



Plate 3 Herrnhut, Saxony, in the nineteenth century. Source: Iert von Ud Schulze, *Die Brüdermission in Wort und Bild*.

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THE SOCIAL & POLITICAL THEOLOGY
OF WESTERN CAPE MISSIONS C.1800-C.1860

- ROBERT ROSS -

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life.¹

The 30 November 1834 was a Sunday. On that day, the Revd Isaac Bisseux, missionary of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society in the Wagenmakers Valley (Wellington), preached a sermon to the above text. His congregation comprised mostly slaves. On the following day, they were to be formally emancipated, although they would still suffer four years of so-called apprenticeship, under much the same conditions. This text, no doubt, rose easily to the minds of many missionaries working among the slaves, as did the elaboration which Bisseux gave to it. As he reported:

I took the opportunity of instructing them on the glorious liberty of the children of God and of the fruits which accompanied it. I explained to them that these were liberation from sin, and remarked to them that this moral and entirely spiritual liberation far outweighed that which the King of England had just granted them, and that, if they were unaware of this, they were greatly to be pitied. I told them that if they allowed themselves to be delivered of their sins by Jesus Christ, the civil liberty which they were about to receive would become the greatest of temporal goods, while, in the contrary case, this very liberty, so excellent in itself, would become a pernicious gift if, abandoned to themselves, they persisted in following their evil desires.²

These sentiments, unexceptionable in themselves for a missionary, are of a piece with Bisseux's whole ministry. A few years earlier he had written of his work among 'the slaves of Satan and of men'. What he could offer them, he felt, was 'a salutary remedy for all their ills, which teaches them to suffer with patience and to resign themselves to their lot and which holds out to them, after a life of miseries, a future of joy and happiness, a rest eternal in the bosom of the Saviour who has called them to him'.³ Not all of his audience accepted this message, of course. Many, Bisseux noted, were still

'abandoned in great vice and showed no sign of a spiritual life'. But there were some who saw the comfortable words of the Gospel of St Matthew—'Come unto me all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you'—as applying to them, and saw in this the escape from their slavery which they could not achieve physically.

CHRISTIANITY AS SOLACE AND AS WEAPON

Bisseux's message, of resignation to one's fate in this world and of hope for glory in the next, is an essential part of all versions of Christianity. In this way, Christianity gives its believers the strength to endure the individual and social miseries to which all are subject, in greater or lesser degree. However, throughout its history, Christianity has also provided its believers with the justification, the power and the courage with which to combat injustice and unrighteousness, as well as the weapons with which to do so. Everywhere, the tension between the two facets of Christianity, as solace and as weapon, has been a major source of its creativity in its confrontation with the world.

Ever since the end of the eighteenth century, with the arrival of Dr Johannes van der Kemp, the message of the social gospel has been a characteristic of at least some sections of South African Christianity, even if it has never been as widespread as its proponents would have wished. Indeed, the very logic of the missionary project, the total reformation of the personalities of those trapped in sin, required, where necessary, intervention to help create a society in which this would be possible (see Elbourne, Chapter 4). This could lead to attempts to impose on African societies, those norms and values of nineteenth-century Europe which were thought to be essential to a Christian life. Nevertheless, the same impulse which gave rise to this arrogant cultural imperialism, as it has been seen,⁴ also fuelled attacks on the structure of colonial society when this was thought inimical to a Christian life. There was no difference between the missionary undermining of a Xhosa ruler's power and the denunciations of the actions of a British colonial governor and his underlings, even though our late twentieth-century estimation of these activities might be very different. The latter actions led to the vilification of some missionaries, above all Van der Kemp, Dr John Philip and James Read, by colonial rulers and by many settlers, both English and Dutch.

There is a curious spatial asymmetry in the protests of missionaries and their converts against the actions of the Cape government and the institutions of Cape society. In general, these were concentrated on the position of the nominally free Khoisan of the eastern Cape, rather than on that of the slaves, or, indeed, the Khoisan of the west. Missionaries did not, of course, condone slavery. Van der Kemp, in one version of his unpublished autobiography,

made what was probably the most scathing attack ever on the Cape version of this peculiar institution, probably on the basis of testimony from his ex-slave wife.⁵ All the same, as Watson has recently pointed out, even if his explanations for at least the religious background to this are unsatisfactory,⁶ the anti-slavery movement at the Cape was conspicuous for its feebleness. In part, the relative avoidance of the issue of slavery among mission publicists at the Cape was for definite tactical reasons. The fight for the emancipation of slaves within the British Empire was carried out largely in the Caribbean. John Philip was able to awaken the interest of evangelicals in the British Parliament, notably Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, in issues of Khoisan rights, largely because they both saw that gains could be made without exciting the ire of the West Indian interest. Later, statements of principle could be exported to the West, when it was too late to complain.⁷ In greater measure, though, the explanation is to be found in the nature of missions in the western Cape. It is to this that I intend to devote the rest of this chapter.

