

Mission and Colonialism in Southern Rhodesia: Locating Subtle Colonial and Imperialist Tendencies in Arthur Shearly Cripps's Mission at Maronda Mashanu (1901–1952)

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Abstract

Academic interest in the life, mission and literary works of Fr Arthur Shearly Cripps of Maronda Mashanu mission, Southern Rhodesia, has not ceased. The reason for this interest derives from the fact that Cripps was one of the most eccentric if vociferous critics of the policies of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and successive Southern Rhodesian governments. Generally, historiography on the Rhodesian Christian mission portrays him in a positive light, and as one of the rare missionaries to take on the mantle of being an advocate for the rights of oppressed Africans, the Shona people, in particular. Furthermore, his independent mission experiment and innovation at Maronda Mashanu mission, near Enkeldoorn (Chivhu), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), accompanied with his poetic repertoire, resulted in his characterisation as “God’s Irregular.” The growing corpus of literature on Cripps’s life and work is a reflection of the interest that followed Cripps in life and death. The purpose of this article is to attempt to locate the agency of the oppressed subjects in Cripps’s mission on the basis of secondary sources available. The study is, therefore, a qualitative desk-top analysis of secondary sources available.

Keywords: Cripps; segregation; colonialism; imperialism; paternalism; Maronda Mashanu; Mashonaland

Introduction

Arthur Shearly Cripps was one of the most controversial missionaries who worked in Mashonaland, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). His life-long friend, John White, correctly predicted that: “When the annals of Rhodesia are faithfully recorded, and the personalities who have influenced the country most potently and beneficially are



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written, the Rev. Arthur Shearly Cripps will occupy a very high place” (Andrews 1935, 120; Steele 1975, 152). His independent mission experiment and innovation at Maronda Mashanu mission, near Enkeldoorn (Chivhu), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), accompanied with his poetic repertoire, resulted in his characterisation as “God’s Irregular.”¹ No doubt, academic interest in his life, writings² and mission has grown immensely since his death in 1952. Biographies, a hagiography, articles in academic journals and book chapters provide testimony to Rev. John White’s prediction. The growing historiography on Cripps’s mission enterprise is a positive development indeed. In our view, the import and relevance of the history of the Christian mission in Africa lie in the agency and voice of the African actors, whose destiny the Christian mission sought to change. Available historiography on Cripps’s mission, however, seems to focus on the person of Cripps and his ideas more than on the people that he went to evangelise. That is the question which this paper seeks to highlight. On the basis of available historiography on Cripps and his mission, we argue that Cripps ignored the agency and voice of the Shona people that he ostensibly represented in his fight against the colonial governments in Rhodesia. The paper focuses on two issues: firstly, Cripps’s plea for segregation in Rhodesia, and secondly, the subtle colonial and imperialist tendencies in his mission.

Brief Life History

Born in 1869, Arthur Shearly Cripps was educated at Charterhouse, Trinity College, Oxford (Steele 1975, 269). In 1891, he obtained a BA degree in Modern History and was ordained priest of the Anglican Church in 1893. He was appointed Vicar of Ford End in Essex in 1894 (Steere 1973, 13). In 1901, he offered his services to be a missionary under the aegis of the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and was sent to Wreningham mission, in the Manyene Reserve, Mashonaland (Steele 1975, 152; Steere 1973, 14). Cripps was originally contracted for only two years, but ended up staying in Southern Rhodesia for close to five decades. From 1914 to 1916, Cripps served as a Chaplain in the East African Campaign for the British army fighting the First World War (WWI) in East Africa. Cripps resigned from the SPG in 1926.

There is controversy over the reasons behind his resignation. Although one view is that Cripps resigned “in protest against acceptance of government education grants” (Doyle 1975, 233; Ranger 1987, 186), another claims that he resigned because of homesickness (Steele 1975, 153). Back in England, Cripps was appointed rector in his old East End parish. He, however, resigned his post and went back to Mashonaland in 1930, where he virtually operated an independent mission without a licence (Sheers 2004,

1 For the term, “God’s irregular” see Steere (1973).

2 The novel entitled *Bay-Tree Country* (Cripps 1913) and a book entitled *An Africa for Africans* (Cripps 1927) have relevance for this study.

260). He styled himself simply as “a Christian missionary in Mashonaland” (Steele 1975, 153). Cripps worked at Maronda Mashanu³ up to the time of his death in 1952.

The memory of Cripps’s dedicated service continues among the Shona people of Maronda Mashanu, and in the Anglican dioceses of Masvingo and Harare (former diocese of Mashonaland). Firstly, in Chivhu town, a street was named in his honour and stretches for almost 12 km to Maronda Mashanu. Secondly, a home for orphaned, destitute and neglected African children was built at St John the Baptist mission, in Chikwakwa, and named after him (Fry 1964, 426–7). Thirdly, an annual festival in his honour is celebrated at Maronda Mashanu (Sheers 2004, 284).

