

THE "WICKED CHRISTIANS" AND THE "CHILDREN OF THE MIST":  
MISSIONARY AND KHOI INTERACTIONS AT THE CAPE  
IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The expansion of Protestant missionary activity in the early nineteenth century has long provided a valuable source for analyzing the complex of racial and cultural interactions in pre-industrial southern Africa. [1] The missionaries had a strong sense of historical purpose and a cultural frame of self-reflection so that, unlike traders, for example, they left a rich, highly detailed data base. Profound links between the discourse of mission expansion - evangelical Christianity - and the discourses of the secular enlightenment [2] have given this analysis a broader perspective as a commentary on the experience of modernity [3] in southern Africa. This paper will address these larger questions only by inference and, hopefully, implication. Its intention is to explore only a very small and specific corner of this history - such detailed study does not, in my opinion, mark rejection or opposition to larger-scale enquiries. Rather, these debates enabled this study, much of which is based on the records of a mere ten days in 1817. In conducting this investigation I have been confronted by a number of unexpected questions - not all of which I feel have received adequate coverage in the earlier histories.

A sharp contrast has often been noted between missionaries who were active in the earlier part of the nineteenth century and those of the later period. [4] This is especially true of missionaries who belonged to the pan-denominational London Missionary Society (LMS). For example, Robert Moffat and his son-in-law, David Livingstone, appear to epitomize the heroic missionary explorer-adventurer, much celebrated in romanticised biographies and numerous children's books of the Victorian and Edwardian era. Yet Moffat arrived at the Cape only six years after the death of the enigmatic and eccentric founder of the Society in South Africa, Dr Johannes Van der Kemp. Van der Kemp, unlike Moffat and Livingstone, lived on terms of near-equality with his congregation, the much despised Khoi, and married a young slave, whose freedom he purchased.

Frequent reference has been made to the character and convictions of the extraordinary Van der Kemp as an explanation of this discontinuity in missionary discourse. In particular his charismatic and individualistic approach to the Christian gospel has been identified as enabling a culturally more radical attitude. [5] For example, Andrew Ross argues that Van der Kemp's marriage to "an African girl" was a practical out-working of his faith which stressed,

that as all humans are equal in sin and guilt before God, the redeemed are also made equal in the eyes of God by their conversion. [6]

Van der Kemp was, however, a highly contradictory personality. The "African" origin of his wife was not the only striking aspect of this marriage; his religious convictions surely cannot also explain why at over sixty years of age he took for a bride a young woman of fourteen who had not even converted to Christianity. [7] The articulation between religious belief and social action is a fascinating and important area of study; to be useful, however, such study needs to be conducted within an investigation of the ensemble of social forces rather than studied as an explanatory level on its own terms. Such a "multifactorial" approach has been pioneered by Jean and John Comaroff in their exploration of missionary expansion in southern Africa, with a particular emphasis on the Tswana in the period after 1820. [8] It is

the argument of this paper that in the earlier period, concerning missions to the Khoi, insufficient attention has often been paid to how missionary discourse was intersected in particular by class, gender and sexuality. [9]

The class relations of the Cape frontier cannot be constituted by an analysis of missionary records, and a thorough investigation of them lies beyond the scope of this paper. By class analysis I mean simply the examination of a "relationship of exploitation" [10] in a specific social conjuncture. This use of class should be distinguished from that which after Weber uses market position and consumption patterns as its definitional criteria. The social origin of certain missionaries, although interesting in itself, becomes a form of economic reductionism when used, for example, to explain a set of beliefs centred around "self-betterment".

Susan Newton-King's current work in progress on labour relations on the frontier around Graaff-Reinet in the period around 1786 provides considerable evidence to confirm the picture of frontier relations found in the missionary correspondence. [11] In particular, the missionaries working on the frontier recorded in great detail a level of violence, which they considered to be murder, far beyond the logic of labour demands. Elizabeth Elbourne has recently drawn attention to the difficulty of reducing frontier violence to labour demands [12]; this difficulty may go some way toward explaining earlier neglect of it. Legassick, for example, in his PhD thesis, argued:

One should not exaggerate ... The major crime of white expansion was the almost complete dispossession of the indigenous Khoi inhabitants of their territory and property. [13]