MORAVIAN QUIETISM

The first of the missionary societies to work in South Africa was, of course, that of the United Brethren, better known as the Moravians. There had been an attempt to begin missionary work among the Khoikhoi of the Stellenbosch district from 1737, but Georg Schmidt's lonely mission fell foul of the DRC *predikanten* and, after seven years, he was forced to leave the colony.⁸ In 1792, when the chance to reopen the mission occurred, the three missionaries who came to the Cape, Hendrik Marsveld, Daniel Schwinn and Johann Christian Kühnel, immediately proceeded to Baviaans Kloof where Schmidt had worked. There, in a well-known story that is, in part, both true and mythological, they found the remnants of Schmidt's congregation—notably Vehettge Tikuie, whom Schmidt had baptized as Magdalena, and who had kept alive his teachings.⁹ These individuals formed the core of the Moravian congregation on the mission station which they founded in the valley and which, a few years later, was renamed Genadendal.

It may seem strange to see the Moravian church as quietistic. In its original, Hussite, manifestation in the fifteenth century, it had been the classic example of the church militant. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Bohemian and Moravian Protestants remained in the forefront of Europe's religious struggles. After all, it was the Defenestration of Prague and the election of the Elector Palatine, Frederick, to the throne of Bohemia which precipitated the great, central European, religious conflict known as the Thirty Years War. After the defeat of the Protestants at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 and the expulsion of the Winter King, Frederick, Moravia and Bohemia were reclaimed for the resurgingly Catholic Hapsburg

Empire. The Protestant churches and their leaders became symbols of resistance to foreign domination, which they have remained to this day.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there was another side to Moravian Protestantism. Ever since the Hussite days of the fifteenth century, a number of small Christian communities existed, often tucked away in the less accessible mountains of central Europe. Theologically they were Anabaptist, thus emphasizing the recommitment of their members to Christ in adulthood, in a way reminiscent of later evangelical conversions.¹¹ They avoided the excesses for which Anabaptists became notorious in the early Reformation, particularly during the short reign of Jan Bockelszoon of Leiden in Münster. The central European Moravian communities lived at peace with themselves and the world, providing communal help, social security, and educational and medical services. They were able to ride out the torments of the Thirty Years War as neutrals and, as such, were idealized by Grimmelshausen in his *Simplicissimus*, for good reasons a much loved book among John Le Carré's spies, who also had to face the devastations of a central Europe rent by ideological conflict. For Grimmelshausen, and others, they formed the ideal of a pacific Christian community. But there was another side to this. Like all Utopias, they were, at best, patriarchal and, at worst, authoritarian and despotic. Dissidence was not tolerated.¹²

I do not know how direct a connection can be made between these Anabaptist communities and the Renewed Moravian Church centred on Herrnhut, but the parallels are striking. As is well known, in the early 1720s a group of German-speaking Moravian Protestants became refugees from a bout of intensified Catholic persecution in their homeland. Moving north into Upper Saxony, they were collected up by the Count von Zinzendorf, a pious nobleman of Moravian descent who had been greatly influenced by August Hermann Francke, a professor at the University of Halle and one of the leading German pietists.¹³ Zinzendorf settled the refugees on his extensive estates, in a village renamed Herrnhut, the dwelling place of the Lord. There they formed a self-sufficient village community under the temporal (and indeed spiritual) authority of Zinzendorf, and 'at the same time a brotherly fellowship under the Saviour'.¹⁴ Within a few years, the flourishing community of Herrnhut began to send out missionaries to Labrador and Greenland, to the Cherokees and other North American Amerindians, and to slave societies in the Caribbean, notably in Surinam. These formed the first major Protestant missions to the heathen, except for those in the Dutch Eastern Empire which were very much an instrument of VOC rule.¹⁵ It was from this movement that Georg Schmidt and then, half a century later, Marsveld, Schwinn and Kühnel came to the Cape.

THE MISSION STATION INVENTED: GENADENDAL

It was on the basis of this central European experience, certainly at Herrnhut and probably in the Moravian communities that preceded it, that missionaries of the United Brethren invented the mission station as an institution. It would be easy to consider these Christian villages, so characteristic of the missions throughout Africa, to be natural developments. Certainly, the idea of an isolated, self-sufficient Christian community is one which goes back to St Benedict in the sixth century. However, like so many other apparently eternal phenomena, the mission station in its modern form was a product of a specific time and place.¹⁶ The time was the eighteenth century; the place was Herrnhut. It may be that the ideal was realized first in Greenland and Labrador,¹⁷ or in the Surinam back country,¹⁸ but it was at the Cape that the Moravian mission station reached its full flowering and acted as a model for similar Christian communities throughout the world.

