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How the political constitutes faith:

Mission Christians in the Soutpansberg of the 1930s

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How the political constitutes faith: Mission Christians in the Soutpansberg of the 1930s

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Abstract

The anthropology of religion generally shows that pre-colonial understandings of religion in Africa did not separate the religious sphere out from the political sphere: political leaders were responsible for the wellbeing of their subjects through the supplication of the ancestors of the polity, supplications that would ensure both the physical health and welfare of the members of the polity as well as their social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. This unity was ruptured when missionaries introduced Christian principles and understandings which created a clear differentiation between the spiritual sphere and the social, political and economic spheres. Missionaries generally painted a picture that mission Christians had successfully enacted this separation of the sacred and the secular in their own lives. Yet, writings by mission Christians in the 1920s and 1930s show that political leaders and their realms featured centrally in their lives: there were visits to the rulers, welcomings of their wives, and speeches by rulers at events of the mission church. This article argues that it is not possible to understand what mission Christians were doing if we continue to separate the secular and the sacred into different spheres. It draws on anthropology and the history of Christian thought to argue that the political realm of the local leaders in which mission Christians lived remained a central part of their spiritual lives, of their faith. They did not separate the political sphere from the spiritual sphere in the way the missionaries expected them to do. When we thus read the writings of mission Christians, it is critical to read them on their terms and not on the terms of how they were framed to say what the missionaries – who published these writings – would have expected them to say.

In an article entitled "On Venda", published in the May 1929 edition of the mission newspaper *Moxwera wa babaso*, the teacher and lay preacher Stephanus Maimela Dzivhani reported that

> "These were great news of great miracles. On the 2nd April 1920[1], King Sibasa Takalani spoke in front of priests, school teachers, and all other people and said, 'I would like to return to Berlin church, our mother church'. I give to boys and girls of my land teachers to teach them. As for me, if my child doesn't attend school, 3 pounds must be paid as a price" (Dzivhani 1929).

In the history and anthropology of missions Christianity, passages such as this have generally been interpreted to speak to the issue of conversion and the problems with the conversion of political rulers who feared to lose political power when converting. This view is shared by the missionaries for whom the authenticity and sincerity of conversion were the most important criteria in their relationship with non-Christians.

This article questions the explanation of the actions of political leaders in terms of the issue of conversion by observing that political leaders in the 1920s and 1930s Soutpansberg were not necessarily associated with the missionaries but with the mission Christians. What does it mean that mission Christians – supposedly separated from the realms of political leaders – were engaged with local political leaders? Does this relationship only have a political meaning? This paper suggests that, rather, the association of political leaders with mission Christians in this time period had a religious dimension which was critical to understand their association.

It does so by analyzing the writings by two mission Christians, teacher and lay preacher Stephanus Maimela Dzivhani and ordained pastor Simson Rabothata, who were associated with the Berlin Mission Society (BMS) and its Lutheran church in the Soutpansberg region in the 1920s and 1930s.

[1] Cj: check date in original.

The overarching majority of texts written by mission Christians who were attending the BMS church in the northern regions of South Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – including those by Dzivhani and Rabothata – were written within the missionary social field: in publications controlled by missionaries, in versions edited by missionaries, and for the readership of mission Christians of a mission church still fully under the administrative and theological / doctrinal control of the missionaries. It could be argued that these texts by mission Christians are missionary texts: they are oriented towards the aims and goals of the missionaries and the mission society and imbued with the values and dispositions of the missionaries.

In one of the most seminal texts on mission Christianity in Southern Africa, the two-volumed monograph *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991 and 1997), Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff grapple with the process of how Africans took on Christianity and how Christianity and its underlying values became so ubiquitous in southern Africa. By applying Gramsci's theory of the interplay between ideology (aspects of a worldview that can be thought of and debated consciously) and hegemony (those parts of a worldview that are seen as natural), they argue that simply by engaging the colonialists and missionaries in debates about the world Africans already had to adopt some of the basic assumptions of a European worldview, thus being pulled, even if involuntarily, into the European hegemony. The Gramscian approach allows an analysis of the "conversation", as Comaroff and Comaroff term it, that Africans engaged in with colonialists and missionaries in particular, which they explore particularly well in their second volume. It shows how mission Christians took on European and Christian practices and behaviours, such as forms of clothing, methods of building, and educational practices and skills.

The analysis by the Comaroffs does not consider, however, the different (albeit additional) reasons why Africans might have adopted Christianity. They look at the adoption of a worldview that changes behaviours and practices. They talk about the adoption of a European worldview and of European assumptions, including in particular a capitalist and market economy, the governmental role of the state, the enforcing role of the military, and the identifying role of the nation. Yet, what these assumptions do not include is an analysis of the theological aspects of the worldview and assumption that the mission Christians took on for themselves. The image that arises is that Africans adopted mission Christianity for reasons of advancing their own careers and lives, in order to achieve access to new forms of resources that promised access to economic and social independence. It does not analyse how mission

Christians felt challenged, addressed, spoken to by, and grappled with, the theological aspects of Christianity. What did adopting Christian practices, values, dispositions mean to these men and women? What did they do with them? Was it, only, to gain access to economic resources and opportunities? This paper proposes that in the manner that the Christians behave we can see traces of faith, not just of accommodation or exploiting the situation; not just using the situation for the own personal and economic interests.