This statement reads sharply at odds with the missionary records. The millennialist visions of Van der Kemp in which the colony was drenched in blood as the "wicked Christians" were destroyed arose from an identification with the lived experience of the members of mission stations like Bethelsdorp, which he established in the Eastern Cape. Descriptions of Bethelsdorp in the early years resemble nothing so much as a refugee camp. The mission was not set up amongst people with their own coherent cosmological and sociological universe: this had long been smashed by the frontier violence. The people who gathered at Bethelsdorp had a social homogeneity in almost only one respect - the extent of their cultural and material dispossession. These "children of the mist", in Thomas Pringle's poignant phrase, were people in a process of profound and irreversible transition - in terms of colonial discourse from "Hottentot" to "Coloured".

Van der Kemp and a number of LMS missionaries stationed at Bethelsdorp were politically radicalized by their experiences in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This radicalization found expression in their religious beliefs and practices, and in their personal behaviour. The conduct of several missionaries associated with Bethelsdorp was to become the subject of a considerable scandal. In 1823 Robert Moffat wrote that all the missionaries who had "fallen into gross sin" were stationed at Bethelsdorp or had recently lived there.

The founder himself of that once renowned station had a character far from being unblamable, neither did his doctrines tend to a holy life ... More of the evil ( I conceive ) is to be traced to the system and doctrines introduced than the temptations around. [14]

The sin to which Moffat referred was not that certain missionaries, like Van der Kemp, had married African women, but that they had committed acts of adultery and fornication with African women.

The charge of sexual impropriety against a number of these missionaries was originally brought to the LMS's attention by the colonial secretary, Colonel Bird. Following an interview with Bird, the secretary of the LMS in South Africa, George Thom, called an

irregular meeting, sometimes termed a Synod although it had no such legal standing, of LMS missionary deputies in August 1817, in Cape Town. The missionaries' primary purpose in holding the meeting was stated by Thom in a bold copper-plate heading written with flourish across the minutes: IMMORALITIES OF THE MISSIONARIES. [15] Although charges were brought against a number of missionaries under this heading, it was principally the immorality of a "conspicuous missionary" that was of concern. By this was meant James Read who, following the death of Van der Kemp, in 1811, had assumed superintendency of the South African Society.

The evidence against Read was presented by Evans, a missionary who had lived with Read at Bethelsdorp. The witnesses Evans appealed to were the altogether absent (and, from a point of view of the historical record, equally silent) African members of the congregation:

Last year Mr. Read was guilty of adultery with a young woman at Bethelsdorp the daughter of Andries Pretorius (he was an elder in 1815) ... several persons in Bethelsdorp had suspicions that this girl was with child and they interrogated her on the subject. At first she denied; but one day when several women were present she confessed that she was pregnant. On being asked by whom she exultingly said 'By the Head!' - meaning Mr Read as ruling or Superintending missionary. Some present said 'O you must not [say] it is the head's, say that Corner is the Father.' Some of M C[orner]'s friends on hearing this said 'If you say so we shall immediately send to Mr. C[orner] to let him know of it.' She answered, 'No I will not say it is from Corner, but it is by the Head that I am pregnant.' Mr Messer hearing of this sent for her to come to ... him. He asked he if the report which he had heard was true that she was pregnant. She answered 'yes.' He asked by whom? With the same exulting tone, 'By the Head.' 'What head?' 'Mr Read.' Mr Messer asked 'when and where she had been with him?' - She answered 'I have been with him several times and in several places.' [16]

Corner, the other missionary referred to by Evans, the 128th missionary sent out by the LMS, was described as, "a negro born in Demerara" [17] - a fact which should caution the making of generalisations about the cultural attitudes of "the missionaries". Corner's own sexual indiscretion had become widely known within the missionary stations through self-confession. The evidence presented at the Synod would presumably have been common knowledge already:

In the year 1814 ... Mr Corner was guilty of fornication with a woman who kept his house, but as she was old, there was no danger of it ever coming to the knowledge of the world, but by his or her testimony. In a very short time after the convictions for his sin and [sic] sorrow of heart were so great, that he sent a letter to the Directors informing them of his fall, to which Mr Campbell in their names sent an answer, that, 'he was fitter to be a Boor [sic] than a missionary.' [18]

