

# MISSIONARIES, XHOSA CLERGY & THE SUPPRESSION OF TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS

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## INITIATION AND BRIDE-PRICE

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of traditional Xhosa social customs were opposed by missionaries who tried to insist that their Xhosa converts abstain from all observance or participation on pain of discipline, even expulsion from the church. This chapter will discuss the missionary attacks on *intonjane* (girl's initiation, puberty rite), *ukwaluka* (circumcision, boy's initiation rite), and *lobola* (bride-price). The making and drinking of *utywala*, the Xhosa beer, was also assailed with increasing vigour but will not be discussed here.<sup>1</sup> As subordinate agents, Xhosa clergy had very limited opportunities to advance views and positions that differed from their missionary mentors on any issue upon which the latter had categorical views. Moreover, they were expected to support and enforce the missionary position. This left them in a very uncomfortable dilemma when rank and file Xhosa Christians were unwilling to abandon the customs. By the beginning of the twentieth century, only the campaign against *utywala* and other alcoholic beverages had been an unqualified 'success' in that abstention was accepted in practice as a requirement for membership in good standing in almost all mission churches. In regard to the other customs mentioned, 'success' was much more qualified. This chapter concludes with a look at the compromises and outcomes arrived at in the churches in the early twentieth century.

In theory, *intonjane* was the female rite of passage at the onset of first menses, marking the passage from girlhood to adulthood and eligibility for marriage.<sup>2</sup> However, the heavy expense<sup>3</sup> involving four killings, plus beer and other food for the feasting and feeding of attendants over several weeks, meant that, in practice, it was frequently postponed, even until after marriage.<sup>4</sup> Thus, even without *intonjane*, a girl became an *intombi* at puberty and could be married. More importantly, the rite was regarded as important preparation for child-bearing. Without it, a girl was liable to fall ill after marriage, be barren, or have sickly children.<sup>5</sup> Any trouble in the young bride was likely to be diagnosed by the diviner as having been sent by her father's ancestors, who were aggrieved that the custom had been omitted, and that she should return to her parental homestead and undergo the rite.<sup>6</sup> Among the southern Nguni, the custom did not involve instruction in sexual matters and techniques, or

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<sup>1</sup> See W.G. Mills, "The Roots of African Nationalism in the Cape Colony: Temperance, 1866-98", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, XIII, 2 (1980), pp. 197-213.

<sup>2</sup> However, when the rite was celebrated at or near the first menses, it was usually two or three years before marriages were, in fact, concluded.

<sup>3</sup> Chief William Shaw Kama, who had been a Wesleyan clergyman for a few years, gave this as the main reason for his Christian followers agreeing to the suppression of *intonjane*. 'It entails great expense on the parents... If a man has only one cow when an *intonjane* happens at his place he has to kill it.' *The Report and Proceedings, with Appendices of the Government Commission on Native Laws and Customs*, [G.4-1883] (Cape Town, 1883), Minutes of Evidence, p. 239. Subsequent references will be *Native Laws*.

<sup>4</sup> J.H. Soga, *The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs* (Lovedale and London, 1932), p. 218; M.H. Wilson, *Reaction to Conquest*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford, 1961), pp. 167, 174; *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 87, no. 1279.

<sup>5</sup> As a spokesperson explained to the Commission: 'When a girl arrives at the age of puberty she must be danced for. The dance is to prevent evil in after days, just as when a woman is married, dancing at her kraal takes place lest evil should arrive.' *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 465, no. 8189.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Reaction*, p. 166; also Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, p. 219. However, both writers emphasize that there were no overt invocations to the ancestors or involvement of priest-diviners in the killings. The lack of a 'strengthening' aspect (i.e., witchcraft as many missionaries saw it) or invocations helped to mask this second aspect of the rite.

even in the duties of wife and mother.<sup>7</sup>

There were five features:<sup>8</sup> seclusion of the initiate, observance of food taboos, the use of bleaching and/or medicinal agents on the skin, ritual killings, and ritual dances.<sup>9</sup> There were other common practices as well. During the rite, the initiate was secluded behind a screen in a separate hut. Family members were excluded from the hut, but neighbouring young people, both male and female, were allowed into the hut and gathered frequently. While men were not allowed to go behind the screen or even to see the initiate's face, the visiting young people often stayed all night and engaged in *ukumetse*.<sup>10</sup>

Except for the Mpondo and Bhaca who had abandoned the custom during the turmoil of the *difaqane*,<sup>11</sup> *ukwaluka* or circumcision was the indispensable initiation for males into adulthood among the southern Nguni. The ordeal was seen as a necessary demonstration that the youth was worthy of being considered a 'man'. If a male did not undergo this rite, he would always be referred to as *inkwenkwe* (boy) no matter how old he became. He was excluded from *all* male activities, prohibited from participation in councils, and was unable to inherit. The uncircumcised male was subjected to the intense ridicule of women as well as men; no woman would have anything to do with him, and no family would agree to arrange a marriage. Overt religious overtones, in the form of direct invocations to ancestors, were few and the participation of a religious specialist (*igqira*-diviner) was limited to one ceremony during the entire process. Nevertheless, the religious significance was important. This custom initiated the young man into full membership in the family, which included not only the living adults but also its guiding spirits--the ancestors who would never accept an uncircumcised man. However, this religious aspect was largely inherent rather than explicit and overt.<sup>12</sup>

The rite was a very protracted one and normally a number of boys from a neighbourhood were circumcised together. It began with a ritual killing and a feast--the former to ward off evil and danger, the latter to celebrate the great transition that was about to begin. The physical operation took place either immediately or the next morning. The wound itself required several weeks to heal. During this time the youths were secluded as this was seen as a period of danger and ritual impurity. After about ten days, when the healing was well underway, there was another killing as thanksgiving for the successful conclusion of the most dangerous phase. After healing, the boys, covered in white clay, spent several

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<sup>7</sup> Wilson is specific, see *Reaction*, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the description is based on Wilson, *Reaction*, pp. 165-74, and Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, pp. 216-23.