Asad argues that the term religion cannot be applied indiscriminately of time and space (Asad 1993). He argues that the term arose in a very particular constellation of circumstances, which gives it a particular definition, namely that it denotes a sphere of being that is separate and separable from the secular sphere, and that is considered personal and interior to a person. He criticises the assumption that religion is one and the same thing everywhere and through time, and shows (by tracing what is understood by "religion" over time, genealogically) that our understanding of religion today – which is one of being of belief – emanates from the development of secularism in the Western world which assumes the Cartesian separation of mind and body.

Asad's argument is critical to this paper. The manner in which the missionaries understood religion would not necessarily have applied to mission Christians. Mission Christians shared sufficient of an understanding of the religious or spiritual with the missionaries for the two to be in a meaningful dialogue and to share spaces, activities and meanings. At the same time, the writings by mission Christians suggest that mission Christians were informed by additional understandings of the religious which were incompatible with how the missionaries understood the religious and which were often taken as signs of a lack of sincerity of belief by the missionaries. In some aspects, however, where mission Christians shared meanings with the missionaries, they did so for different reasons emanating from the different understandings of what the religious sphere encapsulated. While these shared understandings, in particular of the phenomenon of a nation, allowed common actions, they also led to deep frustrations on the side of the missionaries when they felt that mission Christians moved the realm of the sacred too far into the secular. At the same time, the narrow definition of the religious sphere by the missionaries would also have led mission Christians into tensions of how to link their own commitment to the mission church with their political affiliations to local polities.

Clearly it is incorrect to use the concept of "belief" in this context. Belief is a concept associated with religion in the very particular context of Christianity, especially as a result of

the Reformation in the 16th century, as Asad (1993) has shown. Asad even argues that to apply the term 'religion' indiscriminately to religious phenomena is wrong, as the term itself – assumed as being encapsulated in the concept of belief – arose in a very particular historical and theological context. When we look at the writings by the mission Christians, therefore, we need to consider that what they associated with religion might have taken quite different contours to what our current use of the term religion would suggest, or what the focus on a particular instantiation of religion, namely that of Christianity, would have us expect.

One of the striking discourses in the writing of mission Christians is the manner in which they relate to local polities and their leaders, and the manner in which they take up the notion of the nation. It is easy to read the writings by mission Christians in terms of a modern notion of the nation – the association of people into a group on the basis of a (claimed) shared history. Mission Christians themselves strongly employed these terms in their writings. The texts written by Venda-speaking mission Christians in the BMS newspaper *Moxwera wa babaso* and in particular those of Stephanus Maimela Dzvihani regularly refer to the unit of "Venda". Yet this paper argues that mission Christians understood something different with the reference to "Venda" than the missionaries intended. Where for the missionaries the nation, though God-given, was separate from the religious sphere, for the mission Christians the same entity was linked much more closely and definitively to their understanding of what it meant to be religious and to be of faith. Their engagement with the "Venda nation" was part of their fierce belief that they were proper and staunch Christians.

This paper analyses the writings by mission Christians to argue that, at least by the 1930s, mission Christians did not see a necessary tension between being Christian and being part of their home/birth communities. The paper argues that if we do not take this religious aspect of people's lives into account, we do not understand what these Christians were doing and thinking.

Writing in the Soutpansberg region in the 1930s

The writing by mission Christians in the Soutpansberg[2] is critically different from that in other parts of South Africa during the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. The

[2] In this paper I refer to the Soutpansberg as a unit of study. I do this in order to avoid the geographical reference to "Vendaland" which other authors (see for example Kirkaldy 2005) have used, due to the manner in which it assumes an already given ethnic unit that correlates with a geographical, social, political and economic space. The Soutpansberg region that I refer to spans the area of the Soutpansberg mountains where the BMS had

reason for this is the language policy which the Berlin Mission Society adopted for its work in the Soutpansberg, and elsewhere. In its effort to build a "national" church, as they considered ethnic groups ideally to form (their own term was *Volkskirche*), it placed a strong emphasis on building up the "nation", which it considered to be constructed in particular by the language of the "nation". This resulted in the situation where the BMS did not teach its school children and Christians English, and emphasised literacy and numeracy in the ThisVenda vernacular. This is critically different from the practices of the mission societies from which mission Christians in the Eastern Cape and in the Natal provinces arose who were engaged in writing and publication. First of all, these mission societies were mostly English speaking, the British colonial language of governance, different from the German spoken by the missionaries of the BMS, so that mission Christians could not be kept separate from this language as effectively as with the BMS. Secondly, these mission societies encouraged publication by mission Christians and mission-educated Africans, both in English and in the vernacular, often providing printing pressed and training people to run these and edit the newspapers. In contrast is the lack of publication activity by mission-educated Christians emanating from the BMS in the Soutpansberg. The published texts analysed here were published only in the 1920s and 1930s (and these are the earliest that I have been able to trace), whereas reading, writing and publication activity by mission-educated Christians in the Eastern Cape and Natal began more than fifty years earlier (see Khumalo 2005; De Kock 1996).[3]

