

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF MISSIONARY WIVES
IN THE PLANTING OF THE CHURCH IN BOTSWANA
IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES**

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Abstract

This article highlights the contributions to mission work by the wives of the missionaries working in Botswana in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While these women made a substantial contribution to the planting of the church among the Batswana, their role and effort has not been adequately recognised and appreciated. The observation is made, however, that, like the missionaries, they failed to contextualise Christianity, presenting it from a Western point of view and expecting the Batswana to abandon their past in order to become Christians. Nevertheless, their example inspired Tswana women to participate in the public life of their communities.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present article discusses and examines the role played by missionary wives in the planting and growth of Christianity among the Batswana in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although their understanding of Christianity was restricted to the context of their own culture, their contribution to missionary work was outstanding. In mitigation of what may be perceived as a criticism, however, it must be noted that the attitude of the missionary wives to Tswana culture, like that of the missionaries, varied from person to person and over time and space.

The missionary wives became models for the Tswana women, who began doing some interesting work in the changing cultural context in which they found themselves. In many ways they led the way for Batswana women, inspiring them by their Christian zeal to respond to cultural problems and questions of the past and to adopt more prominent roles in their communities.

When the London Missionary Society (LMS) was established in September 1795, its founders, subscribing to the prevailing notions about gender, never considered that women might play an outstanding role in mission work. There was in fact a public outcry against the horrible dangers that presumably awaited women as “weak vessels” in “dark heathen lands”. On addressing the missionaries gathered for the LMS centenary in September 1895, Edwin Lloyd cautioned his audience as follows:

Think of the perils to your missionaries! Think of perils from wild
beasts; of perils from fever, dysentery, and other African diseases; of

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perils from wild and savage tribes among whom we go; and these perils are often present. But I now refer not to these, but to far greater and more urgent perils to the spiritual life of your missionaries, surrounded as they are by a degraded people bound by the potent chains of superstition and evil customs, and innumerable inducements to all that is degrading, selfish, and vile.ⁱ

When women were eventually allowed to accompany their missionary husbands, they were neither given a proper official role to play, such as evangelising, educating or helping women in the mission field, nor recognised as valuable assets to the people. They were expected to confine themselves to the home, there to devote themselves to their families and their traditional household responsibilities. They were to fulfil no more than a supporting role, ensuring that their missionary husbands lived exemplary lives. In Lloyd's own words:

The family life of the mission houses has, undoubtedly, a splendid influence upon our people. The wives of your missionaries seek to elevate and refine the women and girls by holding services for them, and teaching them to sew, knit and do many useful things.ⁱⁱ

The thought that missionary wives could be involved in the evangelisation of indigenous women and men, in the sense of preaching to them or teaching them the word of God, was never entertained: their sphere of influence was seen to extend no further than the household, with their husbands assuming the weighty responsibility of preaching.

2 THE WORK OF MISSIONARY WIVES

Although missionary wives receive barely a mention in missionary literature and journals, they did as much useful work as their husbands, as the information in this section will illustrate. They taught young children to read and write, and introduced adult women to the basic skills of sewing, baking, hygiene and nursing. As a result, one of the LMS agents, commenting on vocational education, recommended that missionary wives should teach Tswana girls useful home economics skills such as dressmaking and cooking (Chirenje 1977:181). The missionary wives were quick to make friends with royal women, thus facilitating their husbands' interactions with the traditional kings or *dikgosi*, which contributed enormously to the success of the missionaries' mission work. Most of the missionary wives very soon learnt the local language, Setswana, and spoke it fluently because they spent most of their time with Tswana women, whom they greatly admired for many reasons. Some subsequently assisted in the translation of the Bible into Setswana, as well as in the production of other Setswana learning materials. Nevertheless, their contribution was never recorded in the annals of missionary history, and they were mentioned as no more than an afterthought. Their involvement in many useful activities such as teaching, sewing and baking in their houses and also nursing the sick in the village, a task that male missionaries found difficult, was never recognised as essential missionary work - yet these activities attracted many people to the church (Tlou & Campbell 1984:141). Notable missionary wives include Mary Moffat, Mary Livingstone and Elizabeth Lees Price. The contribution of these

and other women will be critically examined in this article, and presented as vital mission work that greatly promoted the planting of the church among the Batswana of Botswana (then known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate).

3 MARY MOFFAT

The life of Mary Moffat offers us one of the earliest examples of the contribution to the mission field made by missionary wives. Born in 1795 in Dukinfield, near Manchester, Mary met Robert Moffat in 1816 when he was an apprentice gardener at her father's nursery (Northcott 1961:23-33). Consumed by a longing to become missionaries, Mary and Robert wished to marry and then work together among the "heathens", a term commonly used at the time to refer to people not yet converted to Christianity. Mary's parents, fearing the dangers that might befall their daughter, opposed the marriage (Northcott 1961:24). Moffat therefore resolved to sail to Africa on his own as an agent of the LMS in 1816. Her parents' determination not to allow Mary to go abroad did not thwart her hopes, however. Although sometimes tempted to give up the idea of marrying Moffat, she remained faithful both to him and to her desire to become a missionary. Her parents relented two years later, an event that she related as follows in a letter to Robert Moffat's parents:

I have, through the tender mercy of God, obtained the permission of my dear parents to proceed ... To join your dear son in his arduous work ... My father had persisted in saying that I should never have his consent, my dear mother has uniformly assented that it would break her heart... notwithstanding all this they both yesterday calmly resigned me into the hands of the Lord, declaring they durst no longer withhold me (Northcott 1961:59).