<sup>9</sup> Soga suggests a norm of about three weeks, in *The Ama-Xosa*, p. 221; Wilson thought one month was about average, but had the impression that seclusions had tended to be longer previously, see *Reaction*, p. 170. J.C. Warner in Colonel Maclean's *A Compendium of Kafir Laws and Customs* (Cass reprint, 1968) p. 104, says seclusion was seven to ten days.

<sup>10</sup> Sexual intimacies up to, but not including, sexual intercourse. To many missionaries, this external or 'onanistic' intercourse was not only immoral but also 'unnatural' and 'unclean'. See Revd A. Kropf in *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 244; also A. Kropf, *Kafir-English Dictionary*.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, *Reaction*, p. 165; Hammond-Tooke, *Bhaca Society* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 79-82. Soga was incorrect in asserting (*The Ama-Xosa*, p. 248) that clan groups of northern Nguni origins had not had circumcision and that it was a peculiarly 'Xhosa Proper' custom which had spread to the others. Ten Mfengu witnesses described their origins and were asked: 'Had you then the same customs as now?' 'If you mean as to circumcision, *ukulobola* and *intonjane*, then we had the same.' *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> This is one reason for the contradictory opinions regarding whether circumcision was a religious act. It was a matter of great interest in the nineteenth century because of great speculation about whether or not the custom had originally been derived from the Jews and/or Arabs, and also as part of the 'Hamitic invasion' thesis. L. Alberti, *Ludwig Alberti's Account of the Tribal Life & Customs of the Xhosa in 1807*, trans. William Fehr (Cape Town, 1968), p. 39, denied that it was a religious act, as did Revd H.H. Dugmore, see Maclean's *Compendium*, p. 160. Tiyo Soga asserted, 'It is a civil and not a religious rite.' J.A. Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga: A Page of South African Mission Work* (Edinburgh, 1877), p. 264. J.C. Warner, *Compendium*, p. 100, argued very strongly that it did have a religious aspect.

months in their hut; occasionally, they received lectures on how they should behave as men and went to special dances in their unique *abakwetha* costumes and decorations.<sup>13</sup> After a period that might last several months, there was a series of rituals to bring the rite to a close and to accept the new 'men' into regular society. These rituals included the ritual washing off of the white clay, the burning of their circumcision hut and everything they had been using during the seclusion, another ritual killing, and a great feast.

*Lobola*<sup>14</sup> was a fundamental element of Xhosa marriage. It involved the transfer of substantial amounts of wealth in cattle or an equivalent from the bridegroom (and his family) to the guardian (normally the father) of the bride. Except in the case of chiefs and very rich men, the number of cattle demanded was usually fewer than ten.<sup>15</sup> The number of cattle and the timing of their delivery were matters of long negotiation. In many cases, the final total was not decided, nor in most cases were all of the cattle delivered prior to the completion of the marriage. As a result, the woman's relatives would demand additional cattle from time to time. In order to increase the pressure if it was felt there was unnecessary dilatoriness, the woman might be called home and detained until additional cattle were forthcoming.

Much has been written about *lobola* and its significance. African marriage was primarily a joining of two families rather than a matter between two individuals. As a result, negotiations and decision-making regarding any proposed marriage were in the hands of the family heads. In theory (except in the case of older heads of their own homesteads), all marriages were 'arranged' and the wishes of young people were not regarded as crucial. Obedience to one's parents and the economic and legal dependence of the young people caused most to accept the arrangements made for them. In practice, young men were often consulted and their wishes respected; if a young man wanted to marry a particular girl, his family most likely would attempt to arrange the match, and rarely would they attempt to override a strong dislike or objection.<sup>16</sup> Girls were consulted much less, and families would resort to strong pressure, including thrashings, if they thought the marriage a good one and were anxious to conclude it. A girl was expected to submit to the wishes of her father. However, fathers were constrained not only by their fondness for their daughters and the need to get the consent of the girl's mother, but also by the fact that if the wife were responsible for a breakdown in the marriage, the *lobola* might have to be returned. Thus, if a girl were determined, she could usually effect a veto over a proposed marriage.

*Lobola* was the foundation of African marriage. Although there were a number of ceremonies, rituals and reciprocal entertainments by the families, only *lobola* was indispensable in legitimizing a marriage. Without the payment of cattle, the father or his family could not claim parental rights to the children. Without the payment of *lobola*, a son did not have a claim to inherit. Perpetuation of the lineage was a source of great anxiety to African families, and the main incentive and purpose of African marriage was the desire to provide children. Also, as an active producer in agriculture, a woman made important contributions to the economy of a homestead. Thus, *lobola* was a compensation from the family of the groom to that of the bride for the loss of her productive and reproductive

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<sup>13</sup> The youths made short skirts and conical headpieces from palm leaves sewn together.

<sup>14</sup> For detailed information on the custom among the Xhosa-speaking peoples, see the following: *Native Laws*; Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, pp. 263-85; *Alberti's Account*, pp. 59-70; Wilson, *Reaction*, pp. 30, 32, 122-9, 190-3, 212-13; M. Wilson *et al.*, *Keiskammahoeek Rural Survey III: Social Change* (Pietermaritzburg, 1952), pp. 80-90; Hammond-Tooke, *Bhaca Society*, pp. 47-50, 113, 132-7, 302-8.

<sup>15</sup> See statistics, Wilson *et al.*, *Social Change*, p. 87; however, Hammond-Tooke seems to indicate a somewhat higher average, see *Bhaca Society*, pp. 306-7.

<sup>16</sup> The *lobola* was at stake. If a woman were later dissatisfied with the husband's treatment or demeanour and the marriage broke down as a result of his fault, the *lobola* cattle (*ikhazi*) might not have to be repaid.

contributions. Moreover, *lobola* cemented the alliance between the families, and the substantial transfer of wealth created very important vested interests in the marriage.

The payment of *lobola* was an indication to the bride's family that the proposed husband was capable of providing for the bride and that he and his family were people of substance. Also, it was a security bond posted by or on behalf of the bridegroom as a pledge of good treatment; a man was not likely to abandon such a substantial investment, and in most societies, if a divorce resulted because of abuse and ill-treatment, all or most of the *lobola* was forfeited.

