A Case of Hopeless Failure:
The Role of Missionaries in the
Transformation of
Southern Africa's Indigenous Architecture

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Abstract

Missionary efforts in Southern Africa during the 19th and early 20th centuries focused primarily upon its indigenous people, seeking to bring changes to their patterns of living. Faced with such issues as polygamy, initiation, child price (lobola), ancestral worship, beer drinking, and teenage sexual morality, most did not attempt to understand the nature of these social institutions, and chose to confront them in what they believed to be an uncompromising and *moral* Christian manner. Linked to this was an attempt to bring about changes to the indigenous built environment. This paper seeks to show that although a number of changes to local architecture are indeed present, these are largely cosmetic and the result of a pragmatic transfer of technology, leaving the cosmological core of indigenous settlement largely untouched.

Keywords: Missionaries, architecture, indigenous knowledge systems, culture, colonialism

Foreword

This paper has its origins in archival and field research conducted between 1975 and 1989 which sought to document the historical origins of Southern Africa's indigenous architecture. In the process it encountered a number of

myths and misconceptions as to the '*true*' nature of square-plan dwellings and the use of wall decoration, which were inevitably attributed by popular white consensus to a European cultural presence. More often than not these were also held out to be the product of missionary influence. This was a concept which I found deeply offensive, for it implied, at a time when the structural racism of Apartheid was the prevailing national dogma, that the social and economic conditions currently enjoyed by the urban black population were entirely the outcome of a '*benign and paternal*' white leadership. Much of my work is therefore grounded in Liberal-Radical and Black Consciousness philosophies of the 1970s and 1980s.

Another deeply rooted preconception that I also had to deal with held that the term '*style*', so beloved by Structuralist and Modernist architectural historians, can be equated to '*culture*'. This is demonstrably wrong, and although the aesthetics, the building technology, and the decorative motiefs of a built environment may represent the identity of a place, a people, or an era, they are also easily manipulated for reasons of economic expediency, social status, or political appeasement. The use of architectural space, on the other hand, has been shown to be a more reliable reflection of cosmological and religious beliefs, and is therefore a more accurate measure of change. Although such spatial values normally find expression in the sacred buildings of a people, the same organizational systems are often also manifest in their domestic structures or their settlement planning.

It follows therefore that when one social system seeks to bring about changes in another without knowing that it even exists, such efforts are bound to failure. Persuading a people to abandon the construction of their traditional grass huts in favour of '*neat, white-washed cottages*' will be totally irrelevant unless they also abandon the value systems that structure their domestic settlements.

Introduction

European missionaries to southern Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries played a strangely ambiguous role in the history and affairs of the region. On the one hand they were driven by a strong desire to genuinely serve humanity and bring about material and social changes which would improve its quality of life. On the other hand they were possessed of a moral

self-righteousness which led them to pass hasty and uninformed judgments upon indigenous mores, norms and values they were scarcely equipped to understand. The first manifested itself in an involvement in local agriculture, irrigation and technology which, being environmental and hence independent of larger cultural issues, found a small measure of acceptance in rural society. The second sought to impose an alien morality and work ethos upon the local people without realising that these undermined their most basic social and cultural tenets and were therefore largely resisted. The dichotomy of this approach was not something which found separate expression in different individuals but was often incorporated within the same person. Casalis wrote at Thaba Bosiu, Lesotho, in about 1833, that:

> *... we said that, wishing to provide entirely for our own subsistence, we must have a site where we could build houses and cultivate the ground according to our own ideas and habits. Our buildings and plantations would also serve as a model for the Basutos, whom we regretted to see dwelling in huts, and living in a manner so precarious and so little worthy of the intelligence with which they were gifted* (1889: 183).

It is not for nothing that the statue of Livingstone in Edinburgh represents the missionary-traveller with a Bible in one hand and the other resting upon an axe (Warneck 1888). Ironically enough, in the long run it was found that changes wrought by missionaries at a practical and economic level did more to further their spiritual cause than any amount of moralistic sermonising from the pulpit ever did. Local acceptance of early missionaries in the Eastern Cape hinged more upon their technological ability to introduce furrow irrigation into an otherwise drought-stricken land than upon their Christian teachings (Williams 1959). This was also borne out by the experiences of Moffatt in the Northern Cape.