As had been the case in central Europe, the Moravian mission was at once a place of refuge, solace and petty theocracy, ruled by a 'family' of as many as a dozen missionaries, men and women together.¹⁹ The tendency towards theocracy can be seen, above all, in the regulations for Genadendal which were promulgated in 1816. They were drafted by the editor of the *Periodical Accounts Relating to Moravian Missions* and the leading Moravian in England, the Revd C.I. Latrobe, while on a visit to South Africa.²⁰ They formed the model, not merely for the regulations at other Moravian stations but also for those of other missionary societies, just as Genadendal itself, which was visited by just about every missionary to South Africa (and many others besides), formed the model for many other stations such as Bethelsdorp.²¹ They stress, naturally enough, the discipline required of a Christian community. The drinking of alcohol and the smoking of dagga were outlawed. Parents were held responsible for the behaviour, particularly sexual behaviour, of their children, and, in general, it was held to be imperative that 'the strictest morality be attended to, in the intercourse of children and young persons of both sexes'. In part to ensure this, visitors from outside the settlement could only stay overnight with the permission of a missionary. The sabbath was kept holy and children attending church had to act with due decorum. 'The persons, houses and environs' of the inhabitants had to be kept clean. The penalty for breach of these regulations, after the offender had been given the chance to mend his or her ways, was expulsion from the village.

These were no empty regulations. In many of the obituaries of the faithful living in Genadendal, it is recorded how the man or woman in question had had to leave the settlement in their youth for some act of immorality or drunkenness.²² And these cases refer only to those who later repented and

were readmitted to the fold. Many more must have been unable to return to the sanctuary that Genadendal provided from the harshness of the Cape countryside.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this. The regulations, it was stressed in the first paragraph, were not to be thought of 'as laws, prescribed by Superiors, but as a Brotherly Agreement between the inhabitants of a Settlement of the Brethren'.²³ Obviously, it was necessary that regulations be policed, and disciplinary action taken where necessary, and 'this office is in Genadendal entrusted to the teachers and missionaries'. However, this power was clearly delegated to the missionaries by the inhabitants, and held only so long as their decisions 'are agreeable to the word of God, and the rules adopted by the congregation'. No mechanism was provided for challenging this authority, and, in later years, conflicts between the station residents and the missionaries sometimes did occur.²⁴ All the same, the contractual nature of the relationship, and the ultimate sovereignty, not of the missionaries but of the villagers, was clearly set out.

The regulations also provide a clear rationale for mission stations. As the preamble noted:

The object of the Brethrens' living together in separate settlements is, that they may as much as possible be out of the way of temptations, and that by the preaching of the word of God connected with a wholesome Church discipline a living knowledge of Jesus Christ, and a godly life may be promoted among the inhabitants.

In other words, the mission provided a chance for escape from a sinful world, and an opportunity to live a Christian life. It was not seen, nor after the first few years (see Viljoen, Chapter 3) did it ever function, as a base from which to sortie and change that world. It was in this spirit that the Genadendal regulations stressed the need for submission to government and the laws of the country. In this, of course, they followed the quietist tradition of Herrnhut, and of the Lutheran emphasis on the divine origin of the powers that be. Indeed, the Moravian synod of 1826 specifically forbade its missionaries to agitate for the emancipation of slaves, since this would only cause difficulties in the exercise of their true vocation.²⁵

These ideas as to the place of Genadendal can be amplified in a remarkable document written by the Revd H.P. Hallbeck in 1836, and published in the *Berichten uit de Heidenwereld*, the Dutch equivalent of the *Periodical Accounts*.²⁶ At the time, Hallbeck was the head of the Moravian mission in South Africa, as he had been for nearly two decades. He was a well-educated Swede—more learned than any British missionary to South Africa at the time—who was one of the outstanding, and most underrated, of early nineteenth-century missionaries. Although Hallbeck was based in Genadendal at the time of the hundredth anniversary of Georg Schmidt's arrival in Baviaans

Kloof—Genadendal is in the happy circumstance of having two centenaries per century—he had left the village and was on his way to Herrnhut for a general conference of the Moravian Brethren. Because he was to miss this event, he wrote a long letter which was read out in Genadendal church on that occasion.²⁷ In this letter, he contrasted Genadendal as it then was with how it had been when Schmidt had arrived: the wilderness, the haunt of wild beasts, now 'bloomed as a rose'. He wrote that the ancestors of the inhabitants of Genadendal had travelled from place to place with their flocks and herds, catching wild animals and digging *uitjes* from the ground.

They were...scarcely raised above their flocks; they were, as the Apostle said, without Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the unity of the covenant; without hope and without God in the world, acting according to the will of the flesh and their thoughts.

Now, thanks to the mercy of God in sending Georg Schmidt and his successors to Africa, they had learnt

to raise their thoughts from Earth to Heaven, from things perishable to the great matters of eternity. And, as a natural consequence of this, your external condition has improved: because, to those who seek the Kingdom of God is given, in according to the Saviour's promise, also external things, as an added gift.

Of course, they should not now be complacent. If they had made better use of the privileges they had been given, they could have advanced even further.

The work of your hands would be more blessed, your gardens and fields more fertile, your barns better filled, your houses and dwellings in better state, your children giving more pleasure and fame to their parents and your humble village already a wonderful town and a dwelling place of the Almighty.