On the other hand, by the receipt of *lobola*, the bride's family incurred a great many obligations. The bride had to carry to her new home, a wardrobe, a range of presents for her new 'in-laws', and a good supply of household articles;<sup>17</sup> also, from time to time, she would return home to replenish these by demanding more. Her family had incentives to encourage the young wife's good behaviour. If she were at fault in a divorce, the *lobola* would have to be returned. If she created trouble or violated the *ukuhlonipa* (to show respect) restrictions, she would be sent home to get a fine to restore harmonious relations in the husband's homestead. Beneficiaries of *lobola* acquired lifelong obligations; if widowed or divorced, a woman could go to them and claim protection and maintenance.<sup>18</sup> Also, it seems that in the event of disaster or hard times, a husband could ask for and expect some assistance from his wife's family.<sup>19</sup>

## MISSIONARY OPINIONS

Missionary opposition arose from several considerations. Proselytization and evangelization inescapably involved the attempt to alter behaviours as well as beliefs. It could hardly be otherwise in regard to behaviours whose primary purpose was religious; but what about those when the religious purpose or aspect was only secondary? Indeed, it was frequently very difficult to make a distinction between religious practices and social customs because many customs had religious significance.<sup>20</sup> For example, Xhosa rarely slaughtered animals, especially cattle, solely for the meat; except in the face of exceptional demands of hospitality, the killing of an animal was a means of contact with the ancestors. When a diviner (*igqira*) supervised the procedures or where direct invocations were made to the ancestors, the religious involvement was explicit and overt. However, often the religious aspect was implicit. The ancestors were especially concerned about the performance of customs and ceremonies in the correct manner. Thus, even without explicit invocations, almost any killing carried overtones of pleasing the ancestors, and any ceremonies or feasting that involved the killing of an animal could introduce a 'heathen' aspect.

J.C. Warner, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary who became a government agent, showed acute concern about this and, in 1858, enunciated the most uncompromising

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<sup>17</sup> Wealthy fathers often sent one or more cattle as property for her 'house', and the value of presents, etc. accompanying the bride frequently equaled or even exceeded the value of the *ikhazi* given as *lobola*.

<sup>18</sup> Normally, the very strong ties of kinship would have ensured this anyway, but in those rare cases where the beneficiary might refuse, the claim incurred by receipt of *lobola* was enforceable in the courts of the chief.

<sup>19</sup> He might get assistance with plowing, be loaned some cattle, or send his wife and children to be cared for.

<sup>20</sup> A similar problem arose with regard to medicines and charms as this excerpt from an Anglican Missionary Conference (1889) report reveals: 'Medical practice is so mixed up with sacrifices to, and dealing with, the spirits of the dead, among the natives, and the difference between a medicine which acts by natural means, and a charm which, at any rate as far as our present knowledge guides us, cannot so act, are so easily confused in the native mind, that practically our discussion came to no result.' *Missionary Chronicle*, old ser., V, 53 (1890), p. 118.

missionary position in the influential Maclean's *Compendium*.<sup>21</sup> Claiming that Xhosa beliefs and practices formed 'a regular system of superstition which answers all the purposes of any other false religion', Warner insisted that missionaries were in error to compare them to isolated superstitions of Europe, such as nailing a horseshoe over the door, and should not be misled by the fact that Africans had 'no visible symbols' of their supernatural beings.

It is the spirits of their departed friends and ancestors, whom they dread, in whom they trust, and whom they endeavour to propitiate. This is the foundation of that system of superstition.

Warner asserted that the *igqira* formed an 'order of priesthood'. While all missionaries agreed that the *igqira* and any ceremonies conducted by him or ordered by him were 'heathenish', Warner linked customs such as circumcision and *intonjane*, in which the *igqira* had little or no part, with this system of superstition. Warner's position was that there could be no piecemeal approach; 'the system itself must be nationally abandoned' and customs in any way associated with this 'system' must be 'denounced and overturned'.

Otherwise there will be a danger of building Christianity on the rotten foundations of their pagan superstition. as the Roman Catholic Missionaries have done in some parts of the world.

Not all missionaries adopted this drastic position. Some argued, for example, that circumcision, in itself, is not immoral, nor in any way unChristian.<sup>22</sup> However, they were profoundly shocked and opposed to many of the behaviours that were associated with the customs and the celebrations: the drinking of beer, 'immoral' dancing and other 'immoralities'.<sup>23</sup> Some adopting this position seemed to leave the door open to toleration of the customs if the objectionable associated elements were eliminated. However, for others, the 'immoral' associations were too close for the customs ever to be acceptable. Thus, in the public proceedings of the Native Laws Commission, what sounds like prudery, rather than religious objection, was frequently voiced by missionaries. But, of course, it was not simply prudery. The objective of missionary work, as the missionaries conceptualized it, was to produce a sober, pious community. This was not simply a recreation of European society because such a community was not often to be found in Europe, at least on any scale. In any case, the traditional socializing activities had great appeal to Africans and represented a serious threat to missionary endeavours. It is doubtful if any missionaries escaped losing some of their converts when the latter succumbed to the allure of the traditional social activities and 'backslid'. Thus, even without religious aspects, participation in traditional rites and celebrations involved a 'lifestyle' that was inimical to the 'lifestyle' the missionaries were trying to engender.

In addition, *intonjane* and *lobola* were part of a larger missionary preoccupation in the nineteenth century-the 'degraded', 'servile' status and condition of women in African

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<sup>21</sup> All citations from Maclean, 'Laws and Customs Connected with Their System of Superstition', *A Compendium*, pp. 78-112. This was a basic source of information for both government officials and missionaries. W.C. Holden quoted large sections verbatim in his *The Past and Future of the Kaffir Races* (London, c. 1866), pp. 182ff.

<sup>22</sup> Bishop Callaway (Anglican), *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, appen. C, p. 71. Also, Revd Chalmers (Presbyterian), *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, appen. C, p. 137, no. 2395.