Mary immediately sailed to Cape Town, where she and Robert were married on 27 December 1819 at St George's Church, with John Philip, the then Superintendent of the LMS in South Africa, giving away the bride. Immediately after their marriage she wrote: "My cup of happiness seems almost full; here I have found him all worn out with anxiety, and his very look makes my heart ache" (Northcott 1961:61). Together they started work, with Mary a dutiful Victorian wife and Robert a typical domineering Victorian husband. The Moffats' house at Kudumane became Mary's own creation, where she made a home and raised her family. She was strong, zealous, determined, and a supportive wife and mother. She gave her heart to Africa, and there she remained for almost fifty years. Despite the cultural differences, she quickly adjusted to life among the Batswana, using a traditional brick oven to bake bread, enjoying the thick sour milk that formed part of the local diet, and smoothing her floors with cow dung (Northcott 1961:28-83).

Although the Directors of the LMS did not officially recognise Mary Moffat as a missionary in her own right, she made an invaluable contribution to the establishment of the Kudumane mission. In 1829, for instance, she began sewing classes for women and mothers, who had a great desire to learn.ⁱⁱⁱ As early as 1824, she had a little house where she did her sewing and taught a few girls the domestic arts she had learnt in Dukinfield. In this way, she was instrumental in making Kudumane famous as an outpost of Christian civilisation

(Northcott 1961:110-111). The lessons she gave led to a rapid increase in reading and writing abilities, as well as Church growth, although sewing and needlework remained the most popular activities, with home-made clothes, such as leather trousers and jackets, being produced (Northcott 1961:111-116). Regarding Mary Moffat's contribution to the development of Kudumane station, Northcott (1961:128) writes:

To clothe natives, for their "great comfort and improvement", was always Mary's aim. Nakedness, particularly in the native women, was a spectacle to be covered up with suitable lengths of Manchester, of which the first box was brought up from Cape Town in 1831. Boxes came regularly after that, to supply the sewing school at Kuruman led by the busy needles of the missionaries' wives.

Like her husband, she made war, tumult, discord and "uncivilisation" common topics of correspondence, generally describing the life of the Africans in negative terms. Typically Victorian in outlook, she despised all she saw taking place around her. However, her attitude and that of other missionary wives cannot be characterised purely as Victorian or European, as it was also strongly influenced by the evangelical zeal of the time. The missionary wives shared the belief that human nature was basically sinful and that it could be changed by Jesus Christ; in this context they saw themselves as agents of change, no matter how long the process took. The Moffatts tended to uphold European culture and literary education as the criteria or pre-requisites for church membership, and in this context Mary's group of thirty sewing girls was treasured and seen as the hallmark of civilisation at Kudumane. Robert Moffat wrote as follows in this regard:

I assure you, they make them [clothes] look quite spruce on the Sabbath days. All these things help and help wonderfully too, till by degrees a wonderful transformation has been accomplished. Tho' our great work is to evangelise yet we can never feel satisfied without seeing corresponding progress in civilization (Northcott 1961:185).

Moreover, the 1838 Kudumane report^{iv} stated that since over fifty women and girls regularly attended the sewing classes, progress was satisfactory. School clothes were being locally produced to replace indigenous dress, which was seen as incompatible with Christianity.^v The women of the Bathlaping were greatly motivated by this, as the traditional ideal of the economy was to be self-reliant. They purchased and treated animal skins, making them almost as soft as cloth, and applied the skills acquired during Mary's sewing classes to make them into jackets, trousers and other garments. Robert Moffat wrote as follows in this regard:

A man might be seen in a jacket with but one sleeve, because the other was not finished, or he lacked material to complete it. Another in a leathern or duffed jacket, with the sleeves of different colours, or of fine printed cottons (Moffat 1842:506).

The women also successfully manufactured candles and soaps from tallow, and made clothes from local raw materials.

Mary Moffat contributed not only to the sewing industry and education, but also to translation work, and was at times the “carrier-in-chief” of supplies from the colony (Northcott 1961:245). Twice in 1833 and on several occasions between 1835 and 1836 she made long journeys alone to the Cape to see her children, who were at school there, and on her return brought with her supplies of paper and large type, furnished by the LMS directors in London. She also returned with lesson materials for the infant schools at Kudumane, Griquatown and its outstations and other nurseries of education. She ventured southwards to Grahamstown with an African driver for the same reasons (Northcott 1961:128, 129, 570).

In addition to supporting her husband in mission work, Mary Moffat was also dedicated to her home and children. On one occasion, while Robert was away paying a visit to Makaba, the king of the Bangwaketse, Mary was left alone with her daughters Mary and Ann, at a time when the area was being ravaged by the Mfecane wars. Mary also made their home a hospitable place of call, especially for European visitors, as Kudumane was at one time the most remote station along the route linking the colony to the interior.

Mary died at the Moffats’ Brixton home on 10 January 1871, her heart still deeply attached to Africa (Northcott 1961:311, 326). Her name will always be associated with Africa and African women of the time. She deserves to be presented to African women of today as a great missionary whose commitment to missionary work spanned more than 50 years. African women in general – and Tswana women in particular – should celebrate her contribution and work.