Cripps in Zimbabwean Mission Historiography

Cripps is one of the most popular missionaries in Zimbabwean mission historiography. Historical books, articles and reviews on Cripps hold a preponderant view that he was a defender of the dignity and wellbeing of African people in Rhodesia because he was critical of colonial administrations as well as the missionary church. Biographers, as well as academics, have showered him with many titles. Jeffares (1980, 270) argues that he became “a father, a lawyer, and a doctor to the Mashonas.” Similarly, Borrell (1970, 1) describes him as “priest, poet, novelist, pamphleteer, politician of sorts, visionary.” Ranger (1982, 33) refers to him as “the radical missionary” whose career was characterised by protest and agitation. Other scholars, such as Steele (1975, 155, 111) and Makwasha (2011, 228), call him a human rights activist. Steere (1973, ix) calls him “Africans’ fearless advocate.” He also states that it was “in the service of the voiceless indigenous people that Cripps poured out his life” (Steere 1973, Xii). While the preponderant characterisation of Cripps is that he was a missionary who was deeply committed to the cause of the Shona people, among whom he lived for nearly half a century, there is yet another view that portrays him as awkward, stubborn, difficult, impractical, and naïve. The *Sunday Times* (London) called him a “maverick missionary” (the blurb on *Dust Diaries*, Sheers 2004). Furthermore, Ranger, cited in Steele (1975, 160) refers to Cripps as a “lone wolf—a man who could influence profoundly a few people, but who could not build or lead a movement.”

To understand the relevance of Cripps’s ideas and work for our times, we can ill afford to apply the same tired and bankrupt approaches to history informed by vested interests of the North-Atlantic. Rather, the call for relevance to African interests imposes on us the need for a more critical and nuanced approach to understanding the underlying ideology and philosophy underpinning Cripps’s ideas and mission work. In this article, we submit that although Cripps was a missionary full of lofty ideas, and was inspired by noble intentions, more often than not his ideas were unrealistic and often impractical

3 The name Maronda Mashanu was based on the dying Francis of Assisi, whose body and limbs were marked with the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ’s passion (Steere 1973,13)

to the extent of undermining the dignity, welfare and wellbeing of the Shona people that he sought to defend. In light of this view, the purpose of this article is to provide a more critical gaze into his mission activities at Maronda Mashanu.

A Plea for Segregation

Cripps's missionary sojourn to Charter District (now Chikomba District), Mashonaland, commenced at a time when colonial Rhodesia was in its infancy. Cecil John Rhodes's British South Africa Company (BSAC) had made huge investments in Mashonaland, hoping to find gold reserves to match the Rand, in Transvaal. The failure to find huge gold reserves, however, resulted in unprecedented interest in securing land for agriculture (Moyana 1975, 2). The land option was thus the BSA Company's shrewd attempt to mitigate a definite investment disaster. "The answer to the gold shortage was to use the country as the Mashonas had employed it, for herding and agriculture. Improved methods and superior implements, together with an abundant cheap labour supply, would make the venture profitable" (Doyle 1975, 180). As land speculation drove white settlers' appetite to buy more fertile land, there was a fear that Africans, who did not have the financial capital to buy land, would be left with too little land for their growing population (Moyana 1975, 2). Such an eventuality would not bode well for the future security and stability of the country. By 1920, only 43.5 million acres were unassigned. This figure amounted to about half of the land available in the whole country. However, the land available to each white settler in the same period amounted to 32 times more than his/her African counterpart (Doyle 1975, 180).

Soon after the BSA Company gave way to the Responsible Government, Charles Coghlan, the first Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, appointed the Morris-Carter Commission, in 1925, to come up with recommendations on the future utilisation of unalienated land. The Commission's report was issued in 1926, and its recommendations became law in 1930 (Stere 1973, 104). The Land Apportionment Act (1930) thus legislated a long-held colonial belief that the segregation of land would go a long way towards a viable native policy in Southern Rhodesia (Moyana 1975, 2, and 77–78). Creating native reserves for the African population had not only been practised by the BSA Company administration since 1894, with the creation of Gwaai and Shangaan, but it was intensified in 1989, soon after the Ndebele and Shona risings.