A further critical feature about the 1930s needs to be taken into account in thinking about how mission Christians understood and shaped their faith. Reading the missionary documents (in the form mainly of their diaries that reported on their daily work on and

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located its mission stations. In using the term "Soutpansberg" region, it follows recent studies on the geography and history of the area as proposed by Berger et al (2003). The geographical term Soutpansberg as they and I use it needs to be distinguished from the 19th century administrative term "Zoutpansberg district", which spanned much more widely to include the Hananwa in the Blouwberg to the west of the Soutpansberg mountains, the Lobedu in the south of the mountains, and a host of other communities. In order to distinguish my use of the area as a general region from the administrative district of the 19th century, I spell the term with an "S", as Berger et al. do, rather than with a "Z", as was used in the 19th century.

[3] Tinyiko Maluleke notes the same for the Spelonken area where the Mission Suisse en Afrique du Sud was working. He stated that "after 112 years of written Xitsonga, there exist few black assessments of written work and little is available in written form that is critical of missionaries, possibly because publishing was under their control; after all, they were considered to be the experts" (as cited in Duncan 2005).

around the mission stations), it is apparent that the missionaries in the 1930s in the Soutpansberg are not as consumed anymore with the political leaders as they had been in the last three decades of the 19th century.[4] During the late 19th century, the missionaries were faced with the situation where they felt that the strength and autonomy of local political leaders was the reason why people did not convert to Christianity. Often, in fact, the missionary at the first mission station which the BMS founded in the Soutpansberg, Carl Beuster, would argue that only the breaking of the political power of the chiefs would create the situation where their subjects would be able to convert.[5] The missionaries argued that the political leaders did not allow people to convert because they did not want to loose political subjects. Here we need to understand that when someone in the early decades of BMS work in the Soutpansberg became a member of the mission Church and was baptised, they left their home communities to live on the mission station. The missionaries conceived this to mean that they removed themselves completely and broke off all links with their home communities and families. In fact, they not only encouraged this but made it central to their definition of being a Christian, on the basis that they felt that the possibilities of reneging on their Christian commitments would be too overpowering for mission Christians if they lived in the "heathen" contexts of their home communities. For the missionaries, the differentiation of heathen and Christian were so strong that they were, by definition, antonymous.

What changed between the late 19th century and the 1930s was, critically, the war of 1898 in which Mphephu, the leader of the Ramabulana polity, was defeated by the ZAR forces. Though the Ramabulana polity was only one of three large, and numerous smaller polities in the Soutpansberg region (both independent and semi-autonomous), its defeat heralded the submission of all polities in the Soutpansberg due to the manner in which the various forces (both ZAR and other polities) had played each other and the Ramabulana polity out against each other.[6] Through the war, the autonomous political power of these

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[4] See the last chapter of Kirkaldy's recent publication on the work of the BMS in the Soutpansberg during the late 19th century for an excellent description of the missionary relationship with local polities and their leaders (Kirkaldy 2005).

[5] Insert quote here.

[6] This happened in a very similar way in which Kriel describes it happened in the 1894 war of the ZAR against the Bahananwa in the Blouwberg west of the Soutpansberg mountain (Kriel 2009). Kriel's work demonstrates very eloquently how the wars of submission changed political and religious playing fields for missionaries and mission Christians.

polities was broken and, in the 1930s, all administrative functions and decision-making powers rested in the South African government. The relationship of the missionaries to the political leaders was, thus, a very different one from the late 19th century. In the 19th century the missionaries were critically dependent on the political leaders for permission to live and work in their areas and for usage of land for their mission station, churches and schools. In their writings during this time, the missionaries reveal how they tried to impress their weight and status as representatives of God upon the political leaders, attempting to convince the latter that they had to do as the missionaries said because it was (the Christian) God's will and truth that needed to prevail. At the same time it is evident from these writings that the political leaders were playing a very politically astute game with the missionaries – which these mostly did not recognise – that show that the political leaders were completely in control over what the missionaries were able to do. By the 1930s, however, the missions were independent of the political leaders and held legal ownership possession – granted by the government – of the land on which their mission stations were located. The mission church was no longer dependent on the polities and their leaders; rather, to some extent, the political leaders – whose powers were by now tremendously curtailed and adapted – were dependent on the missions, in particular (as is evident in the opening quote) for education, which came to be seen as central to what it meant to be a political subject.