<sup>23</sup> They were not very specific, but frequently used terms like licentious. Also, the initiation customs brought the beginning of 'sweethearting' and participation in *ukumetse* practices by the young people; missionaries found these unspeakably wicked. The dancing and other activities in the celebrations they argued were an incitement to the young people.

society.<sup>24</sup> 24 Inequality of the sexes resulted because *lobola* 'is based on the idea that females are the property of the father, the elder brother, or the husband, and not equal to them in any way. The whole social state of Kafir society is therefore built on a wrong foundation.'<sup>25</sup> 'The husband looks upon a woman he had paid *ikaz* for as a servant.'<sup>26</sup> Frequently, strong exception was taken to the division of labour which assigned primary responsibility for agriculture to women; as a result, 'women have all the drudgery and laborious work to perform'.<sup>27</sup> However, Bishop B.L. Key's observation that 'although women have to work hard, their position...is as good as that of women in England among the agricultural population', showed that a few missionaries were somewhat less biased.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the introduction of ox-drawn plows was greatly increasing male participation in agricultural activities.<sup>29</sup>

Their greatest example of 'degradation' was polygyny, and *lobola*, they felt, was the foundation of this 'unnatural' relationship. The better, 'natural' feelings of fathers and brothers were corrupted by cupidity and greed; being valued in cattle demeaned and demoralized the women. Old, rich men had a distinct advantage over poor, young men when such large payments were involved, The large vested interests built up made it very difficult to disentangle and dissolve such 'sinful' relationships, Revd Chalmers was not opposed to *lobola* if it were connected with monogamy, but had reservations because of the connection with 'polygamy'.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, by the time of the Native Laws Commission (1881-3), a few missionaries had begun to see polygyny in a broader perspective. Some Anglicans felt that if polygyny were suppressed, a much worse evil, 'concubinage', would result. Even if polygynous, 'the native marriage is a marriage, and entails responsibilities on a husband, though different from those in Christian marriage',<sup>31</sup> and 'the wives have a respectable status'.<sup>32</sup> The Revd Bertram (a retired, Wesleyan Methodist) felt that polygyny 'was a hindrance to Christianity' but, he went on, 'there are advantages; whilst they live in their native state I know of no great disadvantages.' The main advantage that he noted was that 'it reduced the number of children of a woman'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Etherington, Chapter 7 in this volume, for additional evidence.

<sup>25</sup> Revd T. Weiz (Moravian), *Native Laws*, appen. C, p. 216.

<sup>26</sup> Revd W.H. Turpin (Anglican), *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 164, no. 2789.

<sup>27</sup> J.C. Warner, *Compendium*, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Native Laws*, appendix C, p. 186, no. 31. Most missionaries seemed unaware that unflattering comparisons could be made with the drudgery of working-class women in the mines, in the factories, and in the homes of the wealthy in Britain.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, the division of labour, which prohibited females from contact with cattle, could work the opposite way according to Revd Brownlee Ross. Ross encouraged men without sons to use daughters to help drive ox teams; however, the one man who tried it was soon forced to stop by the reactions of his scandalized neighbours. *Imvo* (29 Apr. 1903).

<sup>30</sup> *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 155, no. 2645-6; see entire testimony, pp. 137-55.

<sup>31</sup> Revd Key, *Native Laws*, appen. C, p. 187. See also Archdeacon Waters, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 358-64 and appen. C, pp. 169-70; Revd Thomas Green, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 390-1.

<sup>32</sup> Bishop Callaway, *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 404, no. 7272. Although he says 'polygamy is a great evil' (p. 405), in his testimony (pp. 402-5 and appen. C, pp. 72-8), he reveals more understanding of what polygyny meant to Africans than did the majority of missionaries. This seems to represent a significant shift in his approach from 1862 when he published a pamphlet, *Polygamy a Bar to Admission to the Christian Church*, repudiating Bishop Colenso's more tolerant attitude. Callaway never went as far as Colenso but his testimony seems to indicate that he had swung around to quite a few of Colenso's arguments by 1881. See M.S. Bentham, *Henry Callaway, First Bishop of Kaffraria* (London and New York, 1896), pp. 134-45.

<sup>33</sup> *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 309, no. 5526-29. However, Revd Weiz seemed to regard fewer children as an indication of inefficiency. 'Polygamy is not even expedient, as far as fruitfulness is concerned. Jacob with four wives had not more children than many a monogamist and upon the whole, even among the Kafirs, the number of children is sometimes small, considering the number of wives.' Appen. C., p. 216.

The most tolerant approach on the question of the status of women and traditional customs generally, had been that advanced by Bishop Colenso in the early 1860s. Henry Callaway, Anglican Bishop of St John's (Transkei), but former associate of Colenso and regarded as a Zulu expert, brought that greater tolerance, or at least caution, to the Cape Colony. In regard to *intonjane*, the traditional custom for which missionaries urged forcible suppression by law most frequently (although circumcision was a fairly close second),<sup>34</sup> Callaway said before the Native Laws Commission:

'Intonjane' is attended with customs which appear to us destructive of female modesty, but we are not sufficiently well acquainted with it, probably, to understand it. It has been a fashion to denounce practices with which we are not acquainted, and to be in a hurry to urge legislation against names, without our understanding the things themselves.<sup>35</sup>

Revd W.A. Goodwin (Anglican) restated the Colenso argument very forcefully at a Missionary Conference in 1904. He argued that polygyny was a sin of the missionaries' own making as it was prohibited nowhere in the Bible.

Before either consigning to perdition or withering with so-called righteous indignation, the advocates of tender handling, at least look patiently at the other side of the question, remembering that even though we may be prejudiced, Truth itself is many-sided, and that there is no need to add to the multitudinous sins of humanity fresh sins which our zeal and fervour have themselves created.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the negative consequences of breaking up polygynous marriages, most mission societies insisted that men put away all wives except the first before they could be accepted into membership, and that women must leave polygynous relationships before they could be accepted. Anglicans were moderately less strict. Because a woman was regarded as 'involuntarily' linked and lacking 'power over her own body', she could be baptized and confirmed. A male polygynist could not be admitted to full membership, but it was felt undesirable to urge him to send his wives away as 'it is quite possible that other offences against the moral law, natural and Christian, of a graver character than even Polygamy, may be committed by requiring a polygamist to put away his wives, without their consent and due consideration of their legal status and claims.'<sup>37</sup> Thus, polygynists were taken under instruction as 'catechumens' 'until events release him from moral obligations or covenants entered into before he was acquainted with Christian doctrine'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The Anglican Archdeacon Waters forbade *intonjane* on St. Mark's mission station but allowed circumcision (*Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 358, no. 6401) and advocated legal suppression only of *intonjane* (appen. C, p. 168).

