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THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON 20th CENTURY BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WRITING

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Dealing with such a broad subject in such limited space will not enable one to refer to as many writings as one would like to deal with. Another problem is that the majority of the writings are in the native languages of South Africa. One can, therefore, only sample one or two writings from the main language groups of one's own language, Sesotho, Isi-Zulu and Isi-Xosa of the AmaZulu and AmaXosa respectively.

In recent months we have interested ourselves in the study of both English and native language writings of black South Africans of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This study was prompted by the fact that there is so much in them that is lost to South Africa and to Africa by their being neglected. One hopes to translate a few of these works into English to make them available to a much wider reading public. Just a couple of months ago we received from Lesotho, A. M. Sekese's classical study of the behaviour and habits of the birds of Lesotho in his book "Pitso Ea Linonyana" - "The Gathering of the Birds". This great trial is based on the local Basotho legal system. We only hope that our translation will not destroy the beauty of the setting, the mood, the native traditional atmosphere and the very idiomatic language.

In this book Sekese sets up a conference of the birds - small and large - of Lesotho. The gathering and

its procedures are based on the legal system of Lesotho. The centre of the controversy is the hawk who is the accused. The judges are the eagle and the vulture. Some of the very interesting prosecution witnesses are the smallest bird, Motintinyane (the grass warbler), the butcher bird and the owl. The indictment is that the hawk is guilty of persecuting the birds and making their lives miserable - making it impossible for them to enjoy their meals. The entire bird family is there to see that justice is meted out and that the hawk gets a just punishment.

Any one who has sat in a local traditional court case held under the shade of a tree in the king's headquarters cannot help but admire the gift of observation that the author possesses. Again anyone who knows the birds of Lesotho cannot fail to see the profound knowledge the author possesses of the birds of his native land. The author begins his book by explaining that regular national conferences are held in Lesotho for kings and counsellors to discuss national problems; for kings to meet the nation to hear their problems; for the various rulers to meet to discuss national problems.

"A nation which does not hold national conferences is like a patient whose illness is ignored by the doctors who are able to diagnose and cure disease."¹

The trial extends over a period of several days and in the first session Motintinyane is the first witness and the author describes the proceedings thus:

"And Motintinyane stood up, the poor fellow's eyes unable even to look at the honourable judges; he is an old, old man with a head that is grey, and he supports himself on a walking stick. He held his hands on his waist and spoke and said: "Honourable my masters, you will wish to know what this thing is that speaks first. Indeed, in truth I am nothing in your presence; though it may be

so, though I be nothing, yet I hate to die and see my children killed year in and year out. I have only one thing to say, I say, let the hawk give up his chieftainship, he is destroying and finishing the nation of the Bird Family. Even I, as tiny as I am, I am on the fleeing path all day with torrents of perspiration streaming down my face. I just do not understand how he thinks he can chew me up when there is really nothing to chew of me. I wonder whether he does not think of putting me into his nostrils. You hawk, you have no shame indeed! You are such a great king, yet you insist on making such useless things as myself unhappy. Well, I have spoken, but I end with these words: Oh, please my masters unite in your decision so that the hawk (Phakoe) should be stripped of his chieftainship! (And the nation cried: away with him! away with him!") And these are my words, I Motintinyane."²

There follows a number of other witnesses to corroborate Motintinyane's words, but the first meeting ends indecisively. On the second day the great convocation meets again and it is now the hawk's (phakoe's) turn to answer the many accusations against him. He is proud and looks scornfully and disdainfully with steady steel-like eyes around him, at the judges, and then, his accusers and speaks:

"Yes, My Lord and the court! We are all familiar with what happened in the first sitting of this court, and we all know what caused the postponement of the proceedings. The accusations of my accusers were very unclear, and even I on that day I did not put my defence adequately and clearly. But so as to avoid the waste of valuable time with trivialities, I can say that I am still expected to defend myself today. Yes, My Lord, chieftains and you the nation of the Bird Family, I am the son of the hawk (phakoe),

I do not sing my own praises
For one is worth of praise if others sing his
praises.

I the hawk, I am the third in the line of succession after the Eagle and the Vulture. But, though I am a king I am ashamed that today I should be standing here dressed in the ugly name of the accused. I have listened to and have heard all your misgivings and lamentations about me, and though I have been so greatly pained, in one respect it is an honour and great respect for me to see here before me the entire nation of the Bird Family. I am especially happy that today you will all hear and know what my position is over you, both you accusers and lamenters alike, above all I request that in this sitting today you should not show yourselves lacking in good manners of speech which would prove that indeed you do not know my responsibility over you. I am not imposing myself on you, if you don't know my responsibility over you, no one forces you to know it, for I have already realised that you do not pretend, you indeed, don't know my position over you; among you some have called me a cannibal, others say that I am a constable, and still others say I should be killed like Chaka was killed, if not so that I should be expelled and driven out of this nation! It was when I thought of all these accusations that I said earlier that I was very glad that today you will hear and know those things that you have never heard nor known all this time, with regard to my kingly position of responsibility over you. I am particularly disgusted that my best friend here, the Butcher Bird, (Tsemeli) should have called me a constable!

My Lord and the court, and you my accusers, I trust you still remember what I said at the beginning of this sitting for I had said that I had not put my defence very clearly at the first sitting. You are aware that what I have said here today all concerns the matters that were raised in that sitting, all those things which I had not adequately answered on that day.