What is important to notice in the missionary writings of the 1930s is that it seems that the missionaries were happy for mission Christians to have a positive relationship to the local political leaders. The political leaders no longer feature centrally in the writings of the missionaries in the 1930s. It seems, rather, that they have become inconsequential for the missionising[7] task of the missionaries and that they are no longer seen to embody the "heathen" danger that they had before.

Being a Christian in a political community

A strong theme in Dzivhani's texts is the involvement of political rulers in the events described and the manner of their involvement. In general, Dzivhani's articles indicate a close relationship between rulers and church congregations of the Berlin Mission church.

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[7] This word, "missionising", does not actually exist. Yet, I use it here as the other possible word to be used, "evangelising", conjures up too much of the Pentecostal form of evangelisation that we know in the late 20th and early 21st century, which was not the manner in which missionaries spread the Christian message. In order to keep the two apart, I am using the word "missionising" here.

Dzivhani's image of this relationship – in comparison to the one the missionaries imagined they had with local rulers in the late 19th century – is one in which the agency and control over the relationship between the mission church and the rulers is very diffuse. Dzivhani mentioned the missionaries as one of the figures involved in events, but did not depicted them as holding control over the manner in which events or the relationships unfolded. Indeed, one article described the relationship as one between a congregation and the ruler rather than between the missionary and ruler. In addition, Dzivhani's personal documents show that the relationship was also one between the rulers and Dzivhani himself, rather than with the missionaries. We find that Dzivhani had close links to the rulers Mphaphuli, Ramaremisa Thohoyandou Tshivhase and Ngovhela, as well as with a number of other unnamed lower figures of authority, to build schools in their areas, in relationships that seem to have been independent from the mission. Several documents credit Dzivhani with founding and building the Mphaphuli African School, schools that went up to Form I or Grade 8 in the villages of Dzingahe, Tshamavhudzi, and Tshilivho (Dumasi), as well as schools in the villages of Tswinga, Lufule, Maniini and Mangondi, many of which were community schools and independent of church control.[8]

The closeness of rulers to church congregations is indicated in an event on 1 January 1927 when there was a big celebration at the home of *khosi*[9] Tshivhase to welcome the arrival of his wife and three children. The church congregation from Ha Tshivhase mission station,

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[8] The schools at Tshilivho/Dumasi, Dzingahe, and Tswinga as well as the Mphaphuli African School were community schools independent of mission control (Wits A1075, B6, Map of community and church schools, n.d.). It is likely that the other schools founded by Dzivhani had the same status. Ravhuanzwo (1988) suggests that the fact that the Mission did not approve of Dzivhani's involvement in these community schools under the auspices of local rulers. At least in relation to the Mphaphuli African School, he reports that the Mission attempted to use government procedures of registering schools in order to get the school under its own authority. Ravhuanzwo sources this information to three interviews he conducted with retired teachers who had been younger colleagues of and, in some cases, church members with Dzivhani. Dzivhani's personal papers do not give an indication of this disagreement.

[9] In the TshiVenda original, Dzivhani used the term *khosi*. I prefer to use this term than its English translation "chief", due to how the latter is generally taken to refer to positions rooted in age-old tradition and history. Yet, as a lot of literature on colonialism has shown, colonial practices (and later, in South Africa, apartheid practices) fundamentally changed the nature of political leadership from pre-colonial ones. In addition, who was a *chief* in the Soutpansberg and who not was highly contested over history, both pre-colonial, colonial (including the ZAR) and during the Union. In fact, these contestations have continued into the apartheid period – with claims to a paramouncy – and through that into the post-colonial period.

with all its children and the choir, as well as church congregations from other BMS congregations had been invited. Dzivhani described that this was the first time that "we witnessed something like that" (Dzivhani 1927a, 3). A church service was held during which the *khosi* and his family were welcomed. Afterwards there was a celebration for which the *khosi* had ordered food to be cooked and an ox to be slaughtered "because of happiness" (Dzivhani 1927a, 3). In his article, Dzivhani described the *khosi* as having been happy that his family had been "accepted" (Dzivhani 1927a, 3). The close involvement of the Ha-Tshivhase congregation in this ceremony and the responses by the *khosi* suggest that both viewed the relationship between the two as being close and that the two entities were integrated rather than separate.