The ability of missionaries to make converts and hold them on their stations also seems to have been somewhat in doubt. Etherington (1977) stated that only 12% of people on mission settlements were there for *'spiritual'* reasons. The majority sought either material advantage or psychological security. Also, although some groups such as the Basotho and the Tswana openly welcomed missionaries, others like the Pedi, the Zulu and

the Pondo vehemently rejected their presence as a matter of national policy. Despite Campbell's claim that:

> *Missionary stations are surrounded by moral atmospheres, or have a moral and civilizing influence to a considerable distance around, beyond which it is extremely hazardous for white men to go* (1815: 224).

… they had strong objections to a missionary presence and often took appropriate action. Whole populations moved away from stations; individuals suspected of Christian leanings were administered magic and emetics; and converts were ostracized and quarantined to missionary settlements, thus being effectively purged from the group's polity and its social functions. Despite the continuing spread of a missionary presence into southern Africa during the 19th Century, by the time of the Anglo-Zulu conflict of 1879 very few converts had been won over to Christianity (Etherington 1977).

Success in making converts also seems to have had little to do with the liberality, or otherwise, of missionary methods. Etherington states that:

> *Colenso advertised his willingness to tolerate polygamy and the exchange of bride wealth but made only a handful of converts during a long missionary career. Americans who took a hard line on these issues did considerably better. Berlin and Hermannsburg missionaries who minimized liturgical spectacles won adherents while the Oblates who staged impressive ceremonies failed utterly. Itinerant preaching proved to be no more effective than sedentary station work* (1977).

Ultimately the success of the missionaries in southern Africa appears to have hinged upon their ability to provide viable agricultural land for indigenous settlement at a time when black-owned land was being increasingly alienated for white usufruct. Residence on mission lands however had its price. Tyler reported in 1891 that the church at Nqumba, Natal, had adopted, among several others, the following rules:

> *1. No polygamist shall be allowed to become a member of this church.*

> *2. He who sells his daughter or sister treats her like a cow, and cannot be received into this church.*
> *5. No member of this church shall be permitted to attend a wedding if beer is drunk there, although he may have been invited to it.*
> *9. No member of this church is allowed to go where there is slaughtering for the departed spirits* (1891).

This was more or less in line with the *'moral'* stances taken by most missionary societies, who generally held that:

> *Their bottomless superstitions, their vile habits and heathen customs - their system of polygamy and witchcraft - their incessant beer-drinks and heathen dances which are attended by unspeakable abominations - these present a terrible barrier to the spread of Christianity and civilization* (Wilkinson 1898).

The degree to which these *'vile habits'* had been abolished from local communities was commonly held by missionaries to be a measure of their success in the field. By the 1880s however they could not have countenanced the fruits of their labours with too much joy. The United Missionary Conference reports for 1884 consistently show that all these practices were still prevalent throughout southern Africa despite a missionary presence in some areas dating back over four generations (United Missionary Conference 1889). After Williams had conducted his research in the 1950s he also concluded that:

> *Of the missionary failure in (the Transkei) there is no doubt. Even today the amaXhosa is not a Christian nation. The fact that abaKweta (circumcision initiation) ceremonies take place two miles from the University College of Fort Hare in the year 1959 symbolises the missionary failure significantly to influence the way of life of the rank and file of the tribal amaXhosa* (Williams 1959).

A change of heart appears to have occurred from the 1880s onwards when the initial success of the first trade schools at Morija in 1841 and Lovedale in 1857 spurred others to follow their example. By 1902 fifteen such institutions had opened their doors in southern Africa alone, and fifty-six throughout the

African continent, all but seven of the latter having been founded after 1880 (Dennis 1902). Livingstone's children, it might appear, had laid aside the Bible and taken up the axe.

A Direct Material Influence

Using the foregoing as a basis, it might be possible to conclude, therefore, that changes to the indigenous built environment did not rank high on the list of missionary priorities. This would be incorrect for, despite their preoccupation with *'heathen'* social practices, their concerns for local architecture were never hidden too far below the surface. The writings of early missionaries such as Campbell, Mackenzie, Casalis, Arbousset and Daumas make frequent references to the dwelling forms and building technologies they encountered. None of them however formulated any kind of philosophical response to vernacular structures, choosing instead to view them as some kind of barometer against which to measure progress of a larger social and cultural nature. Thus we find that Cape Government Reports from about the 1870s onwards begin to equate the use of square-plan dwellings with the degree of civilization achieved in any one particular region. The magistrate for Gatberg, Griqualand East, reported in 1879 that:

> *I am happy to say that as far as can be seen there is a marked advance in many ways. The square house and substantially-walled round hut, is superseding the old grass huts, and the use of European clothing is more generally adopted* (Cape of Good Hope Blue Book on Native Affairs 1880).