Now when I continue with my defence I say to you, these are the kings who have given me the responsibility

of being a shepherd over you; ask them, satisfy yourselves perfectly on both sides, whether I was not put over you by them or whether I have imposed myself over you."³

Anyone who has been to a native traditional court sitting cannot fail to recognise the great sense of oratory that Sekese has written into this classic. The speaker prides himself in the use and control of the language. The real point at stake is not so important as the beauty of speech. At that point of Phakoe's defence speech the Chief Justice, Lenong, (the Eagle) interrupted him with these words:

"Just a minute, just a while, son of the Hawk, I don't wish to disturb your speech. (I don't wish to enter your mouth). In short, and in one unanimous voice I accept the truth that Phakoe was given the responsibility over you by us; but though it may be so, we did not give him the power and the right to spill blood, and above all we did not give him the right to paint his lips red with blood like greedy dogs do.

It is not a custom among kings to give a subordinate such powers and responsibilities that are greater than the powers and responsibilities of those who are above him, for the hyena is always brought to the king's palace! ..."⁴

This is the richness that we have lost by neglecting the many master pieces that have been produced in the native languages by our writers, some of whom have long gone into obscurity through death. We must begin to dig these gold mines for if we don't very soon adventurers from Europe and America will discover them for us and it will be too late to moan and cry about outsiders coming to exploit the literary wealth of Africa. Now, I should not, like son of the Hawk, go off the track for my aim in this paper is to show the impact christianity has had on the black South African writing of the periods indicated.

The history of South Africa shows clearly how closely christianity followed behind the wars of liberation fought by the black people against the white invaders and colonizers. Where the whites were victorious they set up missions and opened schools for the express purpose of christian indoctrination. The victories they had won were not handed to them on a golden plate but it cost them sweat, blood and the lives of thousands of their men, women and children. So christian indoctrination was applied as vigorously as the gun had been used to enable the whiteman to gain a firm foothold on the African soil. Going hand in hand with the building of mission stations was also the founding of christian printing presses. This was to make sure that a great deal of what was published by both black and white writers was closely censored by the church. This was especially so for the African writer who could not have his work published by the white commercial publishing houses who themselves were strict censors for most of them were also owned by white people closely connected with the church.

In South Africa the two publishing houses which published black writers were Morija Printing Press in Lesotho and Lovedale Printing Press in the Eastern Cape. Morija Mission station was founded in Lesotho near Thaba Bosiu, King Moshoeshoe's strong hold, in the year 1834. The founders were missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society who arrived in South Africa in 1829. Lovedale was founded in the town of Alice in the Eastern Cape in the year 1841 by missionaries of the Glasgow Missionary Society of the Church of Scotland. In the preface to his book A History of Christian Missions in South Africa the author, Professor J. Du Plessis, has this to say:

"From the pages of the book it will be abundantly evident that mission history and Cape history have always been associated in the closest possible way. In

South Africa, at any rate, they form, not two parallel and separate streams, but two streams which Unite and Commingle. And this "History" may claim to be the first attempt to place the establishment and growth of Christian Missions in South Africa in their true historical setting."⁵

And this "true historical setting" was that christianity followed closely on the heels of military conquests. The missionary followed closely behind the soldier to consolidate his conquests and to spread christian indoctrination. There is no doubt that the missionaries did a thorough job. They reaped rich results inspite of the great odds they worked against. One of the first and finest results of missionary effort was the conversion of a Xosa leader, Ntsikana, by Joseph Williams in about 1881. This man, Williams, was so strong that he also impressed the strong King, Ngqika, and many of his followers. Dr. Shepherd of Lovedale Missionary Institution has this to say about this man, Joseph Williams:

"One of the Bantu declared that when Williams lifted up his hands every man saw that he had hold of heaven and brought it upon earth. Ngqika, after hearing him went to the bush to weep and pray. The whole country appeared to be on the brink of a great moral and religious change."⁶

It is in this kind of atmosphere that the early writings of black authors were published and it is, therefore, not surprising that christian influence is felt in almost all writings belonging to the period under consideration. Though Ntsikana was not an educated man in the European sense yet he soon became a great and flaming evangelist

among the Xosa people. He assumed the dimensions of a teacher, artist and prophet and one of his best creations which has been handed down from generation to generation is still sung with great emotion by South African blacks. After his contact with the missionary this great leader and warrior became one of the greatest legendary figures in black South Africa. His war cries ceased and instead he poured out floods of christian sentiment. At this point I would like to give you the original version of his great composition, "Ulo Thixo Omkhulu ngosezuliveni" - "He the great God, high in Heaven", and then afterwards Professor D. J. Darlow's English Translation:

"Ulo - Thixo umkulu, ngosezulwini
Unguwena, Wena, kaka lenyaniso
Unguwena, Wena, Nqaba yenyanyiso
Unguwena, Wen' uhlel' enyangwaneni,
Ulo 'dal', ubomi, wadala pezulu
Lo - Umdali wadala wadala izulu
Lo - Menzi wenkwenkwezi nozilimela.
Yabinza inkwenkwezi, isixelela.
Lo - Menzi wemfama uzenza ngabomi
Latela ixilongo, lisibizela,
Ulonquin' izingela imipefumlo,
Ohlanganis' imihlambi eyalamayo
Ulo - Mkokeli wasikokela tina.
Ulengub' enkulu siyambata tina.
Ozandla Zako zina maxeba Wena.
Ugazi Lako liyimrozo yinina?
Ugazi lako lipalalela tina.
Lemali enkulu - na siyibizile?
Lowonzi wakon - na siwubizile?
Amen⁷

The following translation into English was done by the then Professor of English at the South African Native College, Fort Hare, Alice, Cape Province in 1941 on the occasion of Lovedale's centenary celebrations.