While John Campbell's bizarre and ironic comment was typical of certain attitudes to the Dutch Settlers at the Cape in this period, in all the evidence presented to the Synod and related correspondence, I have not found any attempt to connect Corner's racial origin with his moral conduct. In a fit of depression and remorse Corner had travelled about the country visiting the various mission stations, confessing his sin:



Seeing such signs of genuine sorrow of heart, the Brethren endeavoured to lift him from the deep mire; but to little purpose ... He would go about by himself so that the Brethren were often afraid he should do some injury to himself. He continued in this state for a long time, but afterwards appeared more composed. [19]

Along with Read and Corner charges were also brought against Bartlett; these, however, were not well substantiated. Thom's evidence significantly centred on the scandal Bartlett had caused by becoming engaged to the daughter of one of the Dutch settlers only to abandon her and marry a "Bastard Hottentot" instead. Bartlett and Corner had married, at the same time, two sisters, members of the Bethelsdorp congregation.

The 1817 Synod has often been reduced by those who have studied it to little more than a conspiracy, mainly on the part of George Thom. There is, of course, some truth in this. However, few studies have examined either the seriousness of some of the allegations made, or the significance which they had to the missionaries at the time. A failure to do this has meant that the Synod has come to have little more importance than as evidence of what is sometimes termed a "colonial" faction within the LMS. This approach does not get beyond asking that rather sterile question, identified by the Comaroffs as typifying most debates about the missionaries - "Whose side were the missionaries really on?" [20] In 1961, for example, Northcott stated of the meeting that:

It was altogether a lamentable and unworthy ten days of manoeuvring on Thom's part, which bought the twenty years of mission work in Cape Colony to a low ebb of domestic uncharitableness and pious spleen. [21]

This was echoed by Legassick, who claimed that Thom "searched for an issue". [22] This "issue", Read's adultery, in many accounts is dealt with in an ambiguous and obscure fashion. Thus W M Macmillan, in *The Cape Colour Question*, for example, suggests:

The evidence of what is called his [ Read' s] 'fall' was not enough to warrant the 1817 Synod reaching a decision and they left it to the Directors. [23]

This is a curious way to describe events about which the missionaries were so convinced that they threatened mass resignation unless the Directors took the action which they were unable to take (i.e. the expulsion of Read from the Society). [24] Similarly, Andrew Ross states that some of the missionaries had been "arraigned on accusations of fornication" and that "the arraignment cannot be disputed though the validity of their condemnation is open to dispute". [25] It is not clear whether Ross means "validity" in the sense that such acts had occurred, or validity in the sense of the Synod's legal standing. Christopher Saunders, in an essay on Read's career, made the comment that writers sympathetic to "the LMS tradition"

would seem to have been embarrassed by Read's confession in 1816 that he might be the father of a child born to the daughter of one of the elders at Bethelsdorp. [26] (Emphasis my own)

Saunders recognises that the "adultery scandal ... deeply affected his [Read's] career", but it is not clear whether or not this was simply the result of an agitated "scandal". Read's own confession to the Directors contains no such ambiguity or obscurity on this critical issue. Read wrote:

What becomes of me is of little importance and what the Lord permits is less than I deserve. I wish to bear his indignation because I have sinned against him. [27]

In the same paragraph, however, Read also states:

The cause of the Missionary Society, the cause of God in Africa and Truth in general are likely to suffer as much from the present proceedings of the zealous missionaries as from my conduct.

Read and Corner both expressed severe regrets, and recognised their behaviour was in violation of their own personal convictions. VC Malherbe, in a rare investigation into the life and times of one of the LMS's African agents at this time, Cupido Kakkerlak, has traced the unfortunate consequences of Read's adultery and its aftermath on the Kakkerlak mission. [28] The Synod witnessed a direct attack on more than just certain individuals. Thom attempted to use the Synod to reformulate Van der Kemp's regulations for the Society and to re-assess the attitude to slavery, attacking fundamental institutional structures and practices at the heart of missionary discourse. That Thom failed in his total objectives is indicated by his subsequent resignation from the LMS. If some of the action which he brought was successful, it was so because in important respects there was truth in the accusations made.