This was echoed by the United Missionary Conference of 1884, which grouped this return for Mount Arthur (Transkei) under the heading of *'Moral Statistics'*:

> *Mount Arthur gives the fullest report. 306 square houses, 9000 acres cultivated land, 419 ploughs, 2 carts, 160 waggons; £700 taxes, 93 brick makers, 37 carpenters, 41 masons, 25 sewing mistresses* (United Missionary Conference 1889).

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It was left for an outsider to express local missionary policy on the question of architecture. The German academic and theologian, Gustav Warneck, wrote in 1879 that:

> *It is not only that the requirement of modesty necessitates the providing of some sort of clothing, however simple; but Christian morality desires also a dwelling corresponding to human dignity, decency and purity. Building plays an important part in the mission. First the missionary builds a simple small house for himself, to which he soon adds a school and a church. Generally he must himself superintend this work; often enough, indeed, he must execute it with his own hand, and it stands him in good stead to have been a tradesman at home. But he induces the natives also to help him, and, much patience as it requires on his part, he undertakes to instruct them. Gradually his word and his example produce their effect, and the converts from heathenism begin to build new and more decent dwellings for themselves* (1888).

It is doubtful that many of the early missionaries were well, if at all, prepared for this aspect of their mission. The Glasgow Missionary Society pamphlet of 1796, *'Report on the Character of a Missionary, etc.'* lays considerable stress upon *'piety, prudence and aptitude to teach'* but not once mentions the need for craft skills (Williams 1959). The London Missionary Society was a little more realistic on this point and in 1800 recommended that missionaries:

> *... should carry with them some acquaintance with agriculture or those branches of mechanics which admit of an useful application in uncivilized countries* (Williams 1959).

It was left for the French to take the initiative in this field. When Casalis and Arbousset were chosen to be sent out to southern Africa by the Paris Missionary Society, they were given basic training in the skills of drawing, building and architecture. Not only that, but they were also joined by Gosselin who, as *'missionary artisan'*, was sent out to assist them erect their first dwellings (Germond 1967: 97). Casalis wrote at Moriah in 1833 that:

> *The next day we began to think about constructing some kind of shelter. The box of tools that we had brought from Europe was opened, and my two fellow-workers and myself took each of us a hatchet and a saw ... Our excellent friend, Mr. Gosselin, who had joined us in the capacity of a missionary artisan, handled with equal skill the hammer of the stone-cutter and the mattock of the husbandman (1861: 28-29).*

The *'box of tools'* brought from Europe included, among other items, agricultural implements and tools for the trades of stone quarrying and cutting, masonry, carpentry, joinery, coopering, shoe-making and surveying (Germond 1967: 99). The attachment of Gosselin to the party was an inspired piece of fore-planning on the part of the French. Once his task of building mission houses for his colleagues was completed, his brief was also:

> *... to train the (South Sotho) to erect proper and comfortable homes for their own families, while gaining their affection by teaching them divers handicrafts (Germond 1967: 97)*

This policy foreshadowed events in the region by nearly half a century and paved the way for the subsequent establishment of Industrial Training Institutions in southern Africa. The first of these was founded, naturally enough, by the Paris Missionary Society at Morija, Lesotho, in 1841, but others soon followed this example. Lovedale in 1857, St Matthews in 1876, Leloaleng in 1879, Amanzimtoti in 1883 and Blythswood in 1884 were but a few (Dennis 1902). The report for Leloaleng in 1910 stated that:

> *Instruction is given in stone and brick building, carpentry, blacksmith work, wagon repairing, shoe making and saddlery (Paris Evangelical Missionary Society c1913).*

while the Lovedale report for 1895 commented that:

> *The work during the year has been the woodwork on one two-storied house; erecting and finishing two new dormitories 117 feet long - joisting of two-storied technical workshop now in process of erection; a great variety of alterations on buildings - new bakery,*

> *Post Office, and some outhouses* (Lovedale Missionary Institution 1896).

Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of the Cape Colony, made the official position regarding industrial training clear when, in a message to Parliament in c1884 he stated that:

> *Nothing can more surely prevent future (border) wars than the multiplication of Institutions like those of Lovedale and Blythswood, especially if they extend their industrial training so as to include agriculture* (Warneck 1888).

Charles Brownlee, Secretary for Native Affairs, issued a circular in 1873, in which he proclaimed that:

> *It is a matter of great importance that the young men brought up at and near Mission Stations should be ... trained to take their proper position in society* (Cape of Good Hope Office of the Secretary for Native Affairs 1873).

while Matthew Blyth, Chief Magistrate for the Division of Transkei, reported to the Cape Parliament in 1879 that:

> *More large schools with European masters, where trades could be learnt and discipline enforced, are wanted in every district, so that there may be more thoroughness about the education. The expense would be large, but it is a matter of vital importance to the Colony that the young may be so trained that they can take their places worthily as members of a civilized and industrious community* (Cape of Good Hope Blue Books on Native Affairs 1880).

It is not an easy matter to assess the results of these missionary efforts. We know that in such matters as initiation and teenage sexual morality they had little impact. This however does not appear to have been the case with building technology where some considerable influence seems to have been wielded through the medium of education. In 1879 some 173 *'special apprentices'* were undergoing training in various industrial institutions in the

Cape (Cape of Good Hope Report of the Superintendent-General of Education, 1880), approximately 60% of whom were engaged in the building trades. Most appear to have originated from the Eastern Cape and Transkei region (Lovedale Missionary Institution 1896), where they also subsequently plied their trades (Cape of Good Hope Blue Books on Native Affairs 1880), but it is not impossible that, with time, they spread further afield. Certainly the missionaries themselves were not slow in proclaiming the fruits of their labours, as seen from this report from Leloaleng, made in 1910:

> *Since its foundation the work of the school has had a marked influence in improving the class of (South Sotho) houses, as in almost every village of importance are to be found neat stone buildings which reflect great credit on the intelligence and enterprise of their builders* (Paris Evangelical Missionary Society c1913).

In the case of some specialised areas of construction such as roof carpentry, stone masonry and brick making, the effects of missionary education remain evident to the present day. Despite this obvious element of technological transposition however, the nature of the indigenous rural environment has remained essentially '*vernacular*'. Dwelling plans have, in most cases, retained their traditional circular single-cell form, materials have remained local and *'found'*, and the technologies concerned, although new, have been harnessed to fulfill the same social roles as the ones they have replaced. Most important, this missionary input does not appear to have had a direct effect upon the nature and form of indigenous settlement patterns which are a more direct manifestation of local *'culture'* than the dwelling form itself (Frescura 1987).

An Indirect Material Influence

The work of missionaries during the last century should not be viewed in isolation from the activities of either traders or government officials. In many ways they shared common interests and often what was of benefit to the one group was equally good for the others. They can also be seen to be part of a progression of events which paved the way for the colonialisation of

indigenous groups not only in southern Africa, but the world over. Warneck wrote in 1879 that:

> *According to a calculation made by the missionary Whitmee, every missionary sent to the Polynesian islands produces an annual trade-revenue of at least 200,000 marks. 'Of course, the trade is organised by merchants, but the missionary originates it'* (1888).

He saw the missionary as generating a demand for consumer goods while, at the same time, creating conditions which facilitated the establishment of trade links.

> *The mission is in a twofold respect a pioneer for commerce. It creates the needs for a civilized life, and is at the same time a protective power ... which contributes more to the security of commerce than many ships of far* (1888).

He also argued against the use of military force as a tool of colonialism, claiming somewhat pragmatically that *Without doubt it is a far more costly thing to kill the (indigenous population) than to Christianise them* (1888).

The impact of trading activity on rural southern Africa is made clear by the various statements to this effect found in Government reports during the 1870s and 1880s. Charles Bell, Resident Magistrate of Berea, Lesotho, wrote in 1879 that:

> *The demand for European clothing is steadily increasing. At public meetings and other public gatherings, it is considered a sign of inferiority to appear dressed in clothes other than those of European manufacture ... the general tendency of the people being to supplant their own crude and badly made articles by those of European manufacture* (Cape of Good Hope Blue Books on Native Affairs 1880).