4 MARY LIVINGSTONE

Another prominent missionary wife, who for many years served Africans in general and the Batswana in particular, was Mary Livingstone. Born in 1821, the first child of Mary and Robert Moffat, she was married to David Livingstone, another famous LMS missionary, who worked among the Bakwena of Botswana for eleven years, from 22 January 1845 to about 1857 (Schapera 1961:59). Born and having grown up among the Batswana, Mary was fluent in Setswana, as a result of which she made a valuable contribution in teaching the women and children of the Bakwena reading and writing. Like most missionaries of the time, she used the Bible as the main reading text. She first became involved in educating the Batswana at Kudumane before she was married. When she moved with her husband to stay among the Bakgatla at Mabotsa in 1845, she became involved in establishing a school that taught children and women the basic skills of reading and writing (Schapera 1961:81). She worked with Paul, a deacon of the church at Kudumane, in teaching and spreading knowledge of the gospel among the women, children and men of the Bakgatla. In terms of the indigenous education system, however, men did not take instruction from women. As they rejected the idea of being taught by a woman, and the Tswana men failed to take Mary’s work seriously.

In about 1846 Livingstone reported that:

Mrs Livingstone has recently commenced an infant and sewing school, but as it still possesses the attraction of novelty we cannot form an opinion as to the ultimate success of the measure. Paul and David continue to render valuable assistance in all our operations ... The infant school under the care of Mrs L. afforded us much encouragement. The attendance during the past year may be stated as from 60 to 80. The failure of the native crops has lately had considerable effect on the regularity of their attendance, for the children have been obliged to go great distances in search of locusts and roots on which to subsist. Mrs L. must also soon discontinue it for a season, but it will be resumed after her confinement (Schapera 1961:113, 121).

Mary's success in establishing and running the infant and sewing school mentioned above was attributable to the fact that she communicated effectively with the local children and their mothers in their own language. The use of Setswana as the medium of instruction continued to attract more and more children and women to her school. Setswana was also seen as the carrier of the people's culture and aspirations.

Mary's commitment and contribution to the planting of Christianity is evident in her unwavering support of her husband. She and the children accompanied him to the malaria-infested north west of Botswana. The extent of the harshness and danger that they faced is revealed by the fact that in 1850, Mary, David and their three children struggled back from their second visit to Lake Ngami "sick and out of supplies" (Northcott 1961:187). Mary Moffat was greatly concerned about the welfare of the children. In 1851, she wrote to David Livingstone protesting against the riskiness of his journey, particularly in exposing a pregnant woman and young children to the danger of malaria (Northcott 1961:216; Schapera 1960:71). She appealed to him as follows:

Before you left the Kuruman, I did all I dared to do to broach the subject of your intended journey, and thus bring on a candid discussion, more especially with regard to Mary accompanying you with those dear children. But seeing how averse both you and Father were to speak about it and the hope that you would never be guilty of such temerity (after the dangers they escaped last year) I, too timid, shrunk from what I ought to have had courage to do. Mary had told me all along that should she be pregnant, you would not take her, but let her come out here after you were fairly off ... But to my dismay, I now get a letter – in which she writes "I must again wend my weary way to the far Interior, perhaps to be confined in the field". Oh Livingstone what do you mean – was it not enough that you lost one lovely babe, and scarcely saved the others, while the mother came home threatened with paralysis? And still you again expose her and them on an exploring expedition? The world still condemns the cruelty of the thing ... A pregnant woman with three little children (Northcott 1961:189).

The family suffered terribly during these journeys as a result of shortages of supplies, of water in particular. The children would cry from thirst, and it was up to Mary to try to ease their discomfort (Schapera 1960:13). She nevertheless viewed it as her duty to support her husband in what he considered a divine

appointment to bring Christianity to those far northern regions. In 1854, Mary Livingstone was again to pack her boxes at Kudumane to follow Livingstone to the Zambezi. As before, Mary Moffat was very critical of him (Northcott 1961:217). On 27 April 1862 Mary Livingstone died, far from her children and parents, at Shupanga on the Zambezi. Her death affected the Moffats greatly, and revived many of their misgivings about their son-in-law and the way he had endangered the life of their daughter and grandchildren. However, throughout her life she remained committed to and supportive of her husband's efforts to open central Africa to Christianity, commerce and "civilisation", and in this her contribution to Africa should not be overlooked or forgotten.

The relationship between Mary Livingstone and the women of the Bakwena was a cordial one. After giving birth to her first child, Robert, she was generally known among the Batswana as "Mma-Robert", "Mother of Robert" (Schapera 1960:141). This was in accordance with the Tswana custom of showing respect to a mother (Livingstone 1857:126), and is indicative of the integral part she played in the life of the community.

5 ELIZABETH LEES PRICE

Mrs Elizabeth Lees Price a further notable example of a missionary wife who made a substantial contribution to mission work, and had interesting ideas of her own. She was instrumental in fostering literacy among the Batswana, and worked with Tswana women in various ways.

Like Mary Livingstone, Elizabeth Price was a daughter of Mary and Robert Moffat of the Kudumane station. She was born on 16 March 1839, and lived a missionary life for most of her years. In October 1861, she married Roger Price, the sole adult European survivor of the Bakololo tragedy (Mackenzie 1871:156-248). Roger Price, who, together with John Mackenzie and John Moffat, her brother, planned to re-establish the Bakololo Mission. Following the failure of this endeavour, Price was eventually appointed to the Ndebele Mission, where he was denied entry by Mzilikazi. He therefore, remained at Shoshong from 1862 to 1866,^{vi} and then transferred to the Bakwena of Sechele in 1866, where he remained until 1875. Apart from four years spent in England, from 1875 to 1879, Elizabeth spent her entire missionary life in Southern Africa.