Cripps's Views on Segregation

In light of the Morris-Carter Commission's report, Cripps wrote *An Africa for Africans: A Plea on Behalf of Territorial Segregation Areas and their freedom in a South African Colony* (1927) in order to put forward a solution for Southern Rhodesia's land question. Cripps wrote in support of the Southern Rhodesia government's proposal for segregated areas in which Africans alone might acquire land and within which Europeans would not be allowed to occupy land (Cripps 1927, Xii). He wrote:

I avow myself a fervent segregationist at this present critical time in Southern Rhodesia's history. I see the splendid hope of Freedom and Self-Development of Native Africa, which a Segregation Policy provides at this present juncture when indigenous Native Life is being so hard pressed in our Mixed Areas. (Cripps 1927, Xiv)

Cripps was in favour of segregation, cognisant of the fact that Africans living in (racially) mixed areas were living in "pathetically squalid and mean" conditions. They were at the receiving end of what he called a "regime of repression" at the hands of white farmers; hence his proposal for segregated areas (Cripps 1927, xiv). Cripps advocated for what he termed "a generous scheme of segregation, generous in reality not pretence, as to the apportionment of the whole land south of Zambezi between its inhabitants, European, Eurafican, African or Asiatic" (Cripps 1927, 11). The quotation below captures the essence of the segregation that he envisioned.

With freedom of movement and action under a minimum of European supervision and control the Native will, in their own areas, have full opportunity and scope for the development of a home-civilisation of their own along lines similar to, if not identical with, those by which the Europeans follow their separate ways. (Cripps 1927, 20)

In *An Africa for Africans*, Cripps emphasised "self-development and self-determination" as the objective of land segregation. In his view, that was the only viable settlement of the Native question in Rhodesia (Cripps 1927, 63). For Cripps, a segregated territory for Africans in colonial Rhodesia would act as "an inviolable sanctuary" to shelter African tribal life and "to foster its development" (Cripps 1927, 87). In the same vein, he wrote:

We want a racially self-conscious African not to feel himself homeless in a colonised Africa; we want a miniature Africa of the Africans, free, as far as may be, from exploitation, and free, as far as may be, for self-development, to exist within the borders of every one of our Native areas. From the point of view of the Higher (or Christian) Imperialism African Native Areas ought to be properly safeguarded, so that on them Africans may be free to go about their proper business of preparing Africa's own unique glory and honour into it. (Cripps 1927, 100–101)

Cripps was a man of letters. In defence of segregation, he cited a variety of sources ranging from the Bible, missionary sources, colonial policies, and books written by black and white, though mainly South Africans. The section below briefly presents some of the key sources and arguments Cripps used to support segregation in Southern Rhodesia.

The Bible

Bible passages that Cripps used to bolster his point of view portray African/Shona people as victims of an evil colonial administration. Citing Ecc 8:9, Cripps argued that

the white settlers' rule was definitely hurting Africans. Comparing white settlers to the biblical Dives and the African to Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31), he maintained that “the soul of Dives was intimately affected by his care or neglect of Lazarus' sores” (Cripps 1927, 47). However, in support of land segregation, he cites Ex 3:7–8: “And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people ... and have heard their cry ... for I know their sorrows ... and I am come to deliver them ... and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large full of milk and honey” (Cripps 1927, 11). For Cripps, segregation was going to deliver cultural and spiritual freedom and development to Africans.

Dr Silas Modiri Molema

Dr Modiri Molema was one of the authorities Cripps relied on in putting together a cogent argument for segregation. Molema, a black South African who authored *The Bantu, Past and Present: An Ethnographical-historical Study of the Natives of South Africa* (1920), was in favour of a “just, fair, and equitable separation” between blacks and whites in the Union of South Africa. He was in favour of what he called “enlightened segregation,” which he hoped would “provide privileges of self-government, and free constitutional life to black and white” (Cripps 1927, 11).

Peter Nielsen

Mr Peter Nielsen, the author of *The Black Man's Place in South Africa* (1922), was another authority that Cripps relied on. Nielsen made an “impassioned plea for the provision of ample Native areas, wherein the Bantu, apart from the European's undue interference, may be able to develop on his own lines which Providence has implanted in him” (Cripps 1927, 20; Doyle, 1975, 182). In a quotation cited by Cripps, Nielsen argues that:

... the policy of territorial separation is the only policy that will make possible a home existence for the natives in their own homeland, for we know that however educated and however worthy the civilized native may become, he cannot hope to find a home, or to feel at home among whites. (Cripps 1927, 61)

Nielsen's thesis was simply that whites and blacks cannot live in peace and goodwill together in one place and that territorial separation was the only sustainable way to lasting peace and happiness in South Africa (Cripps 1927, 81). Cripps fully concurred with Nielsen's point of view. He thus averred:

I desire to associate myself with Mr Nielsen in his view that, things being what they are in our Anglo-Dutch part of the British Empire, the policy of territorial separation is the only policy that will make possible a home existence for the natives in their homeland, for we know that however educated and however worthy the civilised Native may become, he cannot hope to find a home, or feel at home among whites. (Cripps 1927, 61)