In 1927, a serious drought was plaguing the Soutpansberg and the church organized a series of meetings to pray for rain which culminated in a large meeting of all "unbelievers and their kings" on 27 February 1927 (Dzivhani 1927b). At this meeting, the ruler of Ngovhela-Phindula, Tshamandando Ratshikhopa, whom Dzivhani described as being "an active man when it comes to God's word," said a prayer (Dzivhani 1927b, 2). When Ratshikhopa said "Amen" to conclude the prayer,

> there was a sound which sounded like it was saying: "I have heard your prayers! I have heard your prayers! Have faith and you will see, I will give a gift to your prayers, Don't loose hope, Don't loose hope, Don't loose hope!"[10]

Promptly it began to rain when the participants at the prayer meeting returned home (Dzivhani 1927b, 2). The approach taken in this account is critical. If the missionaries had told this story, they would have written the story as leading towards a moral ending that the rain proved the reality and power of the Christian God. Dzivhani did not formulate his text in this manner. He, rather, drew attention to the power of the prayer said by Ratshikhopa, for it is exactly after this prayer that the thunder sounded out suggesting that God had heard the prayer. In this manner, Dzivhani's text suggests that he, as well as the Christian and non-Christian participants at the event, considered the non-Christian ruler Ratshikhopa to be able to intercede with the Christian God on behalf of Christians as well as non-Christians.

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[10] "Ga a ri: "Amen" ke ge e thomiligo duma ka modumo o e kego go thoi "Ki koile merapelo ea lena! Ki koile merapelo ea lena! Dumelang le tla bona ki tla le fa gona byale. Ke tla le fa mmpho ea thapelo ea lena. Tiishang! Tiishang! Tiishang!"" (Dzivhani 1927b, 2). Original in Sepedi and translated by Esther Manabile.

Dzivhani's text suggests, therefore, that Christians were happy for their church and their faith to be associated with political rulers and non-Christians rulers at that.

The closeness of Dzivhani as a person with ruling houses is further illustrated in an event on 9 June 1931 when the Labor Recruiting Company organized what Dzivhani called "games" at Gambani in the Tshivhase area. For this celebration, which attracted large numbers of people, food and beer was provided by the rulers, made from provisions granted by the Labour Recruiting Company. Traditional dances were performed. Dzivhani attended the celebration together with the children of what he called his "troop". This could have either been a choir, as he was a renowned choir leader in the area, or a Boy Scouts group, as he was a scout master. With this troop, Dzivhani performed a number of songs to the assembled people, suggesting a close relationship between Dzivhani as person and the rulers in general and possibly the Tshivhase ruling house (Dzivhani 1931).

Education is a second theme through which people in the Soutpansberg considered their Christian faith, whether their own or that of others. In addition, the theme of education is closely interwoven with the link between rulers and the Christian faith. Dzivhani discussed the theme of education in four of his articles for the *Moxwera wa babaso*, the newspaper of the BMS which it published for its Christians in SePedi. They suggest that for him, as well as for the Christians and non-Christians in the Soutpansberg about whom he wrote, education and Christianity were absolutely part and parcel of each other, with education as the ultimate expression of Christianity.

In the first article, Dzivhani described the wedding of Ephraim Mutsila, a Christian man, and Johanna Mainganya in Ngovhela, a small village in the Tshivhase area (Dzivane 1928). At the wedding, the ruler of Ngovhela-Phindula, Tshamandonda Rasikhopha, who was identified by Dzivhani as "the one who built the school of the children," gave a speech in which he highlighted that the rulers, including his own brother Tshivhase, "loved" education and had supported the missionaries in their educational ventures by building schools (Dzivane 1928, 2). He argued that the problem now was that people were not sending their children to school. He explicitly blamed these parents for this by stating that "Now I am saying God will find them guilty because they deny bringing their children to school" (Dzivane 1928, 2).

Rasikhopha continued his speech by holding up Christian marriage as exemplary, arguing that it was "transparent" because the whole ceremony was held in public and during the day, without any fear. He emphasized that Christian marriage did not involve women

eloping from home, which he argued was a bad aspect of marriage among non-Christians. He continued to say that a woman should not elope as she was not a cow – only cattle eloped when they walked away on the grazing area and could not be found when the shepherd wanted to drive them back into the kraal in the evening.

Rasikhopha then requested to be baptized by Stephanus Masiagwala, the BMS pastor present at the ceremony, as good things could only be found in Christianity. He thus suggested that Christianity had become a crucial conceptual tool through which to express values and perhaps even legitimacy of authority. He went on to argue that the non-Christian beliefs held by people in the Soutpansberg were wrong and misconceived:

> He [Rasikhopha] said that God is one. He [God] is for Christians. God created everything and even people. We just sit and relax – [we believe] that God is goats and cow that we slaughter when we want meat to eat with porridge.
>
> Small children are better than us. Does it not lead to laughter? I mean to slaughter and eat God? Or giving him beer; is our God a drunkard?
>
> God whom we eat is not the true God. Who does not know his children, true God of Christians can see his children and bless them.
>
> I saw it that we were robbed in many things by the healers. Let us leave them and believe in God of the Christians.
>
> Also we ask Christians to pray so that the rain shall fall.[11]

The speech by Rasikhopha opens a very important and interesting window into conceptualizations of Christianity and the Christian faith. As the text was written by Dzivhani, we are seeing the event through his eyes. We are dependent on his personal evaluation of what was important to be reported and what not. Unless we find a second description of the same event, we will not be able to evaluate whether Dzivhani omitted