"He the great God, high in Heaven,
 Great 'I am', of truth the Buckler
 Great 'I am', of truth the Stronghold,
 Great 'I am', in whom truth shelters
 Who created life around us
 Who created Heaven above us
 And the stars, No-Zilimela (The Pleiades)
 We were blind until He taught us.
 (Thou mad'st us blind, it was Thy purpose)
 With a trumpet gave the message.
 As He hunted our spirits.
 Toiled to make our foes our brothers
 (Thou our leader who dost guide us.)
 Then He cast His cloak about us,
 Cloak of Him whose hands are wounded
 Cloak of Him whose feet are bleeding.
 See the blood that streameth for us;
 Flows it, though we have not asked it.
 Is it paid without our praying
 Heaven our Home with no beseeching?"⁸

Among the Africans of South Africa religion is found in the veneration of spirits as distinct from God himself. Among the Basotho these spirits are Balimo; among the Zulus and Xosas these spirits are Amadlozi or Iminyanya - the ancestors. This composition of Ntsikana's therefore, is about a God unknown to the black people of South Africa. He wrote or, as it was then, composed about a strange God brought to him by the missionary Joseph Williams. This then is what christianity made of this great African leader who was born and lived and died in an area where South Africa's bloodiest battles were fought between the white invaders and the indigenous peoples.

Even at this time of the twentieth Century the Morija and Lovedale presses had to continue with the role for which they were intended. Dr. Shepherd makes a very interesting remark about the role that the christian

press had to play when he wrote about Lovedale in 1941, one hundred years after its founding.

"It is another proof of the statesman like views of the pioneer missionaries that so early they recognised the power of the printed word. John Ross, who conveyed the printing - press from Britain in 1823, declared in a later day that there must be provided "good books for youth and age, for the Lord's Day and week-days, for schools and libraries ... The church has still her own people, for whom to care. She should not forget that her commission extends to the world - whence others are to be called - the world of readers, who become the men of action, for evil as much as for good".⁹

The book referred to at the beginning of this paper, "Pitso Ea Linonyana", by A. M. Sekese was first published by Morija Printing Works in 1928 in the early Twentieth Century. What is interesting about the book is that though it is an apparent criticism of the political situation in Lesotho at the time of writing, yet the writer could not avoid being influenced by the powerful christian atmosphere of the country. The hawk, dictator and murderer, is on trial during the second sitting and after several other witnesses, such as the quail (Koekoe) had spoken, the Partridge (Khoale) interrupts the proceedings with these remarks:

"Quail, child of my younger brother, just take a breather for a while by sitting down. Hawk (Phakoe) listen and let me tell you a true story of long ago and which is true even today. It is said that a certain persecutor who persecuted people who worshipped the God of over there, on a certain day, even after he had been given the power and right to kill by permission of the king, when he invaded a certain town, on the way the ruler of that town which he was invading got hold of him and

throttled him and threw him to the ground; and while he was still unconscious, he was awakened by a voice that called him by his name, though he did not see who called him. When he answered he asked, 'Who are you my master?' And the answer was: 'I am him who you are persecuting! It is difficult to kick against the pricks. At once the persecutor regretted his actions and repented. I must say, though that his regret and repentance were not quite complete for he should have been convinced by the dust in which he had found himself."¹⁰

Khoale goes on to explain that Phakoe is in the same position as this persecutor and also reminds him that "the heart of our Creator is not pleased by the things you do to us. And if our masters don't speak strongly to you about your doings, you yourself better pull yourself up and correct your ways. Open your ears Phakoe, and listen to my second example concerning the matters I am composing for your benefit".¹¹

The exchange between the two goes on with Khoale giving another example of another king who lived in another far away country and who ruled over his own people and many other nations which he had conquered but who killed mercilessly. This went on until the Strong Man (Senatla) who rules over all of us realised that this king had no repentance and he decided to kill him, and so he killed him.

At the end of the second day nothing really decisive has been reached and so there is another adjournment. During the third session more witnesses give evidence and the owl who had to be fetched to come and give evidence gets very rough treatment from the judges. As a result of the unsatisfactory manner in which the whole trial has gone Tlaka-Tsooana is forced to close it with the following sad words:

"I Tlaka-Tsooana, I am one of the staunch supporters of the kingship, though it be so yet we are

amongst those to whom it is always said by those in high places, close your eyes so that the big one may be able to swallow! At this very trial we closed our eyes to enable the big one to swallow Sephooko (owl)."

The setting of the story is a political one and it reveals the corruption of those in high places, but Sekese thinks he can solve a political problem by appealing to the moral and christian consciences of those involved in political corruption. So, what could have been a clever and satirical attack of the corrupt morals of those eagles, vultures and hawks in high places, is reduced to another sermon from a christian pulpit. After having said all this one must also say that one is not condemning Sekese's artistic qualities as a writer and observer of the world around him. Unfortunately he lived at a time when black writers had to produce "good books for youth and age, for the Lord's Day and Week-days..." "Pitso Ea Linonyana" is definitely one of the best classics in the Sesotho language, rich in idioms and beautiful expressions.