MW Liefeldt, Assistant Magistrate for Matatiele, East Griqualand echoed the reports of many of his colleagues when he stated in 1879 that:

> *Trade has increased considerably during the past year. There are now fourteen trading stations in the district. There is a great demand for European clothing, ploughs, blankets, etc. etc.* (Cape of Good Hope Blue Books on Native Affairs 1880).

The larger picture was described by the missionary Duvoisin who, in 1885, wrote from Berea, Lesotho, that:

> *Their first preoccupation was to acquire the arms of the Europeans; after which they have progressively adopted their dress, their agricultural implements, their household utensils. They have gradually begun to replace the native hut with stone or brick cottages, which offer a greater resemblance to European houses; finally they have begun to imitate them in their habits and their mode of life* (Germond 1967: 539).

The missionary concern for actively advancing consumer goods usually stopped at European clothing and agricultural implements, but it is not impossible that, from time to time, other goods could also have been promoted. Warneck tells that a conference of native pastors, deacons and teachers held at the Pacific island of Rarotonga passed a resolution encouraging:

> *... the people at all the stations not to live in badly built but well built houses, to sleep in beds, and not on a litter of dried grass* (1888).

Needless to say, missionaries were not unaware of the business opportunities that their evangelical work was creating and, contrary to instructions from Europe, some took to trading in their own right. At Botshabelo, on the other hand, Merenski understood the symbiotic nature of the relationship and the fact that if his missionary work was to succeed, he would have to find ways of meeting the expectations that he was creating. Rather than expose his congregation to the exploitative practices of traders in nearby Middelburg, he established a store on his mission run by a lay '*trader brother*' who had emigrated from Germany for this purpose. His shop carried mostly staple goods, but was able to obtain specialised items such as clothing and farming

instruments on order. Its clientele was not limited to residents on the mission but also included Dutch farmers in the district (Merenski 1889). In this way the missionaries were able to place realistic limits on credit and prevent the development of an exploitative '*company store*' relationship.

Missionary attitudes towards the various Colonial administrations were probably more complex to define. We know that they commonly had an *ad hoc* relationship with Government, which often involved reporting on events in remote areas and fulfilling various diplomatic functions (Williams 1959), but in some cases there was active collusion between the two parties, usually to the detriment of indigenous interests (Etherington 1977). Generally however interaction took place on a more formal level, with missionaries encouraging local people to obey the laws and pay their hut taxes, and occasionally interceding on their behalf with officialdom. Sometimes written recommendations would be submitted to the authorities, such as those made to the Cape Parliament by the Moravian missionary Meyer, stationed at Elukolweni, who in 1875 asked, among other things, that hut tax relief be offered:

> *For the improvement of dwelling-houses ... for a certain number of years as reward for the building of a square brick dwelling-house of certain size with glass windows* (Cape of Good Hope Blue Books on Native Affairs 1876).

It is believed that the colonial officials did not accede to this request, if for no other reason than the fact that hut-tax had already become an important source of revenue with which to subsidise the administration of outlying districts.

A Covert Material Influence

A factor which was to have a profound influence upon the long term social and economic make-up of southern Africa from the 1870s onwards was the creation of a migrant labour system. Provisions for the contractual binding of labourers to employers had already been in force in the Cape since the early years of the nineteenth century (Burchell 1953), but these were largely directed at the Khoi who, even then, did not inhabit the region in sufficient

numbers to satisfy the needs of the Colonial employment market. With the discovery, and subsequent development, of the Cape diamond fields from 1866 onwards came the extension of the local infrastructure as well as the rapid growth of such coastal commercial centers as Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London. This created a need for large numbers of skilled and unskilled labourers to work on public and private enterprises in the Colony. The resultant shortage of labour caused both private employers and the Cape Government to look further afield for potential sources of workers, the most obvious being the Transkei and Eastern Cape. A newspaper editorial of March 1873, on the subject of local labour, among other things urged missionaries to:

> *... single out all the unemployed young men they know of, at their various stations, and talk over the matter with them individually ... The missionary's work is not done when the work of the pulpit and the duties of religious instruction are over. He must follow these up, by seeing how the young men growing up under his care, set themselves to the first duty of practical Christianity - which is to earn an honest livelihood* (Wilson an Perrot 1973).