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[11] "*A amba a ri: Mudzimu ndi muthihi. Ndi wa vhatendi. Hoyu Mudzimu ndi ene o sikalo zwothe na rine vhathu. Rine ro dzula ri tshi ela nge ra ri Mudzimu ndi mbudzi, kana kholomo; zwine musi wa thotha ra hungulula ra shidzha ra sevha vhuswa.*
Ri fhirwa nga vhana vhatuku-tuku. A zwi seisi naa? Ndi amba zva u sevha vhuswa nga Mudzimu? Kana tshi fha mudzimu halwa, kana-ha ndi tshidakwa mudzimu washu?
Mudzimu a liwaho a si Mudzimu vhukuma. A sa divhi vhana vhawe, wa Vhatendi u a vha vhona a vha fhutu tshedza.
Ndi zwone, nne ndo zwi vhona uri zwinzhi ro fhuriwa nga dzinanga. Kha ri vha litshe ri tende Mudzimu wa vhatendi.
Na hone ri humbela Vhatendi vha ite thabelo uri mbvula ine" (Dzivane 1928, 2). Translated by Mpho Rathando.

specific aspects of the event from his account. We can, however, evaluate how he reports on the information that he does chose to give the reader. What Dzivhani emphasizes in his account is the triadic relationship between rulers, education and Christianity, a theme that is of critical importance to him. The fact that he felt this information needed to be included in a public newspaper article suggests that he thought it was an issue that would be of importance to other Christians as well.

Rasikhopha drew on Christian theological principles to make his argument for the importance of education. In discussing the schools that he and other rulers had built, he used the Christian metaphor of sin to scold those of his subjects who were not sending their children to school. He claimed that God would find these parents guilty as they were disobeying the explicit will of God. In this argument, he was conflating education with Christianity. It suggests that at least in a public representation of faith, a political ruler took up the manner in which missionaries saw education as the prime and essential avenue through which faith would take root. It even allows the much stronger suggestion that this ruler equated education with Christianity.

Rasikhopha drew on missionary conceptualizations in a further manner. He conceptualized Christianity and the Christian faith in contrast to perceptions that people in the Soutpansberg outside of the mission church were holding. This drew on the missionary contrast between Christianity and *heathendom*, where he characterized the latter by fear. He continued this point when he drew upon the image of goodness in relation to Christianity, thus implying an opposite category of badness that would be associated with *heathendom*. This language of contrast as one in which the Christian excluded the non-Christian reverberates strongly with missionary analyses of the situation of faith in the Soutpansberg.

Rasikhopha expanded on the theme of a Christian-*heathen* opposition by comparing the Christian and non-Christian beliefs about God. He suggested that the non-Christian belief which considered God as embodied in animals was ridiculous and called upon all those listening to his speech to renounce this belief and to turn to Christianity. Obeying his own call, he requested Pastor Stephanus Makhado to baptize him because he believed in this Christian God. There is a critical point in his speech, however. In his discussion of non-Christian conceptions of God, Rasikhopha suggested that “Small children are better than us”. With this he indicated that children had recognized the truth of these matters much more than older people had. The suggestion in this is that this should be an embarrassing state for older people. The small children that he spoke about were, I suggest, the children who were

attending school. They were exposed to the Christian God every day at school, so that they already knew the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian God, in contrast to the older, uneducated people. Again there is a conflation of Christianity with education.

What is critical in Rasikhopha's speech, or at least in the manner in which Dzivhani reported on it, is that Rasikhopha presented an image of Christianity that shows a lot of parallels with missionary conceptions of faith. This can only be understood on the basis of the fact that this speech was made at a very public event which was attended by missionaries as well as church members and people not affiliated with the church. The speech, as well as Dzivhani's report of it, wished to create parallels between local and missionary conceptions of the Christian faith. The speech, therefore, emphasized the points of parallel between the missionaries on the one hand and the rulers and people on the other. What this theme was hiding are the points at which these two conceptions differed. Thus, though the speech indicated the close relationship between the rulers and the Christians in the Soutpansberg, Rasikhopha did not delve into how this relationship might have been to the exclusion of the missionaries, and might have reflected local conceptions of faith which did not work with the dual opposition of Christian and *heathen*.

There is one indication, in fact, that Dzivhani did not consider this shared dualistic view of the world as meaning that people had succumbed to missionary power. This is suggested by the fact that Dzivhani does not accord the missionaries any role or activities in the wedding, even though at least one missionary attended the wedding.

What we can argue on this basis is that Christianity was, to the least, a critical component of a self-definition of people and rulers in the Soutpansberg area. At its strongest we could argue that the inhabitants of the Soutpansberg did not consider Christianity to stand in diametrical opposition to their own conceptions and practices. In contrast, their actions suggest that they attempted to incorporate both sides into a living and meaningful whole.