Charges brought against other missionaries at the Synod were expressive of a crisis which the missionaries faced in their relationship with the colonial state, the settlers and their own supporters. This was not a case, as Legassick suggests, of charges being "lumped together". [29] For example, the accusations which followed concerning the irregular marriages of Schmelen and Wimmer impinged on a most sensitive area for evangelical non-conformity as a whole. In Britain at this time non-conformist clergy were unable by law to marry believers in their churches. [30] Yet legally ordained marriage, with a total prohibition on any expression of sexuality outside of it, remained central to the evangelical world view. The intersection of discourses of law and respectability need to be traced within the cultural and racial aspects of the missionaries' behaviour.

It was Thom who argued against other, more morally outraged missionaries who wished to condemn Schmelen in unequivocal terms. Taylor, for example, declared to the Synod:

I cannot but consider Mr. S[chmelen] as living in fornication ... A Miss. [sic] is not only called to preach the doctrines of the Gospel to the Heathen but to make known the necessary rules used by Christian churches, and no Christian Society allows of such marriages ... It opens the door to wickedness and is a bad example to Heathen converts and to the Heathen themselves. [31]

Thom's response to this was calculated, reasonable and precise, in considerable contrast to his private correspondence with the Directors. Schmelen's action, he pointed out, impinged directly on that most sensitive of areas - the missionaries' relationship to the state and civil authority.

Mr. S[chmelen]'s marriage is considered by the laws of the colony and all marriages out of it performed by Miss. [sic] as unlawful - such was that of the late Mr Jantz - such is that of Mr Sass. But I believe in the eyes of God neither they nor Mr Schmelen was beheld as fornication ...[sic] But Mr Schmelen has gone to the outmost bounds of Christian charity, so that I do not think he lives in sin, but is guilty of a notorious act of imprudence. [32]

Schmelen's own account of his marriage to his "maidservant" whilst on a journey was written in a high moral tone. In a letter to the LMS Directors, Schmelen insisted:

As long as I have been in this country and remained single, I always have been careful, not to have employed a female servant, yea even I did not suffer a female to speak to me in my house ... [19]

Schmelen's letter continued with a woeful tale of how circumstance had forced him not only to employ a young woman but to share a waggon with her at night.

I now perceived the danger I was [in], with a female servant, yet I could not send her out of it, neither could I leave her in a wilderness, where no human creature lived ... I was in the greatest perplexity, to be with a single woman in the waggon, not on account of committing sin but to avoid all suspicion [ sic ] whatever amongst a talkative people whose character I am well acquainted [with]. My soul was crying to God continually that I might not be an obstacle in the great work set before me. What plans I ever might form, I could not escape all suspicion, I would pay my address to her, which I did and married her before my people in the same form I am used to marry them. [33]

Thom described Schmelen's marriage in highly acidic terms to the Directors in Europe:

Mr Schmelen ... marries his own servant before a few Hottentots on the roadside by reading the Dutch Form of marriage. The poor creature said, 'How can it be that my teacher will marry me?' [34]

Thom's evidence and role in the Synod may indeed have proceeded from his own particularly reactionary political perspective, yet there is nothing in Schmelen's own letter to contradict Thom's account of the young woman's reaction.

The case against Wimmer was considered by all the missionaries present as a great deal more serious. Wimmer's actions had differed from Schmelen's in two important ways. Unlike Schmelen, he had gone through a long courtship, during which time he attempted on several occasions to be legally married. Failing this, he had not taken Schmelen's solution of an impromptu marriage but merely declared himself married "in the eyes of God". Thom had spelt out the implications of Wimmer's behaviour in his circular letter:

... the conduct of Michael Wimmer we conceive in the fullest sense to be injurious to the cause of Christ - as tending to give to the Colonists and the Colonial government, local and general, a mean and unjust idea of the purity of principle with which our worthy Directors are actuated, and as tending to disgrace us as Christian missionaries to be associated with such a person. [35]

"Purity of principle" appears from the record to be something which Wimmer had failed in from the start - at least no doubt as the term would have been defined by Thom. His relationship with a young woman at the Caledon Institute, the Synod was told, had begun in early June 1815. Seidenfaden, a senior missionary, recounted to the Synod how he had challenged Wimmer by not serving him the "Lord's Supper". When Wimmer asked the reason, Seidenfaden informed him:

that he had lately when he came out of the evening service stood with Sabina Adams near the oven which circumstance had been made known to me by the people, and they stated their astonishment at it. [36]

More detail on the event was given in the form of a report written by Wimmer and copied into the minutes:

It happened so, as I stood one evening by the baking oven (to make water ) [crossed through heavily] Sabina came to me in the dark to ask about the state of her soul.