Sekese concludes his book by telling the story of the case between a blindman and a cripple over the skin of a buck which they had snatched from the birds. After they had eaten the meat they began to quarrel over the possession of the skin. The blindman claimed the skin because he had carried the cripple to where the birds were eating the buck and had again carried back the cripple, the meat and the skin to the cave. The cripple claimed the skin because he had seen the birds which were flying to where the dead animal was and he had skinned it and had carried the meat and the skin in his hands on the blindman's back when they returned to their cave.

He ends his story by saying it was God's plan that these two people should work together for each other's good, but that things went wrong when they began to quarrel over who should possess the skin. He concludes very irrationally that the skin really belonged to the blindman

because the blind are always the victims of those who have eyes and can see. The cripple looks fatter than the blind-man and this, therefore, means he must have had a greater share of the meat without the poor blindman knowing it. Like in the story of the birds Sekese's purpose in this story is to preach the moral lesson that it is wrong for those in better and higher positions to exploit and cheat those in lesser and inferior positions. Very heavy overtones of Christian morality!

We wish to look at a book published ten years after "Pitso Ea Linonyana", Thomas Mofolo's "Chaka". The publishers are also Morija Printing Works and the book has been translated into English by F. D. Dutton and published by Oxford University Press. In the preface to the English translation the publishers claim that "This book Chaka is not a history of the great Zulu chief, for it does not claim to give all the known facts of his life. But Mofolo uses fact as a basis for his story of human greed and unchecked ambition, an ambition that masters its victim and leads to his downfall and terrible punishment".¹²

There are very interesting similarities between Chaka and Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe. Where Marlowe uses the devil Mephistopholes, to mislead Faustus, Mofolo uses the African medicine man, Isanuse, to do the trick. Both victims have a long spell of successes in life and have the world in the hollow of their hands for a while. Both die a terrible and painful death in the end with their masters coming in just at the right moment to claim the wages of sin, death. In Mofolo's eyes Chaka is not a nation builder as he is treated by Seydou Badian the West African playwright who incidentally used Mofolo's book as a basis for his play "The Death of Chaka" also published by Oxford University Press. To Badian Chaka's death is regarded as a great loss to the nation, but to Mofolo Chaka deserves death for he had chosen the path of

sin. After Chaka has met the Lord of the Deep Waters he hears these words from a voice in the grass:

"Ahe, ahe. The world is yours,

Child of my own people.

You will rule the nations

and their chiefs and kings,

You will rule all the nations of men,

You will rule the winds and the storms of the
sea

And the deep pools of the mighty rivers,

And all things will obey your word,

They shall fall down before your feet.

E, oi, oi. But take care,

that you follow the right path."¹³

Yes, indeed Chaka ruled a vast area of land; he was victorious in war; he ruled chiefs and kings and all the nations of men, but in doing so he had chosen the wrong path. And for this he had to pay dearly for in terms of christian philosophy the wages of sin is death. Isanusi leads him from one cruel deed to another till he wades deep through the blood of his nation, his mother and his wife, Noliwe. Like Shakespeare's Macbeth he cannot go back any longer for his hands are red with blood and his heart longs for more blood and power. The following extract which is Chaka's dream of Isanusi in his greatest hour of need will make the point better than any lengthy explanation. This dream comes at the end of Chaka's days.

"And Chaka watched them thus in his dreams, Isanusi came with his companions. The three of them remained quite silent, as if they were rejoicing over Chaka with a terrible joy, like the joy of a man who overcomes the enemy he has prepared himself to kill. It was the joy of those who see that their day has come. And Isanusi said: 'Chaka, today I have come to demand my reward. I told you that if I should pass here again you

were to have all preparations made; there was to be no delay; you were to give me what is mine without argument. For I have worked well for you, and you have won the chieftainship and power and honour and riches and glory.'

Harmless as these words were, the pain they caused Chaka was terrible. He saw that Isanusi was counting up all the dead who had gone to fill Udonga-luka-Totiyana during the years of his chieftainship, for as Isanusi spoke he looked down into the valley. When Chaka heard these words he seemed to leap up in his sleep and fall on one of Isanusi's companions and kill him. He woke and looked this way and that, and all he saw was that the night had gone. Beyond this there was nothing else for him to see, except he knew he had been dreaming.

The sun rose and with great difficulty Chaka found the courage to go out and speak with the soldiers, but the Chaka who spoke was no longer the Chaka they knew. He stood up like the royal lion of the Mazulu, like a wild beast without fear, but like a lion with its strength gone, unable even to raise its head. His fine body, his broad shoulders, could no longer carry out his commandments.

Death, the mighty ox, had seized Chaka, but he did not see it; it had come to him and he could not run away or fight against it.