Prof. E. H. Brookes

In addition to the authors referred to above, Cripps also relied on Brooke's book entitled, *History of South Africa's Native in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day* (1924). Brookes wrote: "We must make it our aim, then, to preserve the independent existence of a pure white race, embracing all social classes in South Africa—but every one of the arguments for preserving the individuality of the white race is an argument also for preserving the individuality of the black" (Brookes cited in Cripps 1927, 64–65). Brooks further averred that:

The policy of identity would produce deep-seated hatred of the black man by the white. The policy of subordination would produce deep-seated hatred of the white man by the black. There is only one way out—a way narrow indeed, unexplored, dangerous and difficult, but safer than the raging torrents and tremendous precipices to the right and left—the path of differential development, the course dictated by that wise conservatism which is not prepared to sacrifice national institutions and natural divisions for an unknown and fear-inspiring future. For the preservation and happiness of white and black alike, we stand for the policy of differentiation. (Brookes cited in Cripps 1927, 66)

What Would Land Segregation Bring to the African?

In Cripps's exposition, there were many benefits to be had from segregation. On the basis of evidence from Brookes, segregation, which he called "the path of differential development," would benefit both white and black (Cripps 1927, 65). The benefits would entail freedom, self-development and self-determination (Cripps 1927, 63). For Africans, in particular, segregation would offer them "a chance such as they are not now getting of living their own lives as men, and not as serfs or parasites, and bringing to fruition what is so admirable and distinctive in their own immemorial race characterisation" (Cripps 1927, 66). In Cripps's own words: "Freedom to live your own life in your own rural areas with your own Race's ideals in sight—that is so very much of a boon to ask after all. And the grant of that boon may mean, may it not, just the difference between a race's future daybreak and a race's present darkness" (Cripps 1927, 80–81).

Cripps was highly impressed by Molema's plea for an "enlightened segregation policy" which was evidently couched and cast in liberalism. However, he saw the need to explain further what segregation would entail for Southern Rhodesia:

But let us not forget that an enlightened Segregation Policy implies Faith, not the egotistical Faith that insists on superimposing one's own Race Kultur on a subject Race, but Faith in Freedom and so in the grant of Freedom for its self-development to that subject race. Creative Imperialism [of the Higher or Christian type] is surely at its supreme height of power when, refraining from the temptation to mould temptingly

plastic subjects, it affords them a scope and sphere wherein to mould themselves. (Cripps 1927, 83)

Putting Cripps's views on segregation in context

Firstly, Cripps believed in the trusteeship of missionaries over the “Natives” in the British colonies in Africa. Moreover, the fact that he was English brought with it a sense of English paternalism. He believed that as a missionary his role was to defend the “weaker” against white settlers who were “stronger” (Sheers 2004, 224). In Steele’s view, Cripps had “an inherent conviction that the church had an obligation to protect the weak, a belief that flowered into Christian Socialism during a six-year ministry in London’s East End” (Steele 1975, 152). To this end, he jealously defended his “right to protect ... and likewise to express ... views on all political proposals affecting ‘these politically dumb people’” (Cripps 1927, 148). On the basis of this belief, he did not have any qualms about speaking on their behalf. Without any scruples, he found nothing out of place in writing the following: “In stating that Natives in the Charter District of Mashonaland, which has been my home for many years, desire Segregation Areas (away from Europeans’ Farms and Estates) I do not think my statement is likely to be seriously questioned” (Cripps 1927, 67). Cripps’s paternalism is palpable in his letter to John Harris of the Aboriginal Protection Society, London. On 1 January 1921, he maintained that: “This unawakened race does not perceive yet the injury that has been done it. But one day it will arouse itself, become articulate ... But this is for the next act in the sombre drama.” Ranger (1980, 100), however, disagrees with Cripps. He argues that Cripps was not sensitive to what Africans were saying in a period which “they appeared to be silent and subdued.” In Ranger’s view, throughout the colonial period, Africans displayed varying capabilities of responding to colonialism. Although they sometimes used protest, as happened in the 1896–7 Ndebele and Shona uprisings, they also had other alternatives at their disposal, including adaptation and accommodation. Hence, for Cripps to equate non-protest as being “unawakened” was naïve at best.

Secondly, Cripps’s disdain for the African point of view on the land question is illustrated by the arrogance of referring to their opinion only in the last page of his book. He writes: “This book has asked attention for the native African’s point of view. It seems right, then, in discussing an African Land Question to allow an African Welfare Association to have the last word of all in its pages” (Cripps 1927, 200). While the African Welfare Association was indeed in favour of segregation, it wanted to see “a straight split of the colony into two equal camps, one for the Africans and another for the Europeans” (Cripps 1927, 200). However, because he arrogated upon himself the privilege to speak on behalf of the Africans, Cripps did not even comment on the Association’s proposal.