<sup>35</sup> *Native Laws*, appen. C, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the First General Missionary Conference Held at Johannesburg... 1904* (Johannesburg, 1905), p. 100. However, Bishop Alan Gibson, while admitting all the problems and difficulties posed by taking a hard line, concluded that the need to maintain church principles in regard to marriage and baptism required an insistence on no compromise. See his 'Polygamy and Christianity in South Africa', *East and West*, V (1907), pp. 135-50.

<sup>37</sup> Bishop Callaway, *Native Laws*, appen. C, p. 73. Not only was this felt to be disruptive and a shirking off of responsibility, but it was recognized that women sent home in this way were unlikely to be remarried and in most cases would become *idikazi*. These women had only impermanent liaisons and had no permanent claims on the fathers of their children. Thus, the sending away of wives would lead to much more 'concubinage', 'prostitution' and 'immorality'.

<sup>38</sup> Bishop Key seemed to feel the need to justify this approach as he several times defended it in letters to *Mission Chronicle*; especially the touching story of Thomas Ntaba:

'Then he told us of a talk he had with the second wife...she...said, "Do as you will, but I cannot leave you; I love you." And he told us, "I cannot leave her; she must remain my wife." I cannot think we have given way weakly to compromising our Christian calling when we told him we would admit him as a learner... On the one hand there is the sanctity of baptism, on the other the sanctity of family life—even the family life of a polygamist. Rash hands may not

The more accompanying approach of Anglican missionaries from Natal and Zululand, as noted above, is interesting and revealing. First, it was not shared by their colleagues in the Diocese of Grahamstown. When St John's Diocese was created in the Transkei out of parts of each, that division on this issue remained into the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> However, it also illustrates a more significant feature of missionary attitudes—the influence of peer pressure and conformity. Missionary activity by Anglicans did not begin on any significant scale until about mid century. Anglican missionaries beginning mission work found very different situations in Natal and in the Cape Colony. In the Cape, they found a mission field in which the parameters were already firmly fixed. Moreover, many of the African associates—teachers and later clergy—were educated in other mission societies' schools (especially Moravians). As we shall note, these Africans tended to be outspokenly opposed to the more accommodating approach. Thus, the missionaries in the early decades in the Cape had established norms which later missionaries tended to accept or perhaps found difficult to change. In Zululand, on the other hand, very little had been done. The American Board had been active for some years, but until the defeat of the Zulu state, little progress could be made. As a result, Natal was close to a virgin state in regard to mission work and a missionary such as Colenso was less trammelled by preconceptions and established norms.

African clergy were often in no position to take an independent stand on these issues. In the first place, one of the criteria for selection was opposition to traditional customs, as Revd Barren (Wesleyan) pointed out in a paper on the creation of a 'native agency':

As our work is to reclaim the people from heathenism our helpers should be those who are thoroughly staunch in their opposition to all superstitious customs, barbarous and filthy practice, and I would add beer drinking. They should be men who having been set free by Christ, detest the heathen rite of circumcision and who believe that women having been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ are not any longer to be bought and sold.<sup>40</sup>

African clergy were expected to enforce the rules and were themselves disciplined for any breaches of the rules. In 1881, the Wesleyan Methodist clergy, James Lwana and Abram Mabula, were disciplined for accepting *lobola* for their daughters.<sup>41</sup> As a result of a report in the *Cape Mercury* (6 December 1884), Mabula was accused, in 1885, of paying *lobola* on the marriage of his son. Although very dissatisfied, the missionaries were unable to disprove Mabula's contention that the payments were only 'presents', not *lobola*.<sup>42</sup> It is not clear what the inflexible missionaries felt that parents should do when the parents of a girl whom their son wished to marry insisted on *lobola*, or what a young man in such a situation should do. In the case of circumcision, proposals to discipline parents of boys who went through the rite were never applied. Even the missionaries conceded that parents were unable to prevent determined young men. However, one of the charges levelled against Nehemiah Tile, just before he withdrew from the Wesleyan Methodist Church, was that he had contributed an ox for the circumcision of the Thembu paramount's heir, Dalindyebo.<sup>43</sup>

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touch it in any form; we must deal gently even with this form of family.' *Mission Chronicle*, new ser., I, 10 (1899), pp. 302-3.

<sup>39</sup> *Mission Chronicle*, new ser., I, 8 (1898), p. 234.

<sup>40</sup> Methodist Archives, Cory Library, MS 15, 711(b).

<sup>41</sup> Methodist Archives, MS 15, 018, Minutes of the Grahamstown District Meeting, 1881.

<sup>42</sup> Methodist Archives, MS 15, 192, Minutes of Queenstown Native District Meeting, 1885, pp. 425-6. *Cape Mercury*, 6 Dec. 1884.

<sup>43</sup> C.C. Saunders, 'Tile and the Thembu Church: Politics and Independency on the Cape Eastern Frontier in the late Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, XI, 4 (1970), p. 556.