Death came to him in the moment of his glory, in the hour of his boasting, when he said that the armies of Mazulu had fought against death and overcome it and marched over it with their feet. At such a time death had come to him and there was no deliverance."¹⁴

The next Morija publication we would like to examine briefly is a drama in Sesotho by Twentyman M. Mofokeng entitled "Sek'ona Sa Joala" - A Calabash of Beer - published in 1953. The purpose of this play is quite clearly meant to militate against polygamy and throughout

the church's voice is clear and loud. The story of the play is about two intimate friends, Lefaisa, father of a beautiful girl, Keneuoe, and Seobi, father of a young man, Phephei, engaged to the beautiful Keneuoe. Seobi is a polygamist and his friend Lefaisa does not approve of it. One day Morongoe, Seobi's second wife, offers him a calabash of poisoned beer which his friend knocks out of his hands because he knows that the beer is poisoned. This act strains the old friendship between the two men and also affects the engagement of the two young people. Though the play ends with a reconciliation because of Morongoe's confession, the playwright attempts throughout to stress that polygamy is unchristian and dangerous because it goes hand in hand with jealousy and hatred as was proved by Morongoe's attempt in trying to poison her husband because he paid more attention to his first wife, 'Malirontso'.

The first scene opens with Phephei at the local well just after his arrival from the gold mines in Johannesburg. In his long soliloquy, amongst other things, he meditates about how the eyes were meant to see the beauty of nature by God, but how that they also see the ugliness of the sinful world; how God meant the tongue to speak good things, but that it also is capable of speaking evil things. Some of the things that were useful to the nation have now been turned into bad things by man.

"Perhaps this thing which today has become witchcraft was once great knowledge very different from what it is today; was something which was used in various ways for the good of the nation; but today it was changed into a terrible thing which the priests and wise people wisely condemn when they say that people should not believe in them because they are bad."¹⁵

Then he bends down to drink water from the well with these words:

"Wonderful cool refreshing water. I believe that the well from which Moses let the flocks of his father-in-law drink was as cool as this when, he, Moses saw Sephra and when Jacob saw Rachel, and - listen! What's that I hear?"¹⁶

He soon sees his beloved, Keneuoe, walking to the well to draw water and he hides behind the nearby rocks as she draws the water to the companyment of this song.

1. "We put ourselves at thy feet our Father in Heaven, we ask for your protection as we go To rest.
2. At night the evil spirits will surprise us With evil dreams; please protect us.
3. Encircle us with an army of angels, Watch over us, protect us, You Jesus, Saviour.
4. When we wake in the darkness of the night, Protect us and give us good thoughts only.
5. In our imaginations give us good thoughts only, Thoughts about repentance and new life and new Spirit.
6. In our thoughts at night teach us Thy truth Only, so that we may find and follow the Road of heaven."¹⁷

We said in the beginnings that the play was an attack on the age-old custom of polygamy, but before we say something about that here is another example of sentimental indulgence in religious hope by the characters. When Kenouoe hears that her father has broken her engagement because of the calabash of beer incident she wails,

"Even though my mother and father desert me, my God will keep me. Phephei, my beloved, I was created for you by God, and there is nothing in heaven or earth that can separate me from you. I may be asked to drink blood in place of water or eat bread covered with the slimy saliva of frogs or be burnt with fire or be covered with

open sores, all these things I would gladly do because of my love for you as all these things that pain my heart are not greater than love; even death I can face without fear, because I love you with a red hot love ..."¹⁸

When Seobi explains to Lerafu, Lefaisa's brother-in-law, the cause of the quarrel with his friend he says,

"In fact you remind me one matter which I almost forget to tell you about. The beer calabash was given to me by one person Lefaisa has always criticised me for in secret, she is this second wife of mine, Morongoe. Lefaisa always criticises me for having married her as a second wife, and sometimes I believe it is for this reason that he has cancelled my son's marriage to his daughter."¹⁹

And when eventually Morongoe, Seobi's second wife, explains to Phephei, his son, why she wanted to poison her husband this is how the conversation goes.

"MORONGOE: Now I have told you all, but I wish also to tell Seobi in your presence because I now wish to return to my people so that I may get married to someone else; I am fed up of being responsible for the breakage of the love affairs of other people, indeed I live in constant fear when I realise that Seobi has greater love for his first wife than he has for me, but even so their first love has diminished; all that remains for me now is just to confess to both of them and then to go away from here.

PHEPHEI: You indeed speak the truth, polygamy can never let people live in peace at all. Let me go and call Seobi for I have already sent word for Lefaisa to come here. You go into this room and wait for my return."²⁰

And later when Lefaisa meets Phephei this is the trend of the conversation between them:

"LEFAISA: By the way this woman says she wishes to confess?

PHEPHEI: Yes, infact she wants Seobi to return her to her people, for she wishes to give up polygamy as she has found out that there can never be peace in a polygamous marriage, and she wishes to get married to another man, if it is possible."²¹

The play ends with both Morongoe and Seobi making the following passionate speeches and public denouncements of polygamy. It is very much like what happens in the numerous incidents in church when members of the congregation make public confessions and testimonies.

"MORONGOE: Now I realise that Lefaisa, your friend, who is your enemy today, had seen me when I put the poison into the beer, and it is for that reason that he knocked it from your hands, and spilled it. I plead with you, I pray you, I beg you and 'Malirontso, with tears in my eyes I say, O, please you of the Bafokeng people, forgive me! I feel terrible about the manner in which I have destroyed your friendship with Lefaisa; I feel ashamed to think of the manner in which you had driven your son from your house, I am horrified of myself when I think of the many evil plans I tried, to make you hate your wife and lose your love for her. Now I end my words by requesting you to release me so that I may return to my people; and if I should suffer I won't mind because I will have been responsible for my suffering; no one weeps for those who bring calamity upon themselves.