5.1 Missionary history and work

Elizabeth Price was an intelligent and interesting woman. She wrote interesting letters, and made long and detailed journal entries. While her children were asleep, she would write by candlelight to her friends, to her sister Jane, and to her older children once they had left for Britain (Long 1956:24). Elizabeth's journals, edited by Una Long for publication as *The journals of Elizabeth Lees Price written in Bechuanaland, Southern Africa, 1854-1883* (1956), provide an insight into the enormous contribution she and other missionary wives like her made in Africa in general, and Botswana in particular.

5.2 Christianity, civilisation, education and medicine

Despite Elizabeth's accuracy in recording events and the vividness of her journals, like the missionaries she wrote from a European point of view, contrasting two very different ways of life: her own European lifestyle and worldview, and that of the Africans. The earliest journals and letters, in particular, seem to have been written with a European audience in mind, stressing the remoteness from civilisation of Shoshong, the Prices' first missionary station among the Bangwato. She describes the difficulties she and her husband experienced as they struggled to begin their new married life in that remote environment, where hyenas prowled outside at night, and where snakes and other reptiles, huge spiders and scorpions, and various forms of insect life lurked in every corner of the house (Long 1956:16-24).

Elizabeth presented herself as a devoted mother, upholding the accepted European cultural standards of womanhood. As the wife of a missionary, she did her best to paint a rosy picture of the life of a missionary family and to exemplify Christian living in an environment in which there were very few white people (Long 1956:1). For a number of the Prices' early years in Shoshong, she and Mrs Mackenzie, another missionary wife, were the only white women among the African community. At another time, she was the only white woman. She felt strongly that a missionary, holding a special place in a "tribal" society, had the responsibility to be exemplary in all dealings with the local families. However, it was not this that inspired Sekgoma to invite the missionaries into the area; it was rather their importance in military terms, and their potential use as a shield against his notorious Ndebele and Boer enemies (Mackenzie 1871:268).^{vii} Elizabeth, as daughter of the highly revered and respected missionary Robert Moffat, represented this factor in the eyes of most of the Bangwato. Moreover, the presence of resident missionaries was associated with trading and such items as guns and ammunition.

Elizabeth Price's substantial contribution to the Bangwato mission cannot be over-emphasised, as the mission work done there owes its success just as much to her as to her husband. She at times wrote about the people with great honesty and admiration, but her zeal for the spread of Christianity and "civilisation" nevertheless did not take into account differences between the culture of the Bangwato and her own.

One of her most important contributions was in the area of education. She laid a firm educational foundation not only among the Bangwato, but also among the Bakwena community, to which Roger Price was transferred in 1866. By 1867 Elizabeth, assisted by her husband and Miss Christian Wallace, another LMS woman missionary working among the Bakwena, was teaching sizeable classes at Molepolole (Long 1965:24). Elizabeth continued to seek ways of developing education among the Bakwena for almost 20 years. Her curriculum consisted of reading, writing, sewing, baking and some arithmetic. Her involvement in education in fact began long before her marriage; her parents, influenced by their missionary environment, expected her to do missionary-related work aimed at improving the welfare of Africans. As soon as the Prices had settled at Shoshong, in May 1862, Elizabeth established a school where girls of all ages were taught reading, writing, scripture lessons and domestic science (which included cooking, washing, and household management (Long

1956:9-10). Roger Price, in a letter to the directors of the LMS in London, acknowledged his wife's contribution in developing literacy among the Bangwato, writing: "The congregations on Sabbath days generally are pretty good, but there are not converts and I am persevering from morning to evening with my hands full, and I am assisted by my wife at the school."^{viii}

Elizabeth was indeed making a significant contribution in educating the Batswana, especially those of the royal family. She hoped that they would in turn influence their people to seek missionary education and turn to Christianity (the colonial administration made no similar efforts to educate the Batswana). Among her pupils were *Kgosi* Sekgoma's eldest sons, Khama and his younger brother Kgamane, who benefited greatly from her efforts. She subsequently wrote as follows concerning the brothers:

Khamane ... his perseverance is wonderful and to see him copy exercises or sums repeating them aloud with renewed emphasis, and with all kinds of gestures what he cannot understand ... He is surpassed by two other scholars, but he is decidedly talented and shrewd, curious and quick in observing and knowing different characters ... Khamane is again very different. He lacks application by both being quick and relating to others in school ... but has a good deal of decision of character combined with an easy, gentle disposition which causes him to be universally loved (Long 1956:9-10).

Unlike other missionary wives, who were expected to teach women only, Elizabeth was able to teach both boys and girls and women in her classes. She seems to have enjoyed teaching her classes, and her pupils found her classes very enjoyable. Her classes were so popular that there were usually shortages of learning materials and sitting space (Long 1956:156).

