, they came to his room every night and sang psalm 118, which they had memorised:

'... The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? ... They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them ... The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner' (verses 6,11,22).⁷⁰

Once Van der Kemp and Read had begun ministering to a collection of Khoi refugees from the war at the village of Graaff-Reinet, white settlers fought against such appropriation of biblical sanction. At a missionary meeting in

68. LMS-SA 4/1/E: Annual Report of Bethelsdorp, 1809.

69. LMS-SA 4/3/C: Annual Report of Bethelsdorp, 1810.

70. LMS-SA 1/2: Dr. Van der Kemp's Journal, cited in Newton-King, *Rebellion of the Khoi*, 24.

Graaff-Reinet, the Khoisan congregation sang Psalm 134, 'Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord. Colonists in the congregation responded by singing verses 4 to 10 of Psalm 74, beginning 'thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregation', and concluding 'O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?'"⁷¹ Belligerents besieging the village added to their list of demands that Khoi use of the church be discontinued, the seats and walls of the church be scrubbed clean, and a black cloth be hung over the pulpit as a sign of mourning. Such contestation over the ownership of Christianity would continue for many years. In 1812, for example, James Read would preach a public sermon the evening before judicial hearings opened at George as part of the so-called 'Black Circuit', on Psalm 74 verse 20, 'have regard for thy covenant': here he called on the covenant of God with his people in the lands of cruelty,

[r]eferred to this country, to the circumstances that had brought us here to the Drosdy, observed the appointment of God in ordering the sword of justice to punish in this life what the Gospel does not restrain, acknowledging the goodness of God, the care of Government and the happy prospect of liberty to proceed from the resent circumstances.⁷²

The appeal of mission Christianity in such charged circumstances is evident: it was important for the Khoisan to be able to claim their own covenant with God, and to proclaim that God was on the side of the oppressed. Even at less dramatic moments, however, it seems to me that the type of missionary activity by Khoisan and slave preachers which we have been discussing above was also politically important. It implicitly opposed an alternate discourse of Christianity to that upheld by many white settlers. Khoi preachers upheld a Christianity of equality, arguing for access to the moral community through grace alone, rather than through skin colour. By becoming missionaries among dependents of the patriarchal household, or even to the patriarch himself, Khoi preachers were also establishing an alternate source of authority to that of the white patriarch. They were writing themselves into a narrative which had previously excluded them, and asserting authority through one of the few avenues left open to them.

Let me conclude this essay, then, by suggesting the importance of narrative in weaving together the political and the religious. This article has focussed on mythic belief in the early period of missionary expansion among the Khoisan, rather than on the more dramatic events of the 1820s and 1830s, when political issues such as civil equality and the abolition of vagrancy legislation were fought over all the way to London by Africans attempting to use to their own advantage the communication networks made available by missionary societies and by the fact of a worldwide evangelical community. Even religious myth can be seen to be political, without being reducible to politics. Rather, stories can hold many meanings in them at once: they can be about self-worth, or self-abnegation, for example, as well as being about God.

71. Enklaar, Van der Kemp, 112.

72. LMS-SA S/I/F: James Read, Annual Report of Bethelsdorp, 1812.

Conversion narratives, for example, were both a literary genre with rhetorical conventions and a stereotypical storyline, and replete with individual variation. Many Khoisan converts adopted the missionary evaluation of their old economic lifestyle as worthless and empty, while others, as we have seen, resisted such categorization and interference. Those in the 1830s who argued that the 'Hottentot' nation was rejuvenating itself often drew on the conventions of a conversion narrative: the sinner underwent a passage from evil to good, via the acquisition of self-knowledge through God's intervention. The convention of an evil early life, i.e. of individual guilt - characteristic of English conversion narratives as much as of those of South African converts, were all too easily transposed into an affirmation of *collective* guilt. Nonetheless, such narratives also provided a means for the expiation of anxiety and of personal guilt. Many Khoisan individuals had been the victims of brutal violence and enforced servitude; they had also been forced, or had chosen, to participate in violence themselves, in doubtless very traumatising ways. Many had seen the theft of their land within their lifetimes. The evangelical conversion narrative offered a language about overcoming guilt and adversity, at the expense of acknowledging guilt and 'accepting' it as constitutive of one's being and society. Thus the paradox of evangelical salvation: it creates a climate of shame, while offering an immediate way out. People for whom evangelical conversion narratives are not a standard part of their cultural vocabulary, and thus do not experience guilt in a sense as the necessary precursor to the overcoming of the emotion, are perhaps susceptible to evangelical conversion only if they want change badly enough to generate shame about their past. If this is true, it does not mean, however, that such people are merely passive victims of forces beyond their control.