SEOBI: The blame is mine, I am to blame
I who did not fear to take you into
marriage though I had a wife. When you
ask me to forgive you I also ask you to
forgive me. O, my dear friend, Lefaisa,
my honest helper, I dread to think how I
have wronged you. May the word forgiveness
be the dominant word today, and my son also
whom I have driven away from his own home,
may he also forgive me, that Mofokeng, wher-
ever he may be. And you, Morongoe, you who
I deceived with clever words, even though
you are guilty of nearly spilling blood,
that guilt of yours is made insignificant
by what motivated you; as you have said, no
one weeps for one who brings calamity upon
himself, this which has happened to me now,
and that which nearly happened to me, I
brought them upon myself."²²

Polygamy is an accepted custom among the Basotho people like the ones Mofokeng is writing about in this play. They see nothing wrong in it so that the words that come out of the mouths of Seobi and Morongoe, condemning this respected and time-honoured custom are words coming out of the mouth of the converted christian, Twentyman T. Mofokeng himself. It is the church speaking!

We now wish to take a glance at two books written by two authors from among the Zulus. The play, "The Girl Who Killed to Save" was written by H. I. E. Dhlomo and published by Lovedale Missionary Institution Press in 1935. And the novel "An African Tragedy" was written by R. R. R. Dhlomo and also published by Lovedale Press in the thirties. The two brothers have written these books in the English language and they had a combination of talents for journalism, music composition and authorship.

The play is based on a historical event which took place among the AmaXosa of the Cape Province in the year 1856. Umhlakaza a medicine man, and his daughter, Nongqause, tired of the oppression of the white invaders told the nation that they had communicated with the ancestors. The message of these great past brave warriors to the nation was that they had to destroy all their food and cattle and that on a certain day new herds would emerge from the ground, the country would be filled with quantities of grain and the ancestors would come out of the dead past armed to the teeth to drive the white men into the sea and rid the land of them for good. This great even was to take place on 27th February, 1857 and so for ten months there was a great destruction of food and animals. That day dawned as any other day and nothing happened. A terrible period of starvation set in and Umhlakaza and an estimated number of 20 000 men, women and children died, while about 15 000 cattle also had been destroyed, and the countryside was white with bones. Nongqause lived for years after this incident.

During this period of distress, many people sought refuge on the white farms and missions.

Dhlomo has written a beautiful play with lots of traditional music and dances in it, and he has given it an authentic African atmosphere. The author has also woven into this play the story of the missionaries and christianity. He also sees this great heroic story of the Amaxosa to rid themselves of white oppression as a story of salvation. Death and destruction helped to plant, cultivate and nurture the seeds of western civilization and christianity. It would make an interesting study to compare this play with Ebrahim N. Hussein's "Kinjeketile" which he has based on a similar kind of historical event in Tanzania, the Maji Maji War of liberation against the Germans by Tanzanians in 1906. Hussein sees Kinjeketile's Maji as a unifying factor

against the Germans and Dhlomo sees Nongqause's act as something that was essential to bring christianity to the Amaxosa. The play is full of examples of the tremendous impact that christianity has had on the author.

In scene III when the administrator, Brownlee, and Hugh, the christian, speak about Nongqause's appeal to the people they have this to say:

"HUGH: Nongqause, the source of this drama, may accomplish in a short time, by means of an expensive method, what in the ordinary course of events would have taken generations of christianity and education and administrative wisdom to do. The only thing to ask is whether or not the price she asked the people to pay is not too costly. The passing of time will, I believe, show that it wasn't too costly. If we believe in the doctrine of the survival of the fittest then we may excuse her by saying that those who may survive her purging and liberating test will be individuals physically and intellectually superior to the others. You have told us that some of the people already have shown their intellectual independence by being sceptical and refusing to kill their cattle. This reveals strong characters and keen minds not totally trammelled by tradition, or enslaved by superstition."²³

Scene V opens in an interesting and revealing manner. It shows very clearly the author's mental attitude to christianity and to the African. This scene happens many months after the event which Hugh describes as Nongqause's drama.

"(Many months after, Interior of a christian, but "raw" Xosa home; showing a room and a sick man lying in bed. Three women attending the patient talk in whispers and walk stealthily).

"LUMKA: Sh! He has fallen asleep. Be careful not to wake him up. Sleep soothes. In sleep the sick and

healthy, poor and rich are all alike, you know. Poor Daba! Wakefulness brings pain. (Covers him up with care).

"MRS. DABA: O, O, Yo-o-o. I'm afraid. No hope my sisters, no hope for him. He may die. Oh! he will die. Yo! Yo!

"NOMSA: Don't MaXaba, don't. You will wake him up. He needs rest. Be calm and trust in God. Today, you know, things are different. Before that great Nongqause Femine, death was a fearful black thing. But today we know of our Lord and Saviour of whom the good missionaries preach. Today death means birth. We need not fear for Daba who is a baptised believer. We should pray, believe, work and wait. MaXaba God loves you. (Gently touching the covered up, and bundled MaXaba).

"LUMKA: (To Nomsa) Before he slept, did you give him the medicine the missionary brought?