Although Elizabeth's curriculum confined women to the home and focused on domestic duties, it nevertheless created a new environment for the betterment of women. In her role as educator, Elizabeth transcended the cultural confines of what was then regarded as the feminine role. To the Bangwato, a teacher was synonymous with a *ngaka* (healer), rain-maker, religious priest or herbalist. Elizabeth was therefore seen as more than just a preacher and an educator, and to step far beyond the culturally established women's role. This new phenomenon generated confidence among the women of the Bangwato, who now eagerly aspired to acquire the same skills. Elizabeth herself proudly considered education a symbol of Christian civilisation and European cultural superiority, into which the Bangwato had to be incorporated. The school was seen as the machinery that prepared a way for Christianity. The response of the Bangwato to education and "civilisation" thus determined whether in the missionaries' eyes they were good or bad. When Sechele, for instance, disagreed with the missionaries on such matters, he was described as an "odious character", while Sekgoma, who adamantly refused to accept Christianity, was described as a "wicked treacherous old King". Sekgoma's "selfishness" was seen as representing "heathenism". Of Sekgoma, Elizabeth wrote that he:

would hang about determined to get at least a cup of coffee or something of the kind and Khamane was a little like him in it. It was very disagreeable to have to treat Sekhomi with some degree of courtesy and attention, knowing that he could torment and worry us in small ways if we did not, and he was such a despicable and dirty old creature and his one eye made him look worse, although he could not help that (Long 1956:77).

In contrast to Sekgoma, Khama and Kgamane, who had responded favourably to both Elizabeth's lessons and Christianity, were seen as models of African Christianity: "Their reverence and respect for this offensive old gentleman is striking and whenever they feel it right to obey, they do so with promptitude. On the other hand, they unwaveringly resisted him and rejected his authority whenever it interfered with their duty as Christians."

I was very much struck and delighted with an intense example of this the other day. We were just engaging in family prayers, Khamane happening to be with us – when the old chief presented himself at the door of our hut. He looked, in one evil temper, scowled upon his son then, seeing we took no notice beyond motioning him to a seat, he burst the door open and answered "I shall stand!" & there he stood in the doorway, screening nearly every ray of light from Roger as he read, his own dirty heathen naked self, & with a countenance perfectly satanic. His son sat clothed like a Christian and a gentleman, & when the reading was over he knelt reverently and boldly before His God and in the presence of his heathen father. When we arose and commenced coffee drinking, Khamane stepped forward eagerly and handed his father's cup back and forwards with a reverence and awe which contrasted strongly with the perfect indifference with which he had only a few moments before regarded him. I felt a thrill of delight and admiration run thro' me at the sight (Long 1956:143-144).

Sekgoma was viewed in such a negative light because his unfavourable response was seen not only as an obstacle to missionary work, but also as a hindrance to European traders such as Captain Glyn. By contrast, whenever Sechele adopted practices and measures that promoted literary education and other forms of European culture, he was described as "a fine man at heart and a beloved of his people" (Long 1956:19,145). Elizabeth wrote as follows of Sechele's compound:

I was amazed at the extreme cleanliness of everything around me - the floor almost polished, so finely smeared, and at each entrance to the house was a small square of pebbles inlaid, which gave a very tasteful appearance (and suggested a plan for my house when I get it – my real house I mean) ... there was one camp table covered with a prepared buck-skin for ornament. A few European and native chairs stand by and a wee brass which were the two cups and saucers just used by the king and queen (Long 1956:111).

The acquisition of two European easy chairs, a pillow, a toilet, Sechele's wife's pair of shoes and stockings and other European clothing such as the crinoline, "which has reached this part of the world" (Long 1956:111), were seen as evidence of "civilisation". Elizabeth remarked, however, on the unusual employment of these European materials. Sechele, for instance, is said to have usually dressed "in the hottest garments which could be found" when "the day was by no means cold" (Long 1956:111). The main problems occurred whenever Sechele combined his own Kwena customs with Christianity, upon which, in European eyes, he suddenly turned into an "uncivilised heathen". In this regard, Elizabeth wrote:

I cannot understand the mixture in Sechele. He reads the Bible thread-bare so as some of the holiest Christians do not read it, yet he is one of the vilest of characters in reality and (there is) no more of vital Christianity in him than in Sekhomi (sic) the naked savage King of the Bamanguato, who knows a little more of the white people and their habits etc than of their guns, ammunition and brandy. Ma Sechele is Christian-like, weak and lowly and innocent, but she is under (a) horrid influence (Long 1956:111).

What baffled Elizabeth most was Sechele's mode of praying. Influenced by the Tswana conception of prayer, which saw the secular and the religious as inseparable, Sechele believed that prayer would affect every aspect of life. Elizabeth provided the following illustration:

Next morning, Roger went again and found the family at morning prayer. I will give you an idea of Sechele's mode of praying. He rattles on in prayer as if chatting to some comrade (...?) things or anything which comes first, more as if in self exaltation that civilisation had reached him and his people that he himself had been so highly blessed that he read etc, etc and that moreover, he had been helped with abundance of everything "with a thousand cattle, with a hundred sheep and perhaps ten or so goats" and more than this he said which I cannot and hardly care to remember so vile, so mocking it seemed and so utterly ludicrous to those who know him to be so utterly devoid of sincerity and true religion. Sechele is, in reality, poorer in cattle than any great chief in Africa, because he has parted with an immense number for the sake of European goods and valuables which he has in abundance mostly guns, ammunition and apparel also horses and wagons (Long 1956:112).