The Secretary for Native Affairs in the Cape administration, Charles Brownlee, also saw mission stations as a potential source of labour and issued a circular in November of that year where he stated:

> *The great difficulty has been, how to employ the young men who have been brought up at mission Stations. Many of them look for employment as teachers, interpreters and constables, but in these lines only a limited number of them can be employed. Now, however, ample employment can be given to all* (Cape of Good Hope Office of the Secretary for Native Affairs 1873).

He then went on to outline a scheme whereby youths from mission stations could be formed into groups of fifty, under the *'guidance'* of a paid elder, who would see to their *'moral'* welfare during their sojourn in the Cape as migrant manual labourers. The *Report on Immigration and Labour Supply* to the Cape Parliament for the year 1875 reported that some progress had been made in this direction. It stated that:

> *In reviewing the sources from which the Colony is to look for its labour supply, by far the most hopeful is to be found in the large masses of natives within and immediately beyond our colonial borders ... The gradual introduction of individual tenure of land among the natives, in the place of the location system, will, no doubt, deprive numbers of natives of the means of leading a lazy, lounging life* (Cape of Good Hope Ministerial Department of Crown Lands and Public Works 1876).

Another powerful inducement for young men to enter the Colony's labour market was the introduction of a hut tax from the 1850s onwards (Jeff Peires, pers comm). Although at first this was not applied uniformly in the rural areas, in 1870 it was enacted on a broad basis as an urban and rural house tax which was intended as a straightforward revenue-generating measure (Foster, Tennant and Jackson 1887). This not only provided a disproportionately large slice of the income necessary to create a system of local first tier administration in the rural areas (Cape of Good Hope Blue Books on Native Affairs 1880) but it also created the need for local people to go into towns in order to earn the money for its payment. WG Cumming, Resident Magistrate of Xalanga, Transkei, commented in 1880 that:

> *In order that money might be obtained to pay the hut-tax, hundreds of young men have been sent into the Colony by their relatives to work in the town and among the farmers. The frequent recurring necessity of having to find the money for their friends, will gradually force the young men out of the groove in which they have been living ... By being brought more immediately in contact with civilisation, an alteration will be wrought in their character; and in process of time, habits which have been fostered by a mode of existence calculated to develop all the evil qualities in a man will, under new conditions of life, be, if not eradicated, at least held in check* (Cape of Good Hope Blue Books on Native Affairs 1880).

It is probable however that the rural community's need to earn wages was considerably sharpened by the availability of consumer goods through local trading stores. Such items as ploughs and blankets would have found ready acceptance in local life without necessarily causing too much cultural

upheaval in the process. Later on other articles, such as furniture and building materials, would have become available through the same channels. Consequently, the effect of a migrant labour system upon the local built environment must be seen to have achieved the following:

1. It provided training opportunities in the building industry and other allied crafts over and above those already offered by missionary industrial institutions.
2. It introduced indigenous communities to new building materials.
3. It paid them wages which could then be used to purchase these same materials.

The differences between missionaries and employers are therefore quite evident. The former set standards which they then expected the people themselves to find the means to meet; the latter on the other hand not only trained workers in the technology of European building traditions but also gave them the opportunity of sharing in them by giving them those means. Both were part of the same process of rural alienation, but the missionaries offered ideological comfort, while employers were more material in their rewards. Judging from available evidence it was the material benefits which ultimately carried the day.

There is one additional factor that should also be considered. Research conducted in the 1980s has shown that a move from a circular plan, single-cell dwelling to one with a square plan did not necessarily require significant changes in building technology. It usually took place following the introduction of industrially-manufactured furniture which, using 90° geometry, made circular plan dwellings difficult to furnish. To prevent termite infestation this forced the introduction of concrete floors, which ultimately brought about the replacement of thatch with industrial roofing material (Frescura 1981).

The Myth of the Missionary Influence

It is true that a substantial case can be made to support the proposition that missionaries did, eventually, make a contribution to the transformation of indigenous architecture in Southern Africa, even if this was only achieved in

conjunction with the work of other colonial agencies: the farmer, the trader, and the government agent. However, such changes were only wrought in the context of the individual dwelling, and one needs to question the degree to which the introduction of new materials, building technologies, and furniture can be deemed to have altered the cultural and spiritual core of the people themselves.