"NOMSA: Yes. I did. But the old man, his father, insisted upon him taking also the herbal mixture brought in by Mdhlamkomo, the herbalist. We give him both preparations alternatively."²⁴

All this christian talk takes place only a few months after the "great Nongqause Femine" among the then "raw" and superstitious ancestor worshippers. Yes, of course, christianity can perform miracles.

Now, for us, here follows the most devastating piece of evidence. The play is about to end and Daba is dying. There is present the three women, a missionary, a doctor and a Xosa, Tiyo Soga, a new African missionary from Scotland, and all this only a few months after "the great Nongqause Femine."

"DABA: (Suddenly sitting right up - unearthly expression on his face) MaXaba, come to me. (Wife goes to him). Look, MaXaba, Look! Listen! See the beautiful crowd singing? Ah! this is the host of those who perished

in the Great Femine. Do you see those people, surrounding, thanking and laughing with Nongqause? They tell her that hunger and destitution drove them into the paths of life, led them to the missionary and his divine message; put them into the hands of God. So there is triumph in death; there is finding in death; there is beauty in death.

Nongqause laughs as she tells them that she was really in earnest but was ignorant. They laugh and sing. They call her their liberator from Superstition and from the rule of Ignorance. These people are dressed, not in Karosses and blankets as we are but in Light - Light that makes it impossible to see their bodies or to distinguish their sex. (Bright light bathes his face, and he stretches out his trembling arms, and smiles). There she comes to us. I greet you Nongqause. Yes, I come. Yes, thank you, do lead me to the Master. O, Nongqause, the Liberator!

(Falls back dead)

Wife falls into the arms of Nomsa: Lumka closes Daba's eyes and puts the blankets over his chest (the three women sobbing softly. Missionary sits at organ and plays. Others stand rigid with heads hung down).

Soft music fills the place."²⁵

Now, we are not mocking when we say that the power and influence of christianity over Dhlomo was so great that it could create miracles in just a few months after such a great femine. It could liberate easily those bound by superstition and the rule of Ignorance. It created Scottish trained African missionaries, and even produced organs miraculously in "raw" Xosa homes. Of course, Marxists always tell us that opium creates hallucinations in the minds of those who use it.

"An African Tragedy" is a novel in English by the Zulu Writer, R. R. R. Dhlomo, brother of the playwright we have just examined. Dhlomo, we learn from the Publishers' Note, was educated at Ohlange and Amanzimtoti Institutions in Natal. He was a teacher and a mine-clerk in Johannesburg

and was also a keen journalist. The Dhlomo of "An African Tragedy" most probably experienced the same christian influences of his brother for he dedicates his novel,

"To all those who have not found God's all
in all this story - the humble effort of my
inspiration - is with my innermost and
fervent - feelings dedicated."²⁶

Dhlomo explains in the Preface of the book that the story is about the causes that undermine the peacefulness and blessedness of the newly-founded homes of young married people as he had observed then in Johannesburg. The novel tells the story of a young Zulu teacher, Robert Zulu, who left his job at Siam Village School to seek his fortunes in the big city of Johannesburg to raise enough Lobola or Mahadi money for the girl he wished to marry. In Johannesburg, he meets with serious personal problems because of bad company such as prostitutes, drunkards and knife-happy Malawian (Blantyre card players.) This young christian teacher soon forgets all the good ways of life of his people and gets mixed up in a murder case which forces him to abandon all and flee for his life to his native home in Natal. Back at home two friends plan to get rid of him because they complain that since his return from Johannesburg he plays havoc with their girls and monopolises them as if he were not married. So both Daniel Zibi and Jonathan Moya plan to "send him across the Jordan" which they eventually do by using a girl to be their bait. So very much like the Samson and Dellila story of the Bible.

There is no doubt that Dhlomo believes that the problems that worry him and which he is writing about in his novel can only be solved by christianity. To him christian morality is the only panacea to the social problems of young married couples and young people generally. If they wish to be victorious and successful in life then they must cultivate the still small voice in such a manner so that in their struggle with the evil forces of the devil

they can always hear it loud and clear as in the following instance in the story soon after Robert Zulu's arrival in Johannesburg.

"In his heart, Robert heard a soft, warning voice say:- 'Do not! You will be ruined! Think of your duty to God. Think of those you left behind you. Be a man!' Yet another voice loud and insistent this time rang in his heart: 'Pleasure is the essence of young people's lives in Johannesburg. Enjoy it, man! You will be loved and admired by lovely, dancing ladies of fashion, if you mix up with the gay throng and let your money and clothes advertise you!'"²⁷

Now Dhlomo was writing when Johannesburg was prosperous and there was a great rush by black and white to the gold mines. There was money, there were slums, there was segregation (today apartheid) and there were all the other problems that are found in any prosperous large city. To Dhlomo all these social problems could only be removed by people being obedient to this still small voice and rejecting the loud and insistent voice.

The author believes that political problems also can be solved by christianity. In the following extract he describes a scene and then immediately comments on it.

"At one end of the room an organ was being hammered by a drunken youth. Couples - literally fastened to each other - were swaying giddily wildly, to this barbaric time. In this mood young girls are deflowered in their youth. Yet we hear people wondering why there is so much licence among young people.

"Do these people who have the welfare of our nation at heart, ever visit these dark places and try to win back the straying youth?

"Carrying war only in clean and favourable surroundings; and preaching to the well-to-do and educated, is no remarkable and self-sacrificing warfare. War, if war it is, should be waged right into the enemies' lines where the source of all evil is.