Thirdly, it is important to note the title of Cripps’s book, which was *An Africa for Africans* (1927), that is vastly different from the book of Booth (1897) entitled, *Africa for the African*, which called on European powers to relinquish power to Africans.

Instead, Cripps couched his title in typical colonial terms (also note a third publication by G. M. Williams 1969, entitled *Africa for the Africans*).⁴ Africans were supposed to be given “a miniature Africa” (Cripps 1927, 100) for their own self-development in a larger Africa that was in the hands of white settlers. He justified this notion on the fact that the Shona were at a level of development much lower than the white settlers. Because they were yet to reach the stage of civilisation that the white settlers had attained, it was necessary to create an African enclave for them. One cannot reconcile Cripps’s view on segregation with the claim made by Sheers (cited in Cripps 1927, 134), that he was motivated to go on a mission in Mashonaland by Olive Schreiner’s book, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897). The latter novel was based on the 1896/96 Shona rising and “depicts the acts of the Rhodesian Ahab, Cecil Rhodes, in seizing the vineyard of poor black Naboth” (Steele 1975, 15–16). Schreiner unequivocally condemned Rhodes’s colonial ambitions; Cripps, by preaching and championing segregation, fell short of doing so. Ironically, in his book, Cripps refers to Schreiner as “a prophetess” (Cripps 1927, 22) but fails to take a leaf from her book. Ironically, Gann (1992, 524) a Western liberal historian, went on to call Cripps’s *An Africa for Africans* a “negrophilist book.”

Fourthly, Cripps’s political views were not original. “They were derived from the great leaders of the Christian Socialist movement he knew at Oxford: men like Charles Gore, Francis Paget and father Benson” (Borrell 1969, 2). Gann (1992, 523) observes that territorial segregation “as a solution for South Africa’s problems had antecedents in British humanitarian and ecclesiastical, as well as in Afrikaner Nationalist traditions.” As a matter of fact, Ritner (1967, 19) argues that the decision taken by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1857, to sanction separate ministration for white and non-white members as a concession to “the weaknesses of some,” unwittingly provided “the blueprint for what was to become the cornerstone of the apartheid ideology ... or group development along indigenous lines.” As Gann (1992, 523–4) further observes, “the Native Land Act of 1913, which formalised territorial segregation (in the Union of South Africa), was supported by missionaries and humanitarians who wished to protect Africans from the real or assumed evils of a free land market and urbanisation.”

Fifthly, the big question is whether Cripps understood the political context as well as the ideological underpinnings of his authorities. His plea for segregation is mainly based on borrowed ideas from white liberals who were behind the segregation policy in the Union of South Africa. Even Molema (1920), the only black author whom he refers to as the “Bantu historian of his own Race” (Cripps 1927, 83) was a mission-inspired African liberal whose book was influenced by Classical learning, the European Enlightenment philosophers, anti-slave campaigners, Christian missionaries, and Darwinian evolutionary thinking. Molema naïvely gave Milner’s notion of equitable

4 Cripps 1927, *An Africa for Africans*; Booth 1897, *Africa for the African*; Williams 1969, *Africa for the Africans*.

segregation a chance and was influenced by Milner's Social Imperialism which found segregation a useful instrument for modernising South Africa (Starfield 2008, 263). Moreover, Molema supported Milner and Smuts's 1917 Savoy Speech on "Equitable separation of races" (Starfield 2008, 263). He was part of the ambiguities of early twentieth-century African nationalism, Cape Liberalism and imperial capitalism (Starfield 2008, 234) (Sahistory, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/dr-silas-modiri-molema>). Molema subscribed to the history of migration as espoused by G. M. Theal, who saw South Africa's interior as a *terra nullius*, thus making both white and black equal colonists of the country (Starfield 2008, 251). He "tended to play down the negative aspects of imperialism because he believed that, on the issue of racial equality, the British would treat Africans more fairly than Afrikaners would" (Starfield 2008, 252). Consequently, he supported the British Empire, to the disappointment of ANC "Youth Leaguers" of the militant 1960s (Starfield 2008, 230).

Sixthly, Cripps's failure to understand the direction and long-term implications of race debates in South Africa raises serious doubts regarding the veracity of Steere's claim that he was an exception among missionaries to Rhodesia in respect of the race question. Steere (1973, 26–27) argues that most of the early Anglican clergy "had served an apprenticeship in South Africa." In his view, this must be weighed in understanding Cripps's "ultimate witness on the whole matter of the racial question." To the contrary, although Cripps had gone to Rhodesia via Beira, and not Cape Town, like earlier Anglican missionaries, his captivity to South African segregation policies, laws and to writings by white and black liberals exposed his naivety. All in all, there was nothing radical nor prophetic about his plea for segregation. He was no different from other bigoted liberals and missionaries who advocated for racial segregation on the basis of the belief that Africans were "inferior beings."