Hallbeck then went on to describe his vision of what Genadendal would be like in 1936, a century later. He gave two alternatives. In the one case

I see a pleasant town with long streets and beautifully built houses, in the shadow of noble old trees and surrounded by fine gardens and fertile fields. The peaceable and happy inhabitants walk, tidily dressed, through the streets and lanes, or rest in small groups under their vines and fig-trees, while the youth hurries off together to the schools. There are no police, prison, judge or magistrate: because love reigns amongst them. Without din or disturbance everyone goes about his business, no sluggard is found among them, no drunkard pollutes their streets; and, although all are active, no-one sees his handiwork as all-important. I approach their groups, I hear the content of their conversations; and everywhere only two questions are discussed: 'What must I do to be saved?' and 'What can we do to honour our God?'—I visit the neighbouring places and everywhere I hear told how happy those people are; everywhere people say: 'How exemplary is their behaviour, how eager their activities for the expansion of God's Kingdom, how many teachers and missionaries have been educated in their schools and sent out by their charity to enlighten their ignorant fellows and bring them onto the Path of Life.'

Alternatively, if Genadendal strayed from the paths of righteousness, it would become a ruin, dominated by a prison and a gallows. Thus Genadendal would be either 'a forecourt of Heaven' or 'a foreportal of Hell'.

While I cannot say how closely twentieth-century Genadendal has approached the ideal Hallbeck sketched, clearly his worst forebodings have not come to pass. But in this context what matters is Hallbeck's vision of the perfect Christian community. What he sketches is an idealized, self-sufficient, peasant community, what the villages of central and northern Europe might have hoped to be, but never were. This clearly required regular labour, and part of the esteem in which Moravian mission stations were held derived from a general belief in the industry of their inhabitants. As the Rhenish missionary, the Revd Johann Leipoldt, noted approvingly in 1829, there 'the heathen are educated not just in Christianity but also in civilized diligence'.²⁸ As far as possible, that industriousness was to be in the village itself and to the benefit of the Christian community. The Moravian mission stations might send out teachers to convert those who had not had the privilege of growing up on them. Indeed, Hallbeck's greatest legacy was perhaps the training school for teachers which he founded immediately after his return from Europe in 1838, with money from Prince Victor von Schönberg-Waldenburg.²⁹ Nevertheless, the stations were worlds in themselves and were places to which it was possible to retreat. They were not, in their work and in their ethos, a challenge to the harsh world of even the post-emancipation Cape.

In fairness, though, it should be added that Hallbeck himself did not shirk from political activity, when it was thrust upon him. During his visit to Europe in 1837, he was given the opportunity to testify before the Select Committee on Aborigines of the British Parliament.³⁰ What he had to say there had much to do with the rejection, by the metropolitan government, of the Cape's Vagrancy Act, proposed by the colonial authorities. Hallbeck was not alone in this protest, of course,³¹ but this did represent a unique, direct Moravian intervention into the politics of the nineteenth-century Cape—at least after the difficulties in establishing Genadendal (see Viljoen, Chapter 3).

THE MISSIONS IN THE TOWNS

The Moravian missionary stations remained, for a long time, by far the largest in the south-west Cape. In 1849, the three villages of Genadendal, Elim and Groenekloof (Mamre), together with the outstation of Goedverwacht in the Piquetberg, contained about two-thirds of the mission station residents in this portion of the colony.³² However, mission stations were by no means the only places in the region at which the 'heathen' could

hear the Gospel. From the end of the eighteenth century, missionaries were at work in Cape Town, as well as in the small towns of the colony—Stellenbosch, the Paarl and Tulbagh—and, from approximately 1830, Worcester and Wagenmakers Vallei (Wellington). Their task was to convert the slaves, at least those whom they could persuade to attend their services, and the Free Blacks.

In so doing, they had to contend with two main problems. The first was a strained relationship with the established ecclesiastical authorities. This can best be exemplified by the history of mission activities in Stellenbosch.

For almost half a century from 1786, the Dutch Reformed Church minister at Stellenbosch was the formidable Ds Meent Borchers.³³ Personally pious, a gifted minor poet and antiquarian, and free of any taint of 'enthusiasm', this East Frisian immigrant was an example of what was best in the eighteenth-century Dutch church, but he was out of touch with the new impulses of emotional evangelicalism which arose in the last years of that century. Though himself a slave-owner, Borchers was sympathetic to the aims of the missions in Stellenbosch. He regularly performed important roles in ceremonies, such as the introduction of a new missionary or the opening of a new place of worship. He tried to set an example by propagating the Gospel among the slaves of his own household. Nevertheless, his dealings with the missionaries in Stellenbosch, Mewes Jans Bakker and Erasmus Smit, were full of conflict.³⁴ The problems were ecclesiological. Borchers considered it his duty to protect the rights of the Dutch Reformed Church, its parish council and ministers. He believed that the minister ultimately was responsible for guaranteeing the orthodoxy of religious services held under his auspices, so he had to examine and, in effect, license the missionaries in his parish. The services which they held should not, of course, conflict with those of the established church. Furthermore, he argued that it was only the minister of the parish church who had the right to baptize, therefore those who had been prepared for baptism by Bakker had to be passed on to him for the final examination and the administration of the ceremony. The friction that this standpoint caused with the equally principled, if personally less forceful and socially secure, Bakker, can easily be imagined.