Moreover, many early clergy were convinced by and indoctrinated into the missionary view. The idea of 'progress' was strongly inculcated and, for Africans, frequently that meant abandonment of traditional customs in favour of European customs. In a paper in 1877, P.J. Mzimba pointed out some practical 'evils' of *lobola*. 'This bleeding of young men' prevented their getting married, with resulting immorality, or caused desperate unmarried girls to go to great extremes in adorning themselves in order to attract husbands. Also, as a result, young couples started marriage with nothing or with heavy debts; this was very bad, even fatal, for the marriage; at the very least, young couples were unable to build a proper home with decent furniture.<sup>44</sup> As a result, even though *lobola* was not condemned as sinful, it was regarded as 'outmoded'<sup>45</sup> or as 'a remnant of heathenism'.<sup>46</sup> Peter Masiza (Anglican) was violently opposed and even urged that *lobola* be suppressed by the government.<sup>47</sup> Masiza also maintained an adamant opposition to circumcision.<sup>48</sup> In fact, as noted earlier, African clergy in St John's Diocese adopted the more rigid position of Grahamstown Diocese on circumcision and traditional customs.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, African clergymen were still part of the traditional 'world' of Xhosa society and culture. As a consequence, they had, in spite of themselves and of missionary pressures, an inherent appreciation of many traditional values (even J.H. Soga at times became lyrical in descriptions), and occasionally they expressed uneasiness. In 1885, Gana Kakaza, in a paper to the Healdtown Teachers' Association, displayed uneasiness:

It is my deeply-rooted fear we are in danger of throwing away as useless ever custom that obtained among our forefathers, and of adopting every European custom as being right simply because it is European in its origin.

While the Europeans brought Christianity, they also brought liquor. 'I say, therefore, let us beware of what we are about.'<sup>50</sup>

Isaac Wauchope<sup>51</sup> went even further and launched a significant counter-attack against the unrelenting denigration and disparagement of traditional culture and customs. In 1891, he argued forcefully that much more effort should be devoted to teaching Xhosa in the 'Native Institutions'.<sup>52</sup> Subsequently, he began to collect *amaqalo*-mottos or proverbs-and in November he thanked those who had been sending him examples.

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<sup>44</sup> *Christian Express*, VII, 84 (1 Sept. 1877), pp. 14-15. The writer of *Imvo*'s sub-leader (8 Aug. 1894), probably Jabavu, adopted a similar position. 'We...favour the European mode of building up the home of the new couple to our national mode of denuding it at the very start with concomitant evils.'

<sup>45</sup> *Imvo*, 15 Dec. 1892.

<sup>46</sup> Revd Rubusana, *Christian Express* (1 Dec. 1905), p. 189.

<sup>47</sup> *Christian Express*, II, 19 (1 Apr. 1872).

<sup>48</sup> Bishop Key described his views in 1898. 'Mr. Masiza would have none of it. The thing was bad, and must be extirpated root and branch. He would have no treaty with this old enemy of Christianity...he hailed this new proposal [to impose discipline] as a return to the right path, over the leaving which he had mourned.' *Mission Chronicle*, new ser., I, 8 (1898), p. 234.

<sup>49</sup> *Mission Chronicle*, old ser., V, 53 (1890), pp. 115-16.

<sup>50</sup> *Imvo* (20 May 1885).

<sup>51</sup> Wauchope had a fascinating career. In 1877, he was one of four African volunteers to accompany the Revd Dr Stewart to found the Livingstonia Mission in Malawi. He returned to the Cape in poor health after a few years. After teaching at Uitenhage where he was recuperating, he was appointed court interpreter in Port Elizabeth. There, he was very prominent in the African community. In 1888 he entered the Theology School at Lovedale and was ordained in 1892 in the Congregational church. In addition to his ministerial duties at three congregations in the Fort Beaufort area (which included supervision of several schools also), he was active in parliamentary elections and the Native College Scheme. In 1909, he ran afoul of the law, see *Imvo* (29 Dec. 1909; 25 Jan., 1 Feb. 1910). During World War I he volunteered for the Native Labour Contingent and was one of the victims of the *Mende* disaster.

<sup>52</sup> *Imvo* (16 and 23 July 1891). The paper provoked some dissent and controversy flickered on for some weeks.

There is a tendency in the Native mind to regard civilized moral standards as foreign or strange. My object is to show that corresponding moral standards exist in crystallized forms in their own National Mottoes, and that by living up to those they would not fall far below the civilized standards of morality.<sup>53</sup>

In 1901, in a short series entitled 'Primitive Native Customs: Their Moral Aspects', he strongly defended traditional customs. In the article on circumcision, he referred to the antiquity of the custom, to its place in the Christian Bible and to hygienic benefits. However, it was the disciplinary features that he emphasized. The transition from boyhood to manhood is a critical period and one of anxiety to parents; the discipline is necessary in the transition, 'to rid the lad of his boyishness'. The initiate learns to be hardy and plucky under pain, and during the seclusion he forms new ideas of duty and of life, of order and of routine. A sense of social order is also instilled, as the first boy cut is first in everything, and each boy must keep his place and turn. Athletic exercise is also an important part of the discipline, and the *abakwetha* dances are part of this exercise as 'all the muscles of the body are brought to play'. Finally, the lectures after the removal of the white clay are important and impressive moral teaching in which 'the topics are manliness, bravery, sobriety, chastity, honesty, modesty, obedience'. On the other hand, 'all that is immoral and base in the rite is the result of corruption in later innovations'.<sup>54</sup>

On the issue of *lobola*, Wauchope, along with other African clergy, showed a great deal of ambiguity. He noted four benefits of 'ethical significance' from the custom:

1. ...first, that by it the social dignity of the wife is assured.
2. It provides a guarantee for the good treatment of the wife by her husband and his people.
3. It forms a safeguard against immoral conduct and is an encouragement to chastity—a source of material benefit to parents.
4. It encourages industry, as the lazy man would have no wife, because he would have no cattle unless he worked.

However, there was an underlying assumption that eventually new, better safeguards would replace these as people acquired education and 'civilization'.<sup>55</sup>

African clergy were aware that, from the African point of view, the European model of marriage without *lobola* had a number of deficiencies. Before the Native Laws and Customs Commission, some of Mzimba's church members argued that 'many of our girls who have been married without *lobala* [sic] have been left destitute by their husbands. Without *lobola*, a man did not feel properly married and was more likely to abandon a woman.'<sup>56</sup> As Elijah Makiwane and P.J. Mzimba testified in the presence of their mentor (the Revd Dr Stewart was a member of the Native Laws Commission), in the Free Church of Scotland membership was not denied to persons who practiced *lobola*: 'the way we deal with it is simply to tell the people what we think of it.'<sup>57</sup> However, the ambiguity went much deeper. Throughout the questioning, Makiwane was contradictory. At one point he was asked his opinion of the custom and he replied, 'In itself, I do not think it is a bad one.' However, after being pressed and thrown on the defensive, he contradicted himself and declared that 'it is

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<sup>53</sup> *Imvo* (15 Nov. 1891).