The notion generally held in Europe at the time that women were incapable coloured Elizabeth's perception of herself. As a young wife and mother, she had grave misgivings about herself as a missionary wife. In her earliest years, she struggled with this culturally imposed sense of the inferiority of women, to the extent that she grew to be "always timid", "always apprehensive", "always inclined to introspection", and "always afraid of failure" (Long 1956:2). She nevertheless had remarkable stamina, which allowed her to withstand the challenge of mission and family life. However, her success in constructing her own positive image of womanhood meant that she still viewed Tswana culture as inferior. Her skin colour and cultural background led her to look down upon

Tswana ways of life. Her nursemaids were thoroughly drilled and introduced to European methods of housekeeping, which included sweeping, washing and cooking. She also described Tswana women as extremely rude, always noisy and “jabbering at the tops of their voices”. Ope and Bantshang, two of King Sechele’s daughters, who frequently visited her on a friendly basis, as well as Gobitsamang, one of her students and subsequently wife to Khama, were viewed in a similar light. Although these were women of elevated status among their own people, Elizabeth frequently complained about the bad influence exercised by their primitive environment on their thoughts and character. Despite their warm and heartfelt regard for Elizabeth, their friendship was far from mutual companionship, and because of her attitude they remained strangers to one another at heart. This may have been because Elizabeth had serious misgivings about their Christian genuineness. She wrote saying:

What is all this? Is it from an idea of some great temporal benefit connected with the (spelling) sheets? or because it is all the fashion at court or how many are there, truly hungering and thirsting for these living waters? (Long 1956:24).

Elizabeth nevertheless made important observations about the cultural conditions of the Tswana women, for instance, writing:

The women here are perfect slaves to their husbands and in ploughing or picking time they have to work for their bread with the sweat of their brow while their husbands recline lazily at home in the shade making karosses or sleeping (Long 1956:146).

Although Elizabeth’s educational curriculum unconsciously confined women to household duties, she challenged men to help their wives with agricultural work, such as ploughing, cultivation and harvesting. However, she failed to deal with the potential role of women in political matters, and to suggest ways in which they could make a contribution in public affairs or in the *kgotla* decision-making processes. A more critical analysis of the socio-political position of women, whose oppression she recognised, would have made a vital contribution to the history of Tswana women. However, a factor to consider is that Elizabeth owed her influential position to that of her husband, and that had she been alone, she might not have been as successful.

An area of Ngwato life that Elizabeth viewed as oppressive to the women was the *bojale*, or initiation school for girls. She was particularly opposed to the ritual part of the ceremony, following their participation in which some of her school girls returned to her classes bearing terrible cuts on their bodies. She reported with horror that they came back with “their backs brutally thrashed and scarred ... the girls are ... thrashed, to be made women” (Long 1956:130). Describing these *bojale* processions and ceremonies, which signalled the beginning of womanhood, as disgusting, undignified and horrifying, she tried to prevent her students and maids from attending them or participating (Long 1956:137-138). She moreover rejected the practice of initiation because, in her opinion, it had a bad influence on the girls, and hindered Christian progress and “civilisation”. She may well have had a point, as the ritual entailed suffering and accepting physical and emotional abuse, which is completely at odds with Christian ethics

and the Christian emphasis on love. However, the similarities between the *bojale* educational programmes and Elizabeth's own domestic science classes cannot be overlooked, as both in essence trained and equipped girls for womanhood. Consciously or unconsciously, the missionary education that Elizabeth provided also became a process through which women were confined to the cultural mould of familial duties. This kept women from participating in political activities or from officiating at religious activities, which were seen as a male preserve and as conferring superiority, power and elevated social status on men. In Elizabeth's curriculum literacy was a priority because, while she wanted to produce housekeepers skilled in domestic science, it was essential that they read the Word of God for themselves. Thus, while Elizabeth's educational efforts were generally conceived within a European context, they also reinforced the Tswana cultural conception of the position of women. They nevertheless equipped women with essential skills, from which a new image of women was born.

Elizabeth is also acknowledged for her significant contribution in the realm of medical practice. In an effort to meet the needs of the sick, she advocated the establishment of a medical missionary organisation.^{ix} To provide for the immediate medical needs of the people, the Prices turned their spare wagon into sick quarters, since there was no building for that purpose. Elizabeth argued that medical services provided valuable opportunities to evangelise the general populace. Livingstone and Mackenzie had previously administered European medicine to their patients. Livingstone himself had made efforts to cooperate with indigenous *dingaka* (healers) in discovering certain remedies. While most of the LMS missionaries saw European medical practice as the handmaid of Christianity, this combination also reinforced people's beliefs and values. Elizabeth wrote:

Such little attention from the womankind of our party, and the skill of English surgery as exhibited in such a beneficial way by your father upon them, is not unlikely to make a good impression upon their heathen minds ... and thus at last can be the means of their conversions (Long 1956:19).

Like education, European medical practice was expected "to make a good impression upon their heathen minds". European medicine was associated with Christianity. The Batswana, however, had no difficulties in relating the benefits of medical practice to religion. In their worldview, neither religion nor medical practice could stand alone. What the people objected to was the tendency of the missionaries to see Christianity and European culture as a single package, to be accepted as a whole. Nevertheless, their worldview taught them that medical dynamism, meaning and power resulted from the Divine.