Seventhly, Willis (1967, 199) argues that various land commissions recommended the creation of African Reserves because "they were moved by the wish to protect the African who was without means to purchase land in competition with European speculators." Moyana (1975, 55), however, disagrees with the logic behind the principle. Instead, he argues that:

The view was totally implausible due to the fact that African Reserves served economic interests of white settlers at the expense of Africans. Their creation advanced the maximization of European opportunity which was compatible with the original goals of colonialism and thus ensured a steady supply of labour for the European farmers. (Moyana 1975, 55–56)

The underlying reasons for segregating land for African occupation was thus to incapacitate the African by removing him from the arena of economic competition. (Moyana 1975, 56)

Finally, according to Steele (1975, 157), segregation was underpinned by an “innate conservatism” that characterised Cripps’s spirituality. Instead of condemning the injustice of settler land-grab and the support provided by the British Empire, Cripps only deplored the creation of reserves in remote and inhabitable areas (Moyana 1975, 75) and the colonial government’s practice of creating native reserves in granite veld and tsetse-fly ridden areas such as Sebungwe (Cripps 1927, 44). However, this was not radical enough, considering that he still favoured the principle of segregation. Considering the fact that the Africans were being dispossessed by white settlers and were being forced to move to native reserves, was it not ironic that he could use the Exodus motif, which essentially should be a narrative to celebrate liberation from slavery? The disjuncture between Cripps’s vision and hopes and aspirations of the African people that he came to evangelise, can only be explained by the fact that he lived in an idealistic world of literature which had little bearing on the situation in Mashonaland. This view is supported by Sheers (2004, 239) who argues that Cripps lived an eremitic life that he characterised as a “peculiar form of self-exile.”

Subtle Colonial and Imperialist Tendencies in Cripps’s Mission

According to Banana (1981, 326), “A phenomenon integral to both imperialism and capitalism is the myth of master races created, as it were, by some divinity to rule over other races. Curiously enough, this divinity is very often the God of Christians.” In 1906, Cripps attended a Shona funeral that he described as “very fine in a barbaric way.” He went on to observe that “it should be possible to build upon the Mashona convictions a magnificent faith in the Communion of Saints” (Ranger 1987, 167). The underlying assumption that African religion and ritual were barbaric pervaded missionary ideology and the process of evangelisation. Hence, Cripps did not seek to understand Shona beliefs and ritual in its own right, save for purposes of conversion.

Cripps’s Africa was modelled on the idea of the “Quintessential unspoilt Arcadia he tried to defend from the encroachments of civilisation” (Borrell 1969, 2). The greatest irony for Cripps’s mission at Maronda Mashanu was that, however closely he lived to the African, he remained epistemologically far removed from them. In a poignant critique of his epistemic condescension, Wylie (2003, 32) argues that Cripps was:

... keenly aware of the damage being wrought by European incursions on traditional African life and ecology inseparably. But his consciousness remained embedded in an overriding aesthetic of literary condescension. The poeticisms to which he resorts ... indicate the extent to which he identified African village life with his own European, literary pastoral tradition. He unashamedly refracted his attachment through the poetry of Theocritus: “... may all the dwelling be full, for never is sleep more sweet, nor sudden Spring, nor are flowers more delicious to the bees.” (Wylie 2003, 33)

One of Cripps’s ambitions was to buy land in order to run his own mission. He believed that this would unlock potential to see his vision through and to realise the purpose of living in Africa. Muckleneuk, which was bought in 1909, was over 3 000 acres.

Moneyputt, bought in 1911, had 1 700 acres (Steele 1975, 153; Steere 1973, 74). Later, Cripps bought two more farms, and all in all the land he purchased totalled 7 789 acres. Sheers (2004) states that some of the farms were bought from royalties received from his book sales, and from a trust that his brother managed. However, one of them was bought with the aid of a government grant.

On his return from Britain, in 1930, Cripps moved from Wrenningham mission to the land that he now owned. He erected the famous Maronda Mashanu mission on one of the farms (Steele 1975, 153). Due to the fact that Maronda Mashanu mission became Cripps's headquarters for as long as he lived, the whole tract of country became known as Maronda Mashanu (Sheers 2004, 172). "Free of Charter government native land law and the restrictions of the Anglican Church, an era of self-sufficiency, both spiritually and materially, was close at hand" (Sheers 2004, 173). Several headmen left Manyene Reserve to settle on his farms (Steele 1975, 153). According to Sheers (2004, 172), many families who settled on Cripps's farms were "attracted by his vision of free land ... because there would be no hut tax ... no government inspectors, no controls and no rents. Each man would farm and live on his own portion of land as freely as white farmers tilled theirs."