<sup>54</sup> *Imvo* (4 March 1901).

<sup>55</sup> *Imvo* (6 May 1901).

<sup>56</sup> *Native Laws*, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 100-1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

bad because some of the parents do not look so much to the comfort of their daughters as to the number of cattle they receive'. Still later he denied that fathers consider only the number of cattle.<sup>58</sup> Two Congregational clergymen, Walter Rubusana and Gway Tyamzashe, showed the same ambiguity. Both vigorously denied that *lobola* was a purchase and defended its intent; both also declared that it was a heathen custom and should be discouraged.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the pressure of family could be irresistible. The problems faced by Abram Mabula when his son wished to marry were noted above. James Jolobe (Presbyterian and briefly DRC clergyman) strongly opposed *lobola*, but his sons insisted that he ask for *lobola* because they had had to pay *lobola* and contribute to the outfitting and wedding expenses of their sisters.<sup>60</sup>

## THE ATTENUATION OF OPPOSITION

Gradually, missionary opposition to *lobola* weakened. There were a variety of reasons for this. Attempts to eradicate it brought worse 'evils', especially hypocrisy, either by outright deception or by arguing that cattle being transferred, sometimes in the dead of night, were not *ikhazi* but merely 'presents'. Because of this concern, as early as 1862 the Moravian missionaries ceased to excommunicate those who asked for or received 'presents'.<sup>61</sup> Another evil asserted by some missionaries was that without the incentive of *lobola*, parents lost interest in the preservation of their daughters' virginity, with a consequent increase in immorality.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, some missionaries recognized that the view that women were simply chattels was not compatible with reality. In fact, because of *lobola*, John Chalmers asserted that, 'The men are completely at the mercy of their wives... The result is that the men play the sycophant to their wives, and allow them very much of their own way.'<sup>63</sup> Revd Brownlee J. Ross, a third generation Presbyterian missionary, showed a more accurate view of the status of women in Xhosa society and of the 'insurance' functions of *lobola*. Writing to the *Scotsman* just after the turn of the century, Ross declared that Xhosa women 'have a much better legal standing than thousands of women in Europe, and are better treated, and cases of wives [sic] assault are less common in Kafirland than in Scotland.'<sup>64</sup> While Ross went much further than was typical, his comments are indicative of a change in missionary attitudes; *lobola* came to be accepted as not being incompatible with Christianity.<sup>65</sup> By the end of the century, all the older mission bodies had ceased to treat it as a disciplinary matter. Even the Methodist church, which had been the most adamantly opposed and

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107, no. 1767-71 and *passim*.

<sup>59</sup> Tyamzashe, *Native Laws*, appen. C, p. 153; Rubusana, *Christian Express* (1 Dec. 1905), p. 189.

<sup>60</sup> Interview, Revd J.J.R. Jolobe (son), 28 July 1972.

<sup>61</sup> Revd Weiz, *Native Laws*, appen. C, p. 216. Anglican missionaries advanced this as one reason for not opposing *lobola*; it is clear that many Presbyterians were ignoring *lobola*, even though opposed to it, and for much the same reason.

<sup>62</sup> Anglicans especially advanced this argument. *Lobola* was seen as the only check to a threatened torrent of sexuality, as 'a preventive to absolute license between the sexes', as Revd Key phrased it in *Native Laws*, appen. C, p. 187, no. 52.

<sup>63</sup> Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Reprinted in *Imvo* (29 Apr. 1903). In this article on *lobola*, 'the old, old story of Kafirs buying wives and making slaves of them' was dismissed as 'the old, old lie...the men who know Native laws, customs, traditions, and language best are pretty well agreed that the paying of dowry is a good custom.' J.H. Soga later even further described *lobola* as 'The Bantu Woman's Charter of Liberty', *Ama-Xosa*, pp. 274-5. Soga is, of course, impossible to categorize because he was both Xhosa and Scottish.

<sup>65</sup> However, missionaries arriving under the sponsorship of fundamentalist churches and bodies adopted the old perspectives and condemnation of *lobola*.

most vigorous in imposing discipline, changed its rules sometime after 1894.<sup>66</sup>

On *ukwaluka* or circumcision, the outcome was very similar. Missionary opposition was strong throughout the nineteenth century (many missionaries testifying before the Native Laws Commission had even advocated that it be made illegal). Generally, boys who went through the rite were expelled from school and disciplined in the church. However, if they subsequently 'repented', they were allowed to return. The missionaries faced a dilemma: these young men were their biggest hope for the future and they realised that would shackle their own prospects if they tried to make their disciplinary sanctions permanent.<sup>67</sup> Tiyo Soga was unusual in refusing to undergo the rite. This lack posed problems for his ministry years later, as Xhosa were contemptuous of, and not inclined to listen to, an uncircumcised male.

In any case, with regard to circumcision, missionaries were confronted by a stone wall. B.A. Pauw describes it as 'the traditional institution most tenaciously adhered to by the urban Xhosa-speaking people'.<sup>68</sup> In fact, the 'spreading of the custom to tribes who do not at present practice it, for example, Bhaca and Mpondo, is a fairly general phenomenon in the Transkei'.<sup>69</sup> The churches and mission societies had to compromise, at least to the extent of disciplining only attendance at a 'heathen circumcision school', and often formal bans were rescinded only in the inter-war period. Frequently, the rite was little more than the physical operation itself; even among non-Christians, the special costumes and *abakwetha* dancing died out during the 1920s and 1930s, and the seclusion period became much shorter.<sup>70</sup>

There were several factors behind this resistance to the missionaries' attempts to eradicate circumcision. The Xhosa had an almost mystical belief in the value of, and need for, the transformation brought about by the rite, and the young men were subjected to intolerable pressures. Even when parents desired it, they could not prevent their sons from undergoing the rite. This inability to control their sons extended to clergymen as well. Revd J.J. .R. Jolobe said that he and his brothers had all, under the guise of visiting relatives, arranged to be circumcised and had been so successful in hiding the fact that their father, Revd James Jolobe, did not learn about it until years later.<sup>71</sup> Mr Zizi Mazwai said that he and his brothers had also quietly arranged operations at a hospital, in spite of the Revd Ambrose Mazwai's denunciation of the custom.<sup>72</sup> Thus, circumcision was such a core institution in the identity of the Xhosa-speaking people that no policy, action or sanction was of any real effect. The only result of the missionary campaign was to promote deception, breaches of discipline, disobedience of children, and hypocrisy.