In spite of her pre-conceived interpretations of the responses of the Batswana to Christianity and their day-to-day experiences, Elizabeth's views were, at times, very radical and transcended the restrictions of European cultural expectations and views about women. Her parents, for instance, often disapproved of her unorthodox views. In her introductory remarks to Elizabeth's journals, Long recounts that her independent views were regarded as "heretical" by the Anglican parsons in Cape Town.

Implicit in Elizabeth's analysis of the position of Tswana women, sincere though it was, was a belief in the superiority of Western culture, and in comparing the status of Tswana and Western women, she failed to acknowledge that the two were living in different cultural environments.

6 MRS GOOD, MRS LEWIS, MRS SHAW AND OTHERS

As already mentioned, it was never envisaged that missionary wives would make a meaningful contribution to public life. In this regard Long (1956:2) rightly observes that the success of missionary work (and education) nevertheless rested as much on the missionary's wife as it did on the missionary himself – "a fact not always sufficiently appreciated outside (and inside) missionary circles".

Mrs Good, Mrs Lewis and Mrs Shaw worked closely with their husbands, Reverend James Good, Reverend Haydon Lewis and Reverend J. Shaw respectively. These missionaries worked among the Bangwaketse of Kanye, the southernmost LMS station, at different times from the 1900s to the late 1950s. The Batswana addressed them affectionately as Mma-Good, Mma-Lewis and Mma-Shaw to show respect and acknowledge that they were married to the above-mentioned missionaries.

6.1 Major contributions

The major contribution made by these three women lay in the introduction of health care and education among the Bangwaketse. This was crucial in light of the reluctance of the British government to develop education and health care in the early 1900s (Selelo-Kupe 1993:xxi). With her husband, Mrs Good served the Bangwaketse for thirty years, and when the Goods left Kanye in 1921, they had laid a firm foundation of development favouring the welfare of women. Sadly, the contribution made by Mrs Good in the areas of medical care and education has been a neglected topic in the history of Botswana.

6.1.1 Medical care

In 1945, the LMS expressed its intentions to establish a maternity centre for the women at Kanye, offering antenatal and postnatal care, and child welfare. In 1948, the Kanye Medical Mission commenced the training of probationer nurses. A dispensary had also been opened in Kanye by Mrs Lewis many years previously, and continued by Mrs Good.^x The activities of the health centre were subsequently continued by Mrs Shaw, who was also a trained nurse. The workload was daunting: in 1944, over 3 747 patients were treated and over 1 101 vaccinations carried out during the vaccination campaign. The three women at different times contributed enormously to the development of the instrument that made all these activities a success. The dispensary, which was attended by the Bangwaketse in large numbers, was, for instance, not visited regularly by a medical doctor.

The LMS, and indeed most missionaries, considered prayer at a time of sickness to be more beneficial than medical treatment. They believed that spreading Christianity through the missionaries and setting up schools to teach

people to read and write in order to enhance their knowledge of the Bible was more important than ensuring their physical health. Consequently, many missionaries believed that faith and prayer were sufficient to ensure health and healing, and the LMS provided no funds for medical services, feeling that medical activities had no part to play in missionary work (Seaver 1957:62). Thus, whereas the missionaries had focused on preaching the gospel and teaching people to read and write, their wives introduced a new philosophy of evangelism in which the health of the soul was closely linked with the health of the body. They thus in effect combined preaching with a medical programme (Selelo-Kupe 1993:18).

The prevailing views on the matter made the challenges of providing medical care even more difficult for these women.^{xi} Nevertheless, they continued to consider nursing a useful instrument in furthering Christianity. It gave them the opportunity to reach the womenfolk, bring healing to the homes, and thus pave the way to the conversion of women, children and men to Christianity.

6.1.2 Education

As has already been observed, the missionary wives laid a firm foundation for the establishment of educational services for the people. While Haydon Lewis assumed responsibility for the education of the boys, Mma-Lewis was fully involved in teaching the girls. Through her efforts education came to be a sought-after commodity. Old women and young girls learned how to write and read the Bible. She also introduced them to home economics and other arts.^{xii} Disappointingly, in their mission reports neither James Good nor Haydon Lewis mention the role played by their wives, focusing instead on men such as Chief Gaseitsiwe, and his predecessors, Makaba and Sebego. Discussion of the changing habits of the Bangwaketse concentrates predominantly on the engagement of men in activities such as trade.^{xiii}

6.1.3 Empowerment of other women

The role and contribution of Mrs Good, Mrs Lewis and Mrs Shaw illustrate the way in which they used Christianity and their work in general to empower other women. By offering medical care these women in many ways demonstrated their own strength and encouraged others to believe in themselves as women. They acted as healers and founders of various women's organisations, which inspired others in different prophetic roles. Through their work other women became more aware of gender issues, and insisted on greater involvement and participation in politics and church leadership, to the extent that, by the 1960s, women in Kanye were penetrating church leadership structures, and it was in fact becoming normal practice for women to hold leadership positions in the church. One such woman was Mrs Mabi of Kanye, who had not only become an influential Christian, but was also a deaconess.^{xiv} (This process had actually begun as early as the 1920s. In 1927, for instance, Reverend E.A. Dugmore, minister-in-charge at the Kanye LMS church, reported great changes taking place in that congregation, with women doing much more work than they had done in the past.) The missionary form of Christianity had in many ways made women second-, if not third-class citizens in the male-dominated church. Yet the work done by these missionary wives paved a way for women to come to the

centre of church life, and through the example of their medical work Tswana women were encouraged to enter the medical profession.