The current discourse in Architecture remains firmly grounded in the precepts of liberal modernism, phenomenology and structuralism; ideas which have formed the basis of analysis by architectural historians for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The descriptive approach made within the structural bounds of style and stereotype might well serve to record changing patterns of material culture, but fails to recognize their significance within a broader spectrum of social practices and cultural beliefs. Indeed, it is the fundamental failing of such an approach to assign wider cultural and cosmological significance to alterations in material culture.

During the second half of the twentieth century, a number of scholars began to question the validity of such an approach. During the 1960s Rapoport (1969) pointed out the clear connection between the house form and the culture of its builders, while subsequent authors, such as Oliver (1968, 1971, 1975), Prussin (1986, 1995) and Blier (1987), have fore-fronted the idea of architecture as a series of symbols and texts. Dithey (1962) has pointed out that '*Every expression of life has a meaning insofar as it is a sign which expresses something that is part of life*'. Blier also states that:

> *The study of architecture also necessarily includes the study of its occupants, for it is in their use of architecture and in the symbols that they identify with it that a building can be understood in its complete sense* (1987).

Thus, if were are to fully understand the impact that any changes in material culture might have had upon the value systems of indigenous South Africans, these need to be read in the broad framework of their beliefs.

Missionaries, by the very nature of their activities, sought to alter the basic system of social, cultural and spiritual beliefs of indigenous people. In this they patently failed, and although by 1910 they could show some small advances, in the context of a wider Southern African rural society these were negligible and usually of a cosmetic nature. The fact that they chose to

highlight supposed progress in such areas as the payment of taxes, the wearing of clothes, and the construction of neat, whitewashed cottages, was both a misrepresentation of their role in the process, and an annexation of the work of other colonial agencies. The lie was, in itself, understandable. After a century of proselytizing one can only imagine the levels of frustration in the missionary community faced with seemingly monolithic and unchangeable value systems. Thus, if they did create a myth, this was the self-serving result of delusion and a need to give a degree of significance to otherwise wasted lives.

There was also the need to show results for the benefit of overseas funders, whose faith might have seemed boundless, but whose pockets had measurable limits. The pragmatic burghers of northern and central Europe had long been used to the belief that the achievements of a people could be measured by the complexity of their architecture and the richness of their artifacts, and to most of them tangible changes in indigenous material culture must have seemed sufficient evidence of Christian progress. Thus, for a while longer at least, the flow of funds continued. By such means, therefore, self-delusion, religious propaganda, and false perceptions, the myth that material culture was somehow equated to spiritual change, was created and rapidly became the accepted measure in the evaluation of missionary efforts.

By the 1950s, two disastrous world wars and the impending collapse of the colonial system forced many missionary societies to take stock of their work. In southern Africa, at least, the realization was beginning to spread that, regardless of any outward advances in material culture, the manifestations of wider, deep-seated beliefs were still in evidence. To the despair of most missionaries the practices of initiation and male circumcision were becoming even more overt, child-price or *lobola* was still being paid, sacrifices to the ancestors were still being made, and premarital sex had, if anything, become all the more prevalent. Yet, despite the fact that many missionaries were scholars and ethnographers in their own right, they failed to recognize the centrality of the cattle byre in the indigenous value system, and never attempted to undermine its social or spiritual significance.

Indigenous Southern African cosmology views the plan of the family homestead as a microcosm of their life. At its center resides the byre, which provides the men with a place of gathering, holds the wealth of the community in cattle and surplus food, and acts as a place of burial. It is therefore a place of the '*shades*', where men can commune with their

ancestors and, with their implied guidance and wisdom, can pass laws, and administer the affairs of the group. Cosmologically, it represents *Order*, whereas beyond the bounds of the settlement resides *Chaos*, where the natural environment can grow without constraint, and where wild animals, strangers, enemy warriors and dark terrors can reside. In between this inner Order and outer Chaos lies a transitional belt of land controlled by women, who are given the task of running the everyday affairs of the group, and thereby to mediate between Order and Chaos.

It is thus that women control the residential areas, the planting of agricultural land, the food resources, and the preparation of meals. In indigenous value systems, women are perceived to be inherently '*hot*', while the men are inherently '*cool*'. It is thus the role of women to '*cool*' down the areas of transition between Order and Chaos. This may be done in a number of ways: walls need to be plastered with a mixture of clay and cow dung, itself a *cool* material; spaces between the homestead and its surrounds need to be kept free of encroaching vegetation; teenagers and visitors are unpredictable (hot) factors and thus need to be housed separate from the family. Even the planting and maintenance of gardens can be interpreted as an effort to harness '*hot*' and potentially unruly elements of nature by growing them under controlled conditions.