To illustrate some of these themes, I shall close with the life story of one convert, Andries Stoeffels, who ought to be better known than he is for having travelled to London in 1835 to testify before Thomas Fowell Buxton's parliamentary 'Aborigines' Committee. He was a Gonaqua Khoi, born east of the Fish River in or around the 1770s, who witnessed the conquest of his land by the Dutch. He entered into service with Dutch farmers. As a boy he participated in violent Dutch attacks against San groups: as James Read recalled, Stoeffels 'had been an *agter ryder* to a Dutch Boor (a boy riding behind the master with a large gun upon his shoulder, especially on commando) and had witnessed many scenes that affected him through life.'⁷³ At some point Stoeffels had accumulated cattle, the marker of wealth in Khoikhoi society. They were, however, stolen from him by his Dutch employer, leaving Stoeffels only with his 'little dog'.⁷⁴ Between 1799 and 1802 Stoeffels participated in the abortive Khoi uprising against the Dutch. He was injured in battle; later he was captured by the Xhosa and taken to Xhosaland, where he learnt Xhosa and came to serve as an interpreter. All of these experiences marked Stoeffels: 'like Moses', commented Read, 'he felt severely the degraded state of his countrymen as having lost their country, their property, and their liberty'.

73. James Read, senior, 'The African Witness: or, a Short Account of the Life of Andries Stoeffels', published with Josiah Bassett, *The Life of a Vagrant, or the Testimony of an Outcast* (London, 1850), 109.

74. CA A559.

Stoeffels first came into direct contact with mission Christianity whilst acting as an interpreter for a Xhosa chief visiting Bethelsdorp. He experienced missionary preaching as an effort to instil guilt:

the Missionary came in and began to read, then to talk to the people, then to scold. He concluded that some of them had done something very bad, and had been called forward to receive a public reprimanding, and that the book contained a list of their crimes; and he was looking round to see who they might be that were thus exposed; but it very soon came home to him. He was very much surprised, and quite at a loss to know how it was that the Missionary seemed thoroughly acquainted with all the actions of his life and very heart.

Stoeffels accused his cousin, who lived at Bethelsdorp, of having denounced him. The cousin claimed that the word of God always appeared so that it exposed the actions and the very thoughts of men. Stoeffels was perturbed and, seeking purity, spent time alone. He could find 'no rest' in his old life.

He then went among the farmers, where there was dancing and merriment; but was pursued by his conscience; he returned to Bethelsdorp; but his convictions were deepened by the word of God, and often had he to rise from his seat and run out of the chapel to the bushes and thickets, weeping aloud, and spending hours and even days from men, praying to God for mercy.

This continued for two or three years, until 'light broke in upon his mind, that he understood the way of salvation through a crucified Saviour'.⁷⁵

Stoeffels then became an enthusiastic advocate of education for the Khoisan, and of national salvation through westernization and the adoption of Christianity. On the heels of the failure of resistance through political violence, Stoeffels turned to Christianity. It provided a language for the expiation of guilt and for the rejuvenation of Khoikhoi society, at the expense of typecasting the Khoikhoi as degraded, and their culture as a void. Before the House of Commons, for example, Stoeffels testified that the 'Hottentots were suffering from British economic oppression, as badly or worse than they had suffered from violence at the hands of the Dutch. Nonetheless, Christianity provided hope.

My nation is poor and degraded, but the word of God is their stay and their hope. The word of God has brought my nation so far, that if a Hottentot young lady and an English young lady were walking with their faces from me, I would take them both to be English ladies ... We are coming on; we are improving; we will soon all be one. The Bible makes all nations one. The Bible brings wild man and civilized together. The

75. Read, 'African Witness', 110-11.

Bible is our light. The Hottentot nation was almost exterminated, but the Bible has brought the nations together, and here am I before you.

The terrible ambiguity of even the most well-meaning mission station underlies these words: Stoeffels inadvertently underscores the problem of any culture relying on another for all its positive images and self-respect. Nonetheless, and despite these alarming words, conversion clearly served a reintegrative function for Stoeffels. On the most mundane level, it permitted Stoeffels to accumulate more wealth and prestige at Bethelsdorp and Kat River certainly than he had had as a farm worker, and probably as a Xhosa dependent. More profoundly, it permitted Stoeffels to work for the rejuvenation of his people and to remain politically active. Whatever the effectiveness of his activity, it provided hope and a sense of purpose.

In many ways, then, Khoisan individuals 'used' mission stations and mission Christianity, even in situations which did not appear overtly political. Many of these uses are not recoverable by the historian, but some can be glimpsed. Whatever the profound ambiguities and pain of that usage, it is important for the historian to try to untangle this complex process. Above all, I think it is useful to look for complex relationships between religion and politics, and not to write off complicated individual responses under excessively broad rubric