In the case of *intonjane*, the missionary campaign at first blush appears to have been a 'success'; it has pretty well died out, for traditionalists as well as Christians. But the

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<sup>66</sup> I am not certain exactly when the Methodists changed their policy, but a very interesting article in *Imvo* (8 Aug. 1894) seems to indicate that change was taking place then. *Imvo* under its very active Methodist layman, Jabavu, had consistently condemned the custom; as late as 10 Jan. 1894, it called *lobola* 'a heathen practice' which must be abolished. Just eight months later, *Imvo* said that it was a very much misunderstood custom which used to be prohibited as a sin, but 'the question has been reopened and is being discussed by Native Christians under present day light'. This statement seems to indicate that the pressure for the change was coming from Africans.

<sup>67</sup> Fighting and trouble in the mission schools was almost endemic as boys who had undergone the rite used *inkwenkew* or similar disparaging forms of address with those who were not.

<sup>68</sup> Pauw, *The Second Generation* (Oxford, 1963), p. 88.

<sup>69</sup> Hammond-Tooke, *Bhaca Society*, p. 82.

<sup>70</sup> For descriptions and evaluations of the rite in recent times, see Pauw, *The Second Generation*, pp. 88-94; M. Wilson, *et al.*, *Social Change*, pp. 199-220.

<sup>71</sup> Interview at Lovedale, 28 July 1972.

<sup>72</sup> Interview at Healdtown, 14 June 1972.

missionary campaign was, at best, a contributing factor rather than a determining one. African fathers frequently tried to avoid its burdens and other objections were tending to bring a decline in its observance in any case. A further qualification is that modern anthropologists have found many similar elements frequently incorporated into Christian marriage ceremonials. Just prior to her wedding, the bride goes into seclusion, very like that of the *intonjane*, for up to two weeks. This is concluded by a feast-often called a party.<sup>73</sup> Thus, a good deal of the meaning and intent of *intonjane* appears to have been synthesized into Christian marriage practices.

## CONCLUSION

These campaigns were only part of a more general struggle-the effort to root out traditional religion, their 'system of pagan superstition' as Warner had called it, and to put Christianity in its place. The belief in the family ancestral spirits and in the efficacy of their influence in the lives of the living was the most important element of that traditional religion. The primary concern of the ancestors was that the living members of the family should adhere to and perform the traditional customs. The ancestral spirits punished failure to perform traditional customs; but if they were pleased, they protected the family, its animals and its crops from the malevolent influences and evil medicines (witchcraft) of enemies and jealous neighbours. However, much of this was implicit rather than overt. Only when an *igqira* (diviner) was involved was much explicit. In normal practice, all Xhosa understood that the ancestors were pleased when customs were performed and when meat was offered, even though there were no overt invocations. To observers it could appear to be nothing more than a feast. There was no way for missionaries to monitor the meanings which could be attributed to any killing or feast in the minds of the participants. Church discipline could be visited on the overtly religious act, but could not touch the implicit religious thought. In view of this, it seems likely that church discipline probably tended to suppress external and open practice without necessarily destroying or eliminating beliefs and implicit practices.

Modern researchers have found that Xhosa Christians do retain a great deal of belief in the ancestors and in their effects on the living.<sup>74</sup> Pauw reported high proportions of Christians who had received messages from their ancestors. He also reported a new 'unveiling the tombstone' ceremony. This ceremony has a high degree of similarity with, and incorporates almost all the essentials of, the traditional *ukubona umzi* or *ukubuyisa* ceremony.<sup>75</sup> This seems to indicate that, to a large extent, Christianity was accepted in addition to, rather than in place of, traditional religious beliefs. Pauw explained this by arguing that Xhosa Christians compartmentalized. The ancestors had a role and interest almost exclusively within the family and in regard to domestic concerns, while Christianity was believed to be more relevant and of greater significance in the wider economic and political life of modern South Africa.

One other factor in toning down the missionary campaign against traditional customs

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<sup>73</sup> Wilson, *Reaction*, pp. 214-6, 530; M. Wilson *et al.*, *Social Change*, p. 152; Pauw, *The Second Generation*, p. 94; W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Bhaca Society*, pp. 82-6 and *The Tribes of Mount Frere District*, Ethno. Pub. No. 33 (Pretoria, c. 1955), p. 53.

<sup>74</sup> B.A. Pauw, *Christianity and Xhosa Tradition*, (Oxford, 1975), *passim*; W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Bhaca Society*, p. 236.

<sup>75</sup> After the death of a homestead head or chief (time could vary from six months to three years), this ceremony brought the mourning period to an end, completed the process of purifying the family, and facilitated the passage of the deceased to join the ancestors. There are sketchy accounts in Wilson, *Reaction*, p. 230; Hammond-Tooke, *Bhaca Society*, p. 231; Soga, *The Ama-Xhosa*, p. 322.

was the emergence of religious separatism. It is difficult to quantify how much influence this had, but it could hardly have been a coincidence that the emergence of religious separatism and the waning of the missionary campaign occurred at the same time. However, I do not think it was the major factor. To turn it the other way around, religious separatism was not driven primarily by the urge to continue performing traditional customs, because most Xhosa Christians had continued to do so anyway. Missionaries had always had to compromise or, in some cases, to turn a blind eye. With religious separatism, missionaries became even more aware of the need to avoid provocation. The missionaries had had inflated ideas about what conversion could mean in terms of cultural and social adaptation. What they had been forced to recognize was that in conversion there were limits on how much could be dictated in adaptation to Christianity.