The report of the people, according to Seidenfaden was that Wimmer had already asked Sabina to marry him. On this subject Seidenfaden had a great deal to say - his pedantic, outraged objections were repeated to the Synod and copied into the minutes. Had he known Wimmer could be capable of such behaviour he would never have allowed him to come to the institute at all,

the good faith which the Government have for this Institution is lost thereby [sic], the report which the colonists have for it will be despised - all esteem and respect which the people ought to show to their teachers shall be taken away - the good order shall be spoiled ...

Wimmer later let the people know what he thought of their reports to Seidenfaden by preaching that week from Psalm Sixty Two, presumably from the section which begins:

How long will ye imagine mischief against a man ... [37]

By the end of July 1815, Wimmer's relationship with Sabina had reached a point where he no longer made any denials and informed Seidenfaden that it was their intention to be married. Seidenfaden now agreed to marry them, once Wimmer obtained a license from the Landdrost. At the beginning of August, Wimmer was told that approval would not be given because the young woman was not baptised, and that in any case he would also need special permission from the government. By the end of August the first obstacle had been removed, Sabina had been baptised, and was now named Susannah.

The couple, however, made little progress in their attempts to marry. In March 1816 Wimmer travelled to Swellendam to have an interview with the Landdrost; this meeting was recorded in detail in the minutes:

- Landdrost. Is your intended wife baptised and made a member of the church?  
Mr Wimmer. Yes.  
Land. Where?  
Wim. Caledon's Institution.  
Land. This is not lawful consequently your marriage cannot be solemnized.  
Wim. But the late Dr Vanderkemp [sic] and Mr Read and Mr Ullbright were married in this manner with members of the church at Bethelsdorp.  
Land. All these marriages therefore are unlawful. [38]

On his return, Seidenfaden recorded, Wimmer declared that Susannah was his wife, that he would never leave her, and that he would write to Read and the Directors to inform them. From Thom's, highly critical, correspondence it is certain that Read recognised Wimmer's action as legitimate: he referred to Susannah as "sister Wimmer", and insisted they should receive a full married couple's allowance from the Society. [39] Wimmer was not to encounter much of this sort of sympathy. Taylor, who had wished to press the charge of sin against Schmelen, now recounted some of Wimmer's other attempts at legalizing his marriage as evidence of the depths to which he had sunk:



I remember a sentence or two of the letter which Mr W[immer] wrote to Mr Vos. 'He wished Mr V[os] to marry him but first to baptize her - other missionaries had done the same. But if he did not marry them they would live as they now did in the sight of God as they were married in their hearts to each other and in the eyes of God' and another passage 'O that we had wings that we might fly over the mountains and live among the heathen' - these were nearly the expressions . [40]

On the 7th of August 1816, five months after Wimmer's desperate attempt to get permission from the Landdrost and the declaration of their "marriage", Susannah gave birth to a baby girl. Thom made it clear that he considered the issue of the young woman's conversion as completely irrelevant:

But the Hottentot must be baptised, a little before or after; as if there was a difference between having a woman a Heathen or a nominal Christian. [41]

It was also emphasised at the Synod that it was the illegality of Wimmer's action that was of concern - not the question of his own personal morality. When asked about Wimmer's conduct since his decision to live with Susannah, Seidenfaden replied:

As to preaching it is the same as before - respecting his so called wife He loves her and has no appearance whatever of holding conjunction with any other. He preaches very much against fornication. [42]

The significance which these acts of adultery and irregular marriage had needs to be understood also from the perspective of the women involved and the congregations of the mission stations. The missionaries' sexual activities, both regular and irregular, served in the context of their coming as "outsiders" to African social realities as a site for a potential negotiation over power.