Essentially these were matters of ecclesiastical law, so it was decisions of government which ultimately determined the relationship. In the first instance, the dictates of Commissioner-General J.A. Uitenhage de Mist's church ordinance were heavily in Borchers's favour. As a representative of the rationalist Batavian government, De Mist saw religious enthusiasm as a threat to the social and political order. Therefore the church ordinance re-established the virtual monopoly of the Dutch Reformed Church and forbade the extension of missions, except under the auspices of its ministers. In this way De Mist hoped to maintain government control over religious affairs.

This was not a line which the British colonial rulers could accept after their reconquest of the Cape in 1806. Eventually, ordained missionaries were given the right to act independently and to baptize their converts themselves, a decision which Borchers finally accepted with good grace. The result of the conflict, though, was to leave the missionaries very much in the position of junior partners in the ecclesiastical ranking of the western Cape towns. The arrival of a Dutch Reformed minister known to be particularly sympathetic to missions, as when the Revd Tobias Herold came to the Paarl, was an occasion for rejoicing for the missionary working there, who believed that it would improve the environment in which he worked.³⁵ Obviously, this state of affairs was not conducive to their political and social radicalism.

MISSIONARIES AND SLAVEOWNERS

The second problem with which the missionaries of the western Cape towns had to contend, derived from their connections with the auxiliary missionary societies, and, in general, with the notables among the local population. From approximately 1800, small mission groups had been set up in Stellenbosch, Tulbagh and the Paarl. These corresponded with, and in many ways functioning as the local branches of, the South African Missionary Society (SAMS) based in Long Street, Cape Town.³⁶ As had been the case with the SAMS, these grew out of local prayer groups, and continued very much as such. They provided the buildings in which the missionary held his services, and, through public subscription, paid at least part of his salary, although, in general, the missionary remained in correspondence with the European society who had sent him to South Africa.

Eventually, the tensions between the white directors of the local missionary societies and the mission churches became too great. This first came to a head in Stellenbosch. As what was described as the 'congregation of coloureds' grew in size and in the depth of its ecclesiastical life, it wished to be freed of the tutelage of the Stellenbosch mission society. The final breaking point came about as a result of the right of 'coloureds' to vote, presumably for elders in their own church. The *Berichte* of the Rhenish mission in Germany called this an 'insignificant' problem, but such an assertion of independence of ex-slaves in the decade after emancipation must have had considerable symbolic importance. At any event, in 1845 an apparently amicable separation was achieved between the mission society and the church run by the Rhenish mission.³⁷

There was a variation of this pattern in the Wagenmakers Valley where the leading families were mainly of Huguenot descent. Here, a consciousness of their French ancestry, together with a tradition of considerably piety had been maintained since the days when their forefathers had left France as

religious refugees. The date of the last sermon which had been given in French was still remembered. When the Huguenot missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society arrived, they were greeted as long lost brothers, even though no-one in the valley still spoke French. After considerable representations had been made, it was agreed that one of the Paris missionaries would remain in the south-west Cape, working among the slaves of the Huguenot descendants. Thus it was that Bisseux was in place to deliver the sermon cited at the beginning of this chapter, while the other French missionaries all worked much further north, especially in Lesotho.³⁸

As a result of these contacts, both in the Wagenmakers Vallei and with the auxiliary missionary societies, the missionaries came to be bounden to the local élites of the Cape. They paid their salaries, at least in part. They provided the social networks into which the missionaries were incorporated. They gave, or withheld, permission to their slaves to attend services and other forms of religious instruction. Often they, themselves, were responsible for teaching the tenets of Christianity to the slaves on their farms, a task which frequently seems to have fallen to the farmers' unmarried daughters—a group from which many missionaries found brides.³⁹

The results of this unspoken pressure on the missionaries are predictable. It would have taken a very strong personality to have propounded a social Christianity under such circumstances, and, by chance or otherwise, the missionaries working in the south-west Cape were not the most forceful of those labouring in South Africa. It is true that the LMS did station a missionary in Paarl for many years, and two of those who worked there, James Kitchingman and William Elliott, belonged to what might be described as the 'Bethelsdorp tendency' within the Society. Neither of these men had happy times in Paarl, and Elliott was eventually pushed out as a result of pressure from the local whites.⁴⁰ Against this, the Dutchmen in the employ of the LMS—Arie Vos in Tulbagh, and Mewes Jans Bakker and Erasmus Smit in Stellenbosch—did not bring with them from the Netherlands any tradition of militant social involvement.⁴¹ The Rhenish missionaries, too, were sponsored by a notoriously conservative segment of German society, that of the pietists centred on the Wupper Valley.⁴² As Lutherans both they and the Moravians stressed the ordination by God of the 'powers that be'.