Lastly, we need to consider that this speech was made at a wedding. A wedding was an event that was celebrated widely and to which numerous people were invited. In fact, Dzivhani gave the information that the groom had slaughtered five oxen to provide sufficient food for the event. The fact that the speech was made at this event suggests that people in the Soutpansberg, and especially non-Christians, viewed Christian weddings as being fundamentally related to issues of identity, an identity that was not yet, perhaps, resolved at this point but that was of critical importance to people.

In the 1920s a political ruler who was not baptized felt strong pressure at a public event to express Christian views and even to request baptism for himself. It seems that the breaking of political authority in the Soutpansberg was experienced in such a manner that rulers considered that status and power could no longer be sought solely through local level political avenues.

In the second text, entitled "The Venda Chieftainship" that took the format of a letter, Dzivhani described the installation of a new *khosi* at Tshivhase's place after the death of Ramaremisa Thohoyandou Tshivhase in March 1930 (Dzivhani 1930a). At the installation, the late ruler's brother, Luphai Nephalale, stood up to call upon the new *khosi* to support education just as the deceased ruler had done when he had welcomed the missionaries into his area. He described how the late *khosi* had placed a lot of emphasis on education and on pastors. Nephalale instructed the new ruler to "love education so that his leadership will be excellent and he will be happy and wished long life by his people". This suggests a conception of legitimacy and authority of rule via education, but also success of rule through education. His reference to pastors in the statement that "the late *khosi* appreciated the pastors and education" is the only one to Christianity, yet there is a sense in the statement that Christianity is conflated with education so that it did not require to be mentioned explicitly and separately. By talking of education, the Christian aspect was presumed understood.

Dzivhani ended his report on the installation by stating that the new *khosi*, Ratshimphi Tshivhase, was a young man in his early twenties who knew how to read and write. "If he wants to reconstruct Venda, he can because his is gifted and knowledgeable". Here Dzivhani drew a parallel between education and the development of the ethnic unit of Venda. This suggests that in the 1920s we have a combination of four elements – Christianity, education, an ethnic unit and development – that seem to be conflated in Dzivhani's mind. His reflection of this conflation in a published article suggests that Dzivhani wished to imply that this conflation should be important to others as well.

In a letter to the *Mogwera* entitled "VhaVenda", or the Venda people, Dzivhani drew attention to the importance of teachers (Dzivhani 1930b). He called upon people not to get disaffected with teachers as their job was very heavy. He called upon parents to give their children some money so that they could buy pictures from the teachers. The pictures he referred to are most probably small printed images of biblical figures and events that the missionaries received from Germany for the children. He then called upon the Soutpansberg rulers to "buy" teachers for their "princes", suggesting that the *king* should pay the teachers to

build up schools in the areas of his headmen. The *princes* would then be able to read and write and would then be able to help the *king* in writing letters. He reminded people that several texts were now available in TshiVenda translation (the New Testament, a catechism, a hymnal, and a book of Psalms) which they could acquire now through the missionary at Tshakhuma, Ludwig Giesekke. Parents should also support their children singing songs about education as this would strengthen the "book workers" or teachers.

In this text Christianity is not mentioned but there is the suggestion of a parallel between Christianity and education through the reference to the pictures for the school children. I would argue that Christianity was considered as assumed in and, thus, as the indispensable basis for education. In the conception of Dzivhani and his readers, for a person to be educated meant to be baptized. The values associated with education were thus the values they saw embedded in being Christian.

The text also reveals the importance Dzivhani laid on political rulers for the spreading of education. It suggests a close relationship between teachers and rulers, rather than between missionaries and rulers. In writing this article, Dzivhani assumed that the rulers in the Soutpansberg would be reading the newspaper and his article. The liberty he took to address the rulers in this public manner suggests a certain familiarity with them.

Dzivhani reported that on 2 April 1929 all school teachers and pastors congregated at the homestead of *king* Takalani Joel Tshivhase (Dzivhani 1929). The *king* spoke in front of all assembled saying that "I would like to return to Berlin church, our mother church" (Dzivhani 1929). Tshivhase had been a member of the BMS church from 1902 to 1912, when he with his whole village broke away to join the Church of England. He was now asking to be readmitted to the BMS church, identifying it as the first and original church in the Soutpansberg. Tshivhase then continued talking about the importance of education:

> I give to boys and girls of my land teachers to teach them. As for me, if my child doesn't attend school, 3 pounds must be paid as a price. Teaching only boys doesn't build the nation. We always see gentlemen coming here with their educated wives from townships and women here are not being educated.[12]

[12] "Bashimane le banenyane ba naga eaka ke ba neela baruti gore ba rutoe. Nna ka nnoshi ga noanake a sa tsene sekolo ke bea tefo ea diponto tse tharu. Ke tseba gore ga go rutoa masogana feela ka ntle ga basitsana

Dzivhani reported that the teachers were very happy to hear the *king*'s speech and his appointment of the teacher E. Dan[13] to start the school in his village. After two weeks, 110 children were already attending the school. Dzivhani took this to indicate that the whole country was desperate for school teachers. He reported how the missionaries as well as African pastors and teachers of the BMS thanked Tshivhase for his decision. He ended the report by stating: "Venda people are now up, God has now started speaking to them" (Dzivhani 1929).