A young trainee missionary, Hooper, was charged alongside Schmelen under the heading of "Other Charges". Hooper identified whom the missionaries married as being a source of identity between missionaries and local people:

The custom of marrying with the Natives causes all sorts, Boors, Hottentots, Corannas &c [sic] to prefer that Missionaries would come out single and each sort off by their marrying among them. [43]

The differences between the LMS missionaries were described in some detail by Hooper as revolving around a question of "familiarity". There was a danger, he warned, that the missionaries could become removed from the people if they occupied a privileged, separate and superior position:

A Missionary in Africa to be useful among the various Tribes, need be much among them and familiar with them; must travel with them and must endure privations with them. A missionary may be too distant, disgusted with their manners and his usefulness will be very contracted. The People will care little or nothing about him ... Salvation does not consist in meats and drinks and divers washings, but in the new Man of the heart, created after the image of God in Holiness and Righteousness. [44]



Hooper was, by his own admission, inspired by the work of Van der Kemp and Read. At the time of writing this letter Hooper was living in a state of nearly abject poverty.

the straw hut I live in is about 9 feet square (form of a sentry box) the framework of which I was enabled to erect a twelve month ago; the people covered it with straw. It is without a window and I see to read and write within by the light that comes through the crevices of the reed door; but it has not been so cold since I have been here as that the water should freeze, that I have noticed. The daylight may be seen through all sides of the roof, consequently abundance of rain comes through; but I can sleep comfortably in a sheepskin blanket in the worst weather on a bed or a board, and am as pleased with a fare chiefly of dry bread as with the best provisions when in my nativeland. [45]

Although he felt there were positive aspects to his poverty, Hooper made it clear that it was more a matter of necessity than choice. All of his attempts to become a missionary had been frustrated by Thom. The history of Hooper's impoverishment was not investigated at the Synod. Hooper was, however, accused of wilfully adopting a slovenly and degraded lifestyle. A letter from a Bethelsdorp missionary, Messer, written earlier in the year was used in evidence:

Brother H[oopers] is still the same as you knew him to be he will not listen to what is told him. Brother Corner and I spoke to him about his ugly hut and walls ... but in vain. Now I ask you what is to be done with such a man, you know that it is a disgrace to the settlement to see such a thing standing [46]

No charges of immorality of any type were brought against Hooper. Indeed he had provided much of the evidence used against the other missionaries. The Synod however reached a unanimous agreement that Hooper should be sent back to "his friends in England":

This was a resolution to which Hooper in due course assented, but only after he had delivered a blistering attack on Messer:

He has had little education and can simply teach to read ... [that] Mr Messer frequently repeats he is a Lutheran [is] I fear only a blind for ... his disinterestedness and ingenuousness particularly toward the people ... His cattle were contrary to rule previous to Mr Evans first arrival made accustomed to graze on the most nutritive of the Bethelsdorp pasture between the gardens and they consequently frequently in the night broke into the poor people's gardens who had laboured frequently without victuals at them, and they complained to me he did not remunerate them, though when his Garden was broken into once by their oxen he obliged them to repair and repay the damage ... The women were driven by rough means to carry water ... Children when Mr Messer pleased were obliged to lead the oxen ... to carry Mr Messer's corn ... and so discouraged from coming into the school. [47]

Messer, Hooper and Read were all exposed to a similar experiences of life at Bethelsdorp. The moral positions which they adopted to the exploitation around them were not determined in advance, they were the result of personal choices, political convictions and definitions of spiritual belief. It is impossible to identify the causes of their behaviour - an examination of this behaviour can, however, shed some light on the social factors which enabled it. The Synod itself did not mark so much a break but rather a continuity in processes narrowing the

range of meanings possible in missionary discourse. These meanings were to become increasingly identified with notions of European cultural superiority.

Allegations about the sexual misconduct of missionaries did not end with the Synod. In December 1818 a letter signed by Evans, Messer and Hooper (Hooper was awaiting his return to England) was sent to the Directors:

Mr Corner has been overtaken by a great and heinous sin, and has again fallen before the temptations of the enemy. [48]

Three weeks earlier a woman with a five-month old baby had come to Bethelsdorp from a neighbouring farm. She alleged that Corner was the father.