For after all is said and done what is the use of trying to unite our peoples when their offspring wallow in the mud - so to speak? Do christians who profess to love God and seek to do his will ever visit such places - not as they do on Sunday afternoons when the people in the yards are already half mad with drinks and evil passions - but in the quiet during the week when these people are more amenable to reason?

Does it occur to their minds that these slaves of vice may be the sheep of whose welfare Christ spoke so eloquently and so feelingly in the 10th Chapter of St. John's Gospel: Verse 16?

Pardon my digression, my poor effort being to write the story of Robert Zulu as he handed it to me for publication - not to presume to teach or preach."²⁸

In fact though the author realises his digressions to teach and preach, nevertheless, he does so throughout the entire story. Robert Zulu finds himself in positions, all the time, which cause the angels in heaven to hold their breath in fear and dismay. Now and again his mind fixes on the serious problems that face black people, for example the pass problem, but he believes that such political problems will only be solved through christianity.

In conclusion we wish to refer to the last chapter in the book entitled "God and the Sinner". The two rivals of Robert Zulu at last get their girl friend to poison him and as he dies before his wife this is what happens.

"Those two young scoundrels had got him. For the first time in his life Robert Zulu felt the pressure of the Hand of God.

"Where is the Minister? He gasped. The Minister soon made his appearance. The air in the room became tense, and fraught with tragic issues ...

"My sins", Robert's voice broke the silence, feebly.

"My sins are past forgiveness."

"Hush, my son", said the Minister fervently.

"Not past forgiveness, 'The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sins.'"²⁹

We wish now to quote in full the last part of this chapter because it illustrates quite clearly how easy it was for Dhlomo to digress from his main story in order to teach and preach. The lines that follow are the closing ones of the chapter just after Robert Zulu's death.

The rain began to fall with a fury of a storm. The Minister stood calmly before the awe-inspired gathering and opened his Bible read. "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Whither shall I go from thy spirit or whether shall I fell from thy Presence. If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou are there; *Psalm 139 if I make my bed in Hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

'Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee!'

He closed his Bible.

Had the Boundless Love of Jesus revealed itself to Robert Zulu during that brief hour of visitation? Who knows?

'God moves in a mysterious way ...'³⁰

After all that we have said about the writings of these early writers they should prompt us more and more to find,

read and analyse their works so that we may know the forces that have influenced the development of writing among African authors. In fact we believe we should begin to search for not only the writings but also other works of art. For example we know a man, in the Transvaal, who has two of the early paintings of Gerald Sekoto who has been living in Paris since 1947 as a painter. He bought these paintings for ten shillings each before Gerald left South Africa, but when we spoke to him in 1963 he would not part with those paintings for thousands of shillings.

The two paintings "The Symphony of Labour" and "Starvation in the Midst of Plenty" are a political statement about the blackman's position in that country. It was in the political situation that Gerald Sekoto found his inspiration and creativity.

The powerful christian influences which worked on Mofolo, Ntsikana, Mofokeng, Sekese and the Dhlomo brothers, and many others of that time whom we have not mentioned, had no effect on Sekoto. When he came onto the scene the political situation was hot just after the Second World War. Africa was engaged in the violent struggle of breaking the shackles of oppression and imperialism. And, therefore, christianity had no fascination for him. He wanted freedom.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Sekese, A. M., Pitso Ea Linonyana, Morija Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1955, page 7
- ² Ibid. page 8
- ³ Ibid. pages 15, 16
- ⁴ Ibid. page 16
- ⁵ Du Plessis, J., A History of Christian Missions in South Africa, Longmans, 1911, Preface pages VII and VIII
- ⁶ Shepherd, Robert H. W., The Story of a Century, Lovedale, South Africa, 1841-1941, page 19
- ⁷ Umbedesho Namculo Ama-Wesile, London, 1953
pages 19, 20
- ⁸ Shepherd, Robert H. W., The Story of a Century, 1841-1941, Lovedale, South Africa, page 20
- ⁹ Ibid. page 400
- ¹⁰ Sekese, A. M., Pitso Ea Linonyana, Morija Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1955, pages 17, 18
- ¹¹ Ibid. page 18

¹²Mofolo, Thomas, Chaka the Zulu, London 1949

Preface

¹³Ibid. page 21

¹⁴Ibid. pages 121, 122

¹⁵Mofokeng, Twentyman, T., Sek'ona Sa Joala,

Moriya Sesuto Book Depot, Morija 1939,

page 6

¹⁶Ibid. page 6

¹⁷Ibid. pages 6, 7

¹⁸Ibid. page 9

¹⁹Ibid. page 13

²⁰Ibid. Page 39

²¹Ibid. Page 41

²²Ibid. pages 42, 43

²³Dhlomo, H. I. E., The Girl Who Killed to Save
(Nongqause the Liberator) Lovedale, pages 23, 24

²⁴Ibid. pages 36, 37

²⁵Ibid. pages 40, 41

FOOTNOTES (Continued)

²⁶Dhlomo, R. R. R., An African Tragedy, (A novel
in English by a Zulu Writer) Lovedale

²⁷Ibid. pages 3, 4

²⁸Ibid. pages 6, 7

²⁹Ibid. pages 37, 38

³⁰Ibid. pages 39, 40