The men, on the other hand, are tasked with the maintenance of Order, access to ancestral wisdom, and the governance of ancient laws and customs. The role of the byre is therefore central to indigenous belief systems, and because its place within the structure of the family homestead has remained unchallenged throughout the period of missionary presence in Southern Africa, most of the core values that it represents have gone unaltered. It is true that a reduction in polygamy has had an influence upon the size of the homestead, but not upon its essential structure. Besides, as Livingstone (1963) noted among the Tswana in the 1870s, the majority of their men were not polygamous, a small minority had but two wives, largely as a product of the *Levirate* system, and only those in positions of political leadership had the means to acquire and maintain large polygamous families.

Conclusion

It is evident that although immigrant European settlers to this region did introduce new technologies and building forms to the lexicon of indigenous

architecture, the results were neither immediate nor were they widely accepted. Indeed, most transitions were not the result of blind borrowings, nor were they aesthetic in nature, but only took place after a number of social and economic preconditions had been met. Working within the wider spectrum of colonialism, missionaries played an important part in such transitions, but were not the only agents for change, and often played a subsidiary role to the more pragmatic presence of European farmers and traders. With the one exception of Lesotho, where the Paris Missionary Society introduced a lay brother tasked with the transfer of building skills to local people, mission stations only began to make a practical impact upon local architecture in the mid-1850s with the founding of Industrial Training Schools.

Even then, missionaries equated changes to material culture and living standards to a growing Christian influence, and ignored the underlying principles of indigenous architecture that underpinned virtually all of the social and spiritual practices that they were trying to eradicate. Thus, while local people often accepted that construction and maintenance of '*neat white-washed cottages*' was one of the prices they would have to pay for the benefit of living within the bounds of mission stations, with all their encompassing technological benefits, other aspects of their architecture, such as the planning of the family homestead have been left unchallenged right up to the present day.

It would not be incorrect to claim, therefore, that to this day the cosmological core of indigenous rural settlement in South Africa remains largely untouched, and that the introduction of new dwelling forms and building technologies have made little difference to the social institutions of initiation, polygamy, child-price and burial practices. Indeed it has only been in the latter part of the 20th Century that the rising costs of urban living have begun to bring such practices into question.

Given the fact that, from the outset, missionaries sought the radical restructuring of indigenous life and value systems, the net outcome of their efforts has been negligible. Looking back on two hundred years of hard toil, devastating droughts, minimal spiritual returns, incomprehensible cultural clashes, and death by wild animals, enraged tribes and unknown fevers, Missionary Societies must be left to ponder two vital questions: for whose benefit was this work done, and outside of the spiritual growth experienced by their own members, did their efforts have any real meaning? The outcome

of any honest deliberation in such matters must come to many negative conclusions.

On the other hand, it can be posited that 19th Century European society, faced with the outrages of slavery, ancestral land theft and the world-wide imposition of a colonial system upon indigenous people, used missionaries as a vehicle for the expiation of their own common sins. As such then, the hardships endured by missionaries in foreign lands on behalf of their financial sponsors would have acted as a balm upon the European conscience. In a society which looks upon the sufferings of a man impaled upon a cross as a vehicle to spiritual salvation, the metaphor of such a sacrifice is inescapable.

We must also question the degree to which the experience of missionaries in Africa has coloured modern European and North American perceptions of the continent. Despite nearly five centuries of active engagement with the people of Africa, Western nations still remain woefully ignorant of African values and aspirations, and perhaps the last major task remaining to missionaries in the field is to correct two centuries of misconceptions and mis-readings resultant from their own work, and to disabuse world scholars of the preconceptions that surround the nature and richness of African history and culture.

Key to this is an understanding that the religious and cosmological beliefs of a people are commonly embodied in the symbolic interpretation of their architecture, which then opens the way to further interdisciplinary studies of value systems. As current studies of Buddhist, Islamic, Christian and Animist architecture have shown (Frescura, 2016), an understanding of the cognitive language of the built environment can become a useful tool in the comparative study of world religions.

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