In any event, most missionaries in the western Cape emphasized the quietistic aspects of their faith. At least in public, they often claimed that converted slaves were harder workers and less obstreperous than their heathen or Muslim fellows.⁴³ Whether this was true is difficult to say. Slaveowners were too afraid of the potentially disruptive effects of the mass conversion of their slaves, too suspicious of even the western Cape missionaries, and too concerned with the maintenance of Christianity—a symbol of their superiority—to allow an experiment along these lines. Moreover, missionaries would

not have admitted the true Christian faith of the lazy and rebellious. Even so, it is hard to imagine that the importance of acquiescence to the social order did not feature regularly in their preaching. Such reports of the missionaries' ministry as are available, notably that given by Bisseux, suggest that they saw the benefits of Christianity as being, above all, in the hereafter, although this was coupled to serenity in the face of the travails to which their audience was exposed in this world.

For all that, missionaries were occasionally at odds with the environment in which they were working. The most serious case seems to have occurred when Herold was forced to leave the Paarl because he advocated that slave-owners comply with the regulations regarding punishment issued by the Cape government to ensure the amelioration of slavery.⁴⁴ This stand did not blight his career, however, for shortly afterwards he was called to Stellenbosch. More often, missionaries suffered as a result of their association with their hated fellows, notably John Philip. This seems to have been behind the tension between Bisseux and the local élite which made him, for a time, contemplate leaving the Wagenmakers Vallei.⁴⁵ Certainly the occasional opprobrium in which missionaries, in general, were held by the Dutch gentry, sharply reduced the level of subscription to the auxiliary missionary societies, which, in turn, put the missionaries' salaries at risk.⁴⁶ These, though, were isolated instances in a history notable primarily for the necessarily close relationship between the missionaries and the landowners of the districts in which they worked.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, both the quiescent message of the missionaries and their association with the local élites significantly affected their potential converts' vision of Christianity. This was, of course, not monolithic. There were always those who were willing to trade the uncertainties and oppression of the Cape countryside for the discipline and sanctuary of the mission stations. The rush of ex-slaves to Genadendal, Groenekloof and Elim after emancipation cannot have been entirely out of a desire to hear the word of God, though such a motive can never be discounted completely.⁴⁷ Again, there were those who accepted the solace that mission Christianity provided. In 1835, after hearing Bisseux preach, an apprentice commented, 'Sir, the world is difficult, but heaven is beautiful.'⁴⁸ He cannot have been alone in such sentiments. It may even be that for many slaves and ex-slaves, Christianity gave their labour a purpose and a justification that it would otherwise not have had. There are

clear resonances of the Cape in George Herbert's famous lines:

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine.
Who sweeps a room as for thy laws
Makes that, and the action, fine.

Certainly, there are in this period no clear, western Cape examples of Christianity being used as the justification for oppositional action, as was the case, for instance, in the so-called Kat River rebellion, or in the Jamaican Baptist War.⁴⁹ Even those Groenekloof mission residents who fought against the Kat River rebellion and were accused of fomenting an uprising are not reported as justifying their actions in religious terms (see Ludlow, Chapter 6).

Many of those slaves and ex-slaves who did accept Christianity without joining the mission stations saw their conversion as a way of achieving the status which their slavery had denied them. At least one refused to be baptized until the period of apprenticeship had ended. Christianity and freedom—not in the sense that Bisseux meant—were too synonymous for her to do otherwise.⁵⁰ Many more hoped to achieve social mobility by acquiring education. The Rhenish missionaries who took over the work of the auxiliary societies in Stellenbosch, Tulbagh and Worcester, seem to have spent most of their time as schoolteachers.⁵¹ So ingrained was the equation of literacy and Christianity, that one ex-slave, an elderly woman who was finding learning to read at her advanced age beyond her, had to be reassured by the missionary that it was possible for an illiterate to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.⁵²

For many more, Christianity was seen to be too much the religion of the masters for it to have any attraction for them. If they took to any religion, they embraced Islam. As William Elliott remarked bitterly, 'if the Cape proprietors of slaves were Mohammedan, the majority of slaves would immediately become Xtian.'⁵³ It was to take a long time before Christianity ceased to be considered as a symbol of ruling-class oppression—an interpretation which the early missionaries did little to counteract. Only when this happened could it truly be considered to be a doctrine of liberation.

Notes:

- 1 Rom. 6.22.
- 2 Bisseux to Directors, 23 Dec. 1834, *Journal des Missions Evangeliques* (henceforth *JME*), X (1835), pp. 113–14.
- 3 Bisseux to Directors, PEMS, 22 Nov. 1830, *JME*, VI (1831), p. 70.
- 4 J. and J.L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago and London, 1991); *idem.*, 'The Colonisation of Consciousness in South Africa', *Economy and Society*, XVIII (1989).
- 5 Council for World Mission, Archives, London Missionary Society series, School of Oriental

and African Studies, London (hereafter LMS), Africa odds, Box 8, cited in E. Elbourne, 'To Colonise the Mind': Evangelical Missionaries in Britain and the Eastern Cape, 1790-1836' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1991), p. 114.