6.2 Race and women

While these missionary wives were doing excellent work among women and the community as whole, they were faced with the very real challenges posed by racial attitudes. The political system of the day inculcated a way of thinking that relegated Tswana women in the nursing profession to subordinate status purely on the grounds of race. For instance, a European nurse at the time earned £40, whereas a trained Tswana nurse earned a mere £10. While this was a major obstacle to cultivating Tswana nurses, it nevertheless did not completely discourage them from fulfilling their professional obligations.

The missionary wives cannot be held accountable for the environment in which they found themselves. They had to do their best to provide health services within the context of an oppressive system of colonial rule that sought to destroy traditional institutions such as indigenous religion, chieftainship and rainmaking ceremonies. The destruction of these institutions changed the self-concept of the Batswana. Women who were part of the traditional society and chose to be nurses suffered rejection and injustice at the hands of the colonial system. Nursing education in those early days was seen as an important socialising tool aimed at ensuring conformity to the oppressive system. This was in line with the impact of male-engineered colonial education on the behaviour of the colonised people, which inhibited both the missionary wives and the Tswana women from performing their duties freely and effectively (Selelo-Kupe 1993:xxii-xxiii).

7 CONCLUSION

The contribution made by missionary wives in Botswana deserves every acknowledgement, and it must be emphasised that their successes in winning the hearts of the Tswana women depended on their effectiveness in integrating Christianity into the everyday experiences of the people. Their inadequacies and failures to fundamentally re-think the importance of integrating the theoretical and epistemological implications of Christianity with Tswana experiences and circumstances, and their ideas about education, nevertheless created some difficulties. The missionary wives made a vital contribution to the development of the Tswana women, yet the effect of their presence and activities tended to be perceived in terms of European culture. Although some, in fighting for the recognition of women, did challenge male dominance, their methods and approaches emanated from a patriarchal power structure. Measures restricting women were generally interpreted in terms of foreign laws, which to a large extent superseded the indigenous laws. For instance, the missionary wives, like their husbands, were happy to be allied with or seek political support from their home colonial administrative officers. Furthermore, they seemed to endorse the socially assigned responsibility of women for child-bearing and household duties.

Although the missionary wives at times contributed substantially to the diagnosis and understanding of male bias and campaigned to overcome it, even those who were aware of the problem did not provide useful conceptual

tools for doing so. Thus, even within Christianity, there were differences in the experiences of women and men. In fact, church history of the 1920s shows that acute inequalities were survived by men, who took advantage of women; the latter, although themselves disadvantaged, became their implicit accomplices.

This article has shown that the male-dominated church history of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries emphasised male achievements, and that these were allowed to eclipse the achievements of women. It is hoped that the present contribution has, in a small way, drawn attention to the deserving work of a number of missionary wives, which passed unnoticed by the LMS. These women played a significant role in the educational and scriptural educational development of the Batswana, and their conversion to Christianity. While the missionaries concentrated almost solely on conversion and ignored the social aspects of missionary work, these women popularised education and medical services, and contributed to the empowerment of women. While their efforts went largely unappreciated, these women taught and healed people in difficult conditions, overcoming language and cultural barriers and the lack of facilities and resources. Through their perseverance a solid foundation was laid on which the Batswana could build and improve their educational system for the future of their children. On balance, missionary wives made a substantial contribution to the development of Christianity in Botswana that deserves recognition by the Church in Botswana and all those who support the cause of women in Africa.

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ENDNOTES

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- 1 *Founders' Week Convention Report*, Sept. 1895, p168.
 - 2 *Founders' Week Convention Report*, Sept. 1895, p168.
 - 3 *London Missionary Society Report*, 1823, pp84-6.
 - 4 *London Missionary Society Report*, 1838, pp99-101.
 - 5 *Ibid*, p101.
 - 6 Roger Price (Logageng) to LMS, March 10, 1863, SOAS: B33 F1 JA; R. Moffat (Moffat) to LMS, March 10, 1863, SOAS: B35 F1 JA.
 - 7 As noted by Mackenzie, Sekgoma thus refused the passage of missionaries to serve other African peoples.
 - 8 Reverend Roger Price to Tidman, Foreign Secretary of the LMS, Dinokana, 22 December 1864, SOAS: B33 F2 JB.
 - 9 This dream was fulfilled only 80 years later, when the Scottish Livingstone Hospital was founded by the United Free Church of Scotland. It took over LMS work in Molepolole in 1931.
 - 10 University of Botswana Microfilm: B332 U S332/3 Archival Series: Secretariat
 - 11 BNA S556/1/1 Hospital – Kanye; UFCS – Moffat Hospital. G.E. Nettleton to Priestman, Director of Medical Services, 2 August 1947; BNA S332/3 Maternity Centre: Kanye, Memo of interview with Dr Mackenzie, Deputy Director of Medical Services at Mafikeng, 23 January 1945. Present were LMS representatives Messrs Haile, Shaw and Tribe.
 - 12 BNA, HC 92/47; BNA, HC 177/7.
 - 13 LMS, Box 38, Folder 3, Jacket A, J. Good to J. Mullens, Kanye, 28 April 1876.
 - 14 University of Botswana Microfilm: ILLUS 297-303: British Official Photographs Division, Central Office of Information, London, July 1960.