Although Cripps defied ecclesiastical and civil authority, he arrogated upon himself powers greater than that wielded by any Shona chief. He did not welcome polygamists on his farms and would not allow them to attend church services. Interestingly, back in 1903, Cripps had appealed to the church synod, his first, to drop an item that read: "Two things which make the native unambitious in his work, both for himself and for others: 1st Polygamy; 2nd the absence of wants" (Steele 1975, 155). At that time, he had felt inward that it was not the task of the Christian Church to publicly humiliate the Shona and his culture. Instead, he argued that the church should try to respect and uphold their own dignity and worth (Steele 1973, 45). Decades later, however, he was not prepared to have polygamists as occupants of his farms. Moreover, Cripps "imposed fines for immoral behaviour on Africans living on his farms" (Sheers 2004, 240). According to Steele (1975, 155): "In 1935, the Chief Native Commissioner noted that it was Cripps's practice to impose fines on Christian Africans whom he found guilty of immorality." A story is told of an African tenant on his land who wanted to divorce his wife because she had run away to become a prostitute in Salisbury. "Cripps gave him summary notice to quit his mission and remained deaf to his entreaties" (Steele 1975, 155). The land that was purchased ostensibly to empower victims of colonial injustices was now being used to further a narrow imperialist and religious agenda. Banana (1981, 321) argues that Cripps's ulterior motive was to make Africans dependent on him and on the rich.

Like other white missionaries, Cripps exerted a patriarchal authority over his tenants (Ranger 1987, 166). However, his rejection of polygamous families from his lands/farms must be understood as a form of cultural imperialism inherent in the evangelisation project in Africa. Western mission approach to Africa consisted of what Hallencreutz (1988) refers to as a "double mandate," viz. to evangelise and civilise.

Polygamy was generally seen by missionaries as a vestige of barbaric marriage practice that had to be eradicated with the support of the colonial state. Hence, for Cripps, saving the African from the “oppressive horrors of magic and polygamy” became integral to his civilising mission at Maronda Mashanu (Doyle 1975, 182).

Cripps seems to have suffered from the entrapment of Social Darwinism. He belonged to the ilk of missionaries whose attitude Nwoye (2007, 383–4) describes as having been “firmly grounded on the theory of institutional evolutionism, for which Africans (in becoming civilised) would have to progress from the rule of custom to the rule of law, from polytheism to monotheism, and from polygamy to monogamy.” Such attitudes were embedded in a racialised and Euro-centric ideology that not only reified and demonised polygamy as an institution but short-circuited a serious engagement with its internal dynamics (Nyameka cited in Nwoye 2007, 394).

Cripps’s conduct was as good as imposing a moral hegemony over the Shona idea of family on the belief that monogamy was a Christian practice and not merely a Western social norm. In this regard, Cripps shared a bigoted view with, and was no different from, other missionaries who saw polygamy as a sign of a lower civilisation. By insisting on monogamy as one of the requirements for settling on his lands, Cripps was engaging in a power game which was at the heart of the civilising agenda of the British Empire. Cripps’s marginalisation of polygamous families was driven by a conscious intention to create class differentiation in African communities. No doubt, this was one sinister side of mission as it helped to divide the African society. The defeat of polygamy and barbarism served the interest of colonialism as it weakened the social fabric of the African family. The Christian imperialism that Cripps perpetrated against the Shona on his farms casts him in the group of missionaries who acted as “the spiritual arm of the white civilising force” (Steere 1973, Xii).

Furthermore, the naming of his farms adds another dimension to Cripps imperialistic links. In an article on land, holy places and pilgrimages in Rhodesia, Ranger (1987, 159) argues that whites, in general, ignored the African oral historical geography. His main premise is that in an African historical geography, “hardly a hill or cave existed, in a landscape full of hills and caves, which did not have a religious or political historical significance.” This was, however, ignored by whites in general as they expropriated land and divided it up for their own occupation. To show that they were in control, they gave their farms names “drawn from their own places of origin or illustrative of their own experiences and hopes ... farms whose names invoked the English countryside Bidford, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Lovedale” (Ranger 1987, 160). In like manner, Cripps named his first two farms, Muckleneuk and Moneyputt, respectively. Obviously, he alone knew the meanings of the names. Ondonyms such as Muckleneuk and Moneyputt obviously created an unambiguous nexus between mission and British imperialism.

Cripps and fellow missionary colleagues saw the British Empire as the guardian, defender and benefactor of Africans. Cripps was too ready to criticise colonial rule, yet

he regarded the British Empire as the legitimate *de facto* authority over Africans. According to Steere (1973, 83): “Cripps had faith in the British trusteeship principle which for him meant that Britain’s ultimate and primary responsibility lay in seeing that the rights of the native population of her territories were vigilantly safeguarded ... To Cripps that was the matter at stake as regards the African Reserves.” He pleaded with the British Empire for a solution to the African problems, yet it was the same Empire that had granted Rhodes a charter and the status of “responsible government” to settler administration that succeeded company rule. To Cripps, the British Empire was the God-given guardian of Africans in colonial lands.