- 6 R.L. Watson, *The Slave Question; Liberty and Property in South Africa* (Hanover and London, 1990), esp. pp. 161-81.
- 7 R. Ross, 'James Cropper, John Philip and the Researches in South Africa', in H. Macmillan and S. Marks (eds), *Africa and Empire: W.M. Macmillan, Historian and Social Critic* (London, 1989), pp. 147-8; Elbourne, 'To Colonise the Mind', ch. 8.
- 8 H.C. Bredekamp and J.L. Hattingh (eds), *Das Tagebuch und die Briefe von Georg Schmidt dem Ersten Missionar in Südafrika (1737-44)* (Bellville, 1981).
- 9 H.C. Bredekamp, 'Vehetige Tikkuiie, Alias Moeder Lena van Genadendal, 1739-1800', *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, XL1 (1987), pp. 134-41.
- 10 The greatest of these leaders, Bishop Jan Comenius, the quattrocentenary of whose birth was celebrated in 1992, lived most of his life as a refugee in the Netherlands and was buried at Naarden, outside Amsterdam. His grave became a centre of pilgrimage for Czech dissidents, to such an extent that the church visitors' book had to be removed, because it was examined too frequently by the Czechoslovak secret police.
- 11 The evangelicals did not demand rebaptism, thus avoiding the heresies of which the Anabaptists were accused.
- 12 On these communities see, for example, H.D. Plümper, *Die Gittergemeinschaft bei den Täufen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg, 1972); H.D. Gebauer, *Grimmelshausens Bauerndarstellung: Literarische Sozialkritik und ihr Publikum* (Marburg, 1977).
- 13 From the early eighteenth century, the pietists, under the influence of Philipp Jakob Spener, reacted against what they saw as the rigidity and formalism of orthodox Lutheranism. In its place, they stressed a much more intense personal and emotional commitment to Christ.
- 14 B. Krüger, *The Pear Tree Blossoms: The History of the Moravian Church in South Africa, 1737-1869* (Genadendal, 1966), p. 13.
- 15 L.J. Joosse, 'Scoone Dinge Sijn Swaere Dingen': *Een Onderzoek Naar de Motieven en Activiteiten in de Nederlanden tot Verbreiding van de Gereformeerde Religie Gedurende de Eerste Helft van de Zeventiende Eeuw* (Leiden, 1992).
- 16 An argument could be made for the primacy, in time, of the 'praying towns' of seventeenth century New England, but I do not know of any links from these to the mission stations of colonial Africa—which, of course, is not to say that such did not exist. On these, see J. Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York and Oxford, 1985).
- 17 B. Richling, 'Very Serious Reflections': Inuit Dreams about Salvation and Loss in Eighteenth Century Labrador, *Ethnohistory*, XXXVI (1989), pp. 148-69.
- 18 R. Price, *Atah's World* (Baltimore and London, 1990).
- 19 See, for instance, the letter by C.A. Küster, 12 Jan. 1841, *Berichten uit de Heidenwereld*, VIII (1842), p. 27.
- 20 On the drafting of the 'regulations' see Krüger, *The Pear Tree Blossoms*, p. 13. The regulations themselves are published in this book, at pp. 304-7.
- 21 One of Johannes van der Kemp's first acts after landing in Cape Town was to visit Genadendal, by which he was much impressed. I.H. Enklaar, *Life and Work of Dr J. Th. van der Kemp: Missionary Pioneer and Protagonist of Racial Equality in South Africa* (Cape Town and Rotterdam, 1988), pp. 78-9.
- 22 See many accounts in the Genadendal diaries, published in the *Periodical Accounts of the Missions of the United Brethren*.
- 23 In this context, I do not want to discuss the fascinating role of the Moravians, in particular, in the construction of gender roles in the Cape, but I should point out that to Zinzendorf, at

least, 'Brother' was a sex-neutral term, equivalent to the modern 'person'.

24 For instance, in Mamre in 1902; see E.A. Host, "Die Hondje By": Labour Relations in the Malmesbury District, c.1880–c.1920' (BA Hons. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1987), pp. 27–8.

25 Krüger, *Pear Tree Blossoms*, p. 195.

26 *Periodical Accounts*, II, (1836), pp. 73–80.

27 He also wrote a general history of Moravian missions in South Africa which was circulated to all the brotherhood's South African churches and published, in translation, in the *Periodical Accounts*, XIII, pp. 501ff. That is, however, much less interesting.

28 Cited in E. Strassberger, *The Rhenish Missionary Society in South Africa, 1830–1950* (Cape Town, 1969), p. 13. The last two words are an inadequate translation of the original 'bürgelich(en) Fleiss', but are the nearest I can get.