Upon enquiring when and how many times he had been with her? She answered only once in the new building (the church) ... Mr Evans spoke to him[Corner] privately on the subject, when he candidly acknowledged that he had connections with her once in the place she had mentioned, but that he had deluded himself with the idea that most probably it would never come to light, especially as the woman (Hottentot) had been away so long ... [49]

Although freely admitting his guilt, it was reported that Corner at first was not repentant. No doubt in the face of considerable censure, however, in due course the missionaries reported that "he seemed to be sorrowful about his fall". The missionaries decided that they must now take action themselves and publicly suspend Corner both from "work and fellowship". On reflection, however, they decided that they could not take this action, but only suspend him privately. In making this decision they were at pains to emphasize their reasons were primarily local and personal, and only secondarily the hierarchical structures of the LMS:

we were fearful of the most alarming consequences if it became more generally known. The considerations which induced us ... are the following.

1st. Because we are much afraid if Mrs Corner comes to know of it, who is of a very jealous disposition, and of a hasty and turbulent temper, and has only lately been brought to bed with her second child, it is too probable the consequences may be serious, as there are no bounds to her passions when she begins ...

2ndly Our other reason ... is the silence of the Directors in their answer to the minutes of the meeting in Cape Town. [50]

Corner himself, apparently once again in a state of depression, now asked that he should be, "cut off" publicly

in order that others may fear to tread in his steps, as he did not care what became of his name, or what sufferings he would be called on to endure. [51]

Corner left the mission station, privately suspended from missionary work. The LMS records state that the Society's deputation, (i.e. Philip and Campbell) dissolved his connection with the Society. [52] The remarkable fact that a black evangelist had been amongst the first to bring Christianity to southern Africa had amounted to very little. The ending of Corner's missionary career cannot be blamed on conspiracy or spleen on the part of certain missionaries. Hooper signed his name alongside missionaries whom he had publicly criticised for their lack of concern and oppressive attitudes. The letter concluded:

If it was not for a glimpse of the light of our heavenly Father's countenance now and then through the thick clouds, we do not

know what would become of us. What with the lamented falls of our Dear Brethren the one after the other - being encompassed around about by most bitter enemies, who glory in our downfall, being deserted and despised by some of our own Directors ... and being plagued with the most stubborn and stupid people on the whole globe; we see no earthly place whatever ... [53]

The reduction of the Synod, and subsequent events, to mere conspiracy has resulted in a failure to recognise the complex and contradictory nature of early nineteenth century missions in southern Africa. The records of the Synod provide a rare opportunity to investigate a moment, a particularly well recorded moment, in the articulation of missionary discourse in this period. This moment marked, at least, a partial closure of a considerably different pattern of African missionary activity. The nature of these differences in mission ideology and practice, and the processes leading to their closure, are subjects which warrant detailed consideration on their own terms.

#### Notes

- 1 See for example, W M Macmillan, *The Cape Colour Question* (London, 1928); M Legassick, "The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries 1780-1840: the politics of a frontier zone", PhD thesis, University of California 1969.
- 2 See A Ross, *John Philip (1775 - 1851). Missions, Race and Politics in South Africa* (Aberdeen, 1986); K Crehan, "Ideology and Practice. A Missionary Case: the LMS and the Cape Frontier 1799-1850" in C Hill (ed), Centre for African Studies, *Collected Papers* (Vol 4, 1979).
- 3 See R Variava, "The deployment of Racism in South Africa" (PhD thesis, Cambridge University, May 1989); J & J L Comaroff, "Through the Looking Glass: colonial encounters of the first kind", in *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol 1, No 1 (March 1988); and J & J L Comaroff, "Revelation and Revolution. Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa" (manuscript, 1990).
- 4 See Macmillan, *Cape Colour*, p 52; T Dederling, "Southern Namibia c1780-c1840: Khoikhoi, Missionaries and the Advancing Frontier" (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989), p 354.
- 5 See for example, S Newton-King and V C Malherbe, *The Khoikhoi Rebellion in the Eastern Cape (1799- 1803)* (Cape Town, 1981), p 34.
- 6 Ross, *John Philip*, p 221.
- 7 For a discussion on Van der Kemp's marriage, see I H Enklaar, *Life and Work of Dr J Th. Van Der Kemp 1747-1811* (Cape Town, 1988), pp 204-06.
- 8 See Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*.
- 9 For a notable exception see E Elbourne, "'To Colonize the Mind': evangelical missionaries in Britain and the Eastern Cape 1790-1837" (DPhil, Oxford University, 1992).