There is no doubt that the church at Maronda Mashanu—a church that Cripps gave birth to and led till his death, as an independent mission—became spiritually crippled. Because of his decision to go independent, he was no longer authorised to administer sacraments. His anomalous status automatically disqualified him from continuing as a priest in good standing. Doyle (1975, 233) makes an interesting observation when he says that the Mashona were probably oblivious or indifferent to this technicality. “If they had been forced to examine the situation, they might have suggested that Baba Cripps held his commission from God rather than from the bishop of Rhodesia.” The moot question is whether they were privy to the fact that Baba Cripps was no longer a minister of the Anglican Church. There is no evidence that he put his church members into his confidence. In spite of his anomalous standing in the church, Cripps continued “to minister in every way to his people, and they received his ministration in true faith” (Doyle 1975, 233).

No doubt, Cripps made personal sacrifices for his church at Maronda Mashanu. He gave his all; his time, energy, intelligence and “every fragment of his worthy possessions” (Doyle 1975, 234). Steere (1973, 150) suggests that Cripps died a very impoverished man because of his “ceaseless assistance to the Africans with whom he was surrounded.” Such a statement may be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, for Makwasha (2011, 233) this was part of Cripps’s legacy of “what it means to serve the people. It teaches that life is not about personal gain but giving to the community.” On the other hand, however, it implies that the vaNjanja people whom he lived with, took advantage of him to the extent of being dependent on him. The latter raises a major concern whether Cripps adequately prepared a church after his great life of service?

On the question of the imposition of hut tax on Africans by colonial administrations, Cripps understood the adverse effects wrought by the heavy tax on the African social structure as the young and old were pushed out of their homes by economic pressures in search of paid employment. Instead of condemning the principle of taxation that was unjustly imposed on African men, Cripps proposed payment in kind as a mitigation measure (Curt Gersh, <http://www.christiancourier.ca.columns-op-ed/entry/arthur-Cripps/>). One wonders whether his proposal was a viable and practical alternative to the colonial option, considering the fact that it was the settler white buyers that the Africans were going to sell or barter their crops and livestock to in order to get cash for tax. Did

Cripps expect fair prices from the white buyers? Was the net effect going to be any better than selling their labour? Either way, the African was being forced to sell his hard-earned wealth in the form of crops and livestock for a pittance. Cripps's ill-conceived proposal was an enrichment programme for white settlers and, without doubt, a naïve and tacit legitimisation of the colonial project.

Conclusion

What we find deeply disturbing about Cripps's mission were his paternalism, idealism and naivety. Apparently, a chilling narcissist streak seems to have characterised his so-called defence of the African cause. He became a prisoner of his own presuppositions. Driven by a congenital paternalism, Darwinian bigotry and British condescension, Cripps believed that Africans were not only barbaric but in a state of infancy, and were therefore unable to survive in the modern industrial world characterised by a capitalist mode of production. In this situation, Cripps saw himself as the arch-defender and protector of the Africans. He paternalistically mobilised all international networks and financial resources at his disposal to protect them from an unjust colonial system. However, in his world, the voice of the African did not matter: for him, the African was there merely to be seen and not to be heard.

Cripps's mission as a champion of the poor has serious contradictions, precisely because it was located in a missionary environment characterised by complicity between mission and empire (Banana 1981, 329). In such a context, Cripps was a victim of the insidious ambiguity between the need to legitimise British imperial authority in Rhodesia and commitment to affirming African selfhood.

From the foregoing discussion, when considering the role and place of Cripps in Zimbabwean history, one cannot just look at the actions that he undertook on behalf of the African, but the underlying worldview, outlook and methods informing them. Cripps's outlook and methods clearly demonstrate that he was beholden to the British Empire more than to the Africans whom he evangelised and lived with.

Finally, the historiography on Cripps and his missionary enterprise suffers from the weaknesses of imperialist Christian historiography that focuses on his thoughts, ideas, projects, activities and his writings at the expense of the insurgency and agency of the subalterns, the Shona people that he evangelised and lived with. The latter's voice is not only absent but is irrecoverable. The portrayal of Cripps in this historiography as a hero, generous benefactor to their material and spiritual needs, and a veritable St Francis of Assisi of Mashonaland, is not only unfortunate but demeaning to the Shona who come across as passive, inarticulate and dependent. Unfortunately, in Cripps's writings and actions discussed above, the Shona were not given space to articulate their opinions through him. Instead, he spoke for them without much consultation. The outcome was obvious; the interests of the subalterns were profoundly misrepresented and undermined.

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