29 *South African Biographical Dictionary*, vol. IV, (Pretoria, 1981), p. 207.

30 For his testimony, see Report of the select committee on Aborigines (British Settlements); together with the minutes of evidence, British Parliamentary Paper, 538 of 1836, pp. 336–45.

31 W.M. Macmillan, *The Cape Colour Question: A Historical Survey* (London, 1927), pp. 237–44; E. Bradlow, 'The Khoi and the Proposed Vagrancy Legislation of 1835', *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, XXXIX (1985), pp. 99–106; S. Trapido, 'The Emergence of Liberalism and the Making of "Hottentot Nationalism", 1815–34', Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London: *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, XVII (1992).

32 I have defined the south-west Cape as the area to the south-west of a line from Ebenezer at the mouth of the Oliphants River, through Wuppertal in the Cedarberg to Zuurbaak to the north of Swellendam. Population figures are taken from *Master and Servant: Documents on the Working of the Order in Council of 21 July 1846: Addendum* (Cape Town, 1849), pp. iii–xx. Information of Wuppertal is missing, but at that time it cannot have had more than about 350 inhabitants (Strassberger, *Rhenish Missionary Society*, p. 52), compared with 2,500 for Genadendal and more than 1,000 for Groenekloof.

33 This section derives primarily from S.B.I. Veltkamp, 'Meent Borchers: Predikant in Overgangstijd (Jengum 1762–Stellenbosch 1832)' (Ph.D. thesis, University of South Africa, 1977), esp. ch. 5, and A.H. Huussen Jr and S.B.I. Veltkamp-Visser (eds), *Dagboek en Brieven van Mewes Jans Bakker (1764–1824): Een Friese Zendeling aan de Zuidpunt van Afrika* (Amsterdam, 1991).

34 Not, incidentally, because Borchers was a slaveowner. Bakker, too, owned two slaves at his death in 1824. Huussen and Veltkamp-Visser (eds), *Mewes Jans Bakker*, p. 78.

35 Report of the Paarl Auxiliary Missionary Society, 1823, LMS, South Africa, incoming letters 9/1/D; see also Bissex to Directors, 28 July 1835, *JME*, XI (1836), p. 33.

36 On these societies, see P.S. de Jongh, 'Sendingwerk in die Landdrosdistrikte Stellenbosch en Tulbagh (sinds 1822 Worcester), 1799–1830' (MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1968).

37 *Berichte der Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*, XVIII (1847), p. 82.

38 For this story see the journal of P. Lemie, I. Bissex and S. Rolland, *JME*, V (1830), pp. 92, 105f., and subsequent letters in the *Journal*.

39 For example, the report from Tulbagh, presumably by the Revd A. Vos, in *Nederduitsche Zuid-afrikaansche Tijdschrift*, I (1824), p. 234; I. Bissex, 'Autobiographie', *Die Huisgenoot*, IV (1919), p. 127; *Berichte der Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*, XVIII (1847), pp. 128–9.

40 B. le Cordeur and C. Saunders (eds), *The Kitchingman Papers* (Johannesburg, 1976), pp. 100–29, 215; Watson, *Slave Question*, pp. 169–74, 180; On the 'Bethelsdorp tendency', see E. Elbourne, Chapter 4 in this volume.

41 J. Boneschanser, *Het Nederlandsch zendeling Genootschap in Zijn Eerste Periode: Een Studie Over Opwekking in de Bataafse en Franse Tijd*, (Leeuwarden, 1987).

- 42 For example, W.O. Henderson, *The Life of Friedrich Engels*, 2 vols. (London, 1976), I, pp. 4–9.
- 43 For example, E. Evans to Directors, 19 Feb. 1822, LMS, South Africa, incoming letters, 8/4/B.
- 44 Jane Philip to LMS, 10 Oct. 1832, LMS, South Africa, incoming letters, 13/1/C.
- 45 Bisseux to Directors, 23 Dec. 1834, *JME*, X (1835), p. 115.
- 46 W. Elliott to Directors, 14 May 1832, LMS, South Africa, incoming letters, 13/1/A.
- 47 Letter from H.P. Hällbeck, 18 Jan. 1839, *Periodical Accounts*, XV (1839), pp. 12–14.
- 48 Daumas to Directors, n.d., *JME*, XI (1836), p. 155.
- 49 Elbouïne, 'To Colonise the Mind', esp. ch. 9 and conclusion; M. Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Destruction of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Urbana, 1982).
- 50 B. Warner (ed.), *Lady Herschel: Letters from the Cape, 1834–8* (Cape Town, 1991), p. 82.
- 51 See their journals published in the *Berichte der Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*.
- 52 Letter from Schwester Henriette Kulpman, 19 June 1844, *Das Missionsblatt, herausgegeben von der Missions-Gesellschaft zu Barmen*, XIX (1844), no. 23.
- 53 Elliott to LMS, 12 June 1829, LMS, incoming letters, 11/3/C.