- 10 G de Ste Croix, "Class in Marx's Conception of History, Ancient and Modern", *New Left Review* , 146 (July/August, 1984), pp 94-112.
- 11 S Newton-King, "The Enemy Within: the struggle for ascendancy on the Cape eastern frontier, c1760-1800" (PhD thesis, forthcoming), Chapter 6. (Work in progress - cited by kind permission of Susan Newton-King).
- 12 E Elbourne, "Concerning Missionaries: the case of van der Kemp", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17 (1), March 1991.
- 13 Legassick, "The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana ...", p 100.
- 14 I Schapera (ed), *Apprenticeship at Kuruman: being the Journal and Letters of Robert and Mary Moffat 1820 -1828* (London, 1951), p 69.
- 15 CWM South Africa Incoming Correspondence(hereafter CWM SA) Box 7/2/C, Minutes of Missionary Deputies, August 1817 (hereafter Minutes).
- 16 CWM SA 7/2/C Minutes.
- 17 Annotated Bibliography of Missionaries of the London Missionary Society - entry under W F Corner.
- 18 CWM SA 7/2/C Minutes.
- 19 CWM SA 7/2/C Minutes.
- 20 Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* , p 11.
- 21 C Northcott, *Robert Moffat - Pioneer in Africa* (London, 1961), p 37.
- 22 Legassick, "The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana ...", p 288.
- 23 Macmillan, *Colour Question*, p 39.
- 24 This was done in a signed declaration at the end of the minutes.
- 25 Ross, *John Philip*, p.49.
- 26 C Saunders, "James Read: toward a reassessment", Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Vol 7 (1975-76), Collected Seminar Papers No 21, p 20.
- 27 CWM SA 7/4/D G Barker from Theopolis, 28 April 1818.
- 28 V C Malherbe, "The Life and Times of Cupido Kakkerlak", in *Journal of African History*, 20, 3 (1979), pp 365-78.
- 29 Legassick, "The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana ...", p 289.
- 30 See J R Gillis, "Married but not Churched: plebian sexual relations and marital non-conformity in eighteenth century Britain", in R Maccubin (ed) *'Tis Nature's Fault* (Cambridge, 1987), p 35.
- 31 CWM SA Minutes.



- 32 CWM SA Minutes.
- 33 CWM SA 7/5/C H Schmelen from Bethany 6 November 1818.
- 34 CWM SA 7/1/D G Thom, 29 April 1817.
- 35 CWM SA Minutes.
- 36 CWM SA Minutes.
- 37 CWM SA Minutes.
- 38 CWM SA Minutes. Pencil notes in the margin of the minutes, probably by Evans, question the legality of the Landdrost's behaviour. According to A J Jardine, *A Fragment of Church History at the Cape of Good Hope*, (Cape Town, 1979; first published 1827), p 26, to make a valid marriage, nothing is requisite but a mutual interchange of real consent with a full intention to constitute as at that date the relation of husband and wife; and evidence of that fact either in writing, in which it is expressed, or by witnesses before whom it has been declared.
- 39 CWM SA 7/1/D G Thom, 29 April 1817.
- 40 CWM SA Minutes.
- 41 CWM SA 7/1/D G Thom, 29 April 1817.
- 42 CWM SA Minutes.
- 43 CWM SA 7/1/A F Hooper 4 January /1817.
- 44 CWM SA F Hooper, 4 January 1817.
- 45 CWM SA F Hooper, 4 January /1817.
- 46 CWM SA Minutes.
- 47 CWM SA 7/3/B F Hooper, 25 October 1817.
- 48 CWM 7/5/C SA C Messer, E Evans and F Hooper from Bethelsdorp, 7 December 1818.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Annotated Bibliography of Missionaries of the London Missionary Society - entry under W F Corner.
- 53 CWM SA 7/5/C Messer, Evans and Hooper, 7 December 1818.