In this report, Dzivhani recorded that the missionaries were present and that they were amongst those who thanked the *king* for his decision. Yet, the report does not give the missionaries any influential role. At the same time, however, the meeting at the *king*'s homestead took place on a very significant day in the Lutheran church calendar, which suggests that the missionaries would have known of the announcement beforehand and that it was staged to happen in this manner. What this manner of writing suggests, therefore, is that Dzivhani did not consider the missionaries as critical to the history and events of the church and schools in the Soutpansberg, or at least did not want to portray them as that. Rather, his manner of writing confirmed the close relationship between the church and the Tshivhase ruling house.

There is one important point in this passage: the direct parallel that Tshivhase drew between being readmitted to the BMS church and education. In his understanding, I would argue, Christianity was equal to education. Dzivhani shared this approach, which he took elsewhere too, and his position is indicated here in his final statement that "Venda people are now up, God has now started speaking to them" (Dzivhani 1929). The statement is opaque as to whether it refers to the Christian aspects of Tshivhase's message or his educational aspect. I would argue it refers to both, and that it reveals the conflation of Christianity and education as being one.

There is an interesting parallel between the school built by Dan and the Mphaphuli African School built up by Dzivhani in 1920 upon the request of *khosi* Makwarela Mphaphuli. In a "Memorandum of Chief Phaswana Mphaphuli and his councilors on the history, laws and customs of the Vhavenda people", Dzivhani recorded that when he founded

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ga se gona re agile naga ea rena. Ka melha re no bona masogana a tla le basadi ba ba tsoago didropong e le gore mono basadi ba gona, feela ga se ba rutoa" (Dzivhani 1929, 2). Translated by Esther Manabile.

[13] Most probably Emanuel Dau.

Mphaphuli African School he had enrolled 108 students after only two weeks.[14] The rate at which Dzivhani and Dan attracted scholars was very different from the struggle experienced by the missionaries of attracting scholars to their schools in the 19th century. This indicates a change in time. During the 19th century, the political leadership in the Soutpansberg was still intact and Christianity was not necessary for the self-definition of the leadership. In the 1920s, however, after the defeat of Mphephu in 1898, Christianity seems to have started playing a crucial role in the definition of local political power and legitimacy. The success of the schools in the 1920s also suggests that, in the building up of these schools, the rulers could be convinced that education was *not* something that would lead their subjects away from them, something they had not been convinced of in earlier times.

Lastly, the texts by Dzivhani which conflate education, Christianity and local rulers also, critically, put forward the ethnic category of Venda. It is very likely that this category was created by the Berlin Mission and was propagated through its linguistic work (Jeannerat 2007). Here this category is put forward by a man who, as an educated Christian, was part of a new form of elite that gained status through education rather than through the location within a social hierarchy. At the same time, however, this man located himself and his work as a teacher squarely within local structures of authority. His texts suggest that he drew status not from being a teacher for the Mission but, rather, for the local rulers. At several instances in his texts, Dzivhani puts forward the category of Venda and identifies people in the Soutpansberg as carrying and sharing this ethnic identity. It is an identification that few other mission Christians felt important to emphasize. It is likely, as well, that this claimed shared identity might not have reverberated with local rulers, for such an overarching unity could have been seen to undermine claims that their political authority was independent from that of other Soutpansberg rulers. The claim for a Venda form of identity took on a stronger importance towards the end of Dzivhani's life with the formal creation of political entity based on this claimed Venda ethnicity. This is revealed through his composition of songs that celebrate the ethnic unit of the Venda homeland (Jeannerat 2007).

Dzivhani's texts from the 1920s reveal that for at least one Christian faith meant being educated and living as a Christian within the local structures of political administration. They

[14] Wits A1075, F1.1, [S.M. Dzivhani], [n.d.], "The memorandum of Chief Phaswana Mphaphuli and his councillors on the history, laws and customs of the Vhavenda people".

also reveal a conceptualization that the inhabitants of the Soutpansberg were characterized by a shared ethnic identity.

Royals and Christianity: Mission and education

Rabothata regularly cited another category of people as expressing support for the mission, Christianity and education, namely that of the rulers. There are indications that the rulers have taken an explicitly different approach to the mission at this point, in the 1930s, than they did in the last decades of the 19th century towards the earlier missionaries.

Thus, for example, on New Years day 1933, the congregations of Vhulaudzi and Manini had decided to celebrate the service of the day at the homestead of *Häuptling* Mulambilu who ruled in that area. Rabothata recorded how Mulambilu had invited numerous people to his homestead for the service, and that he and his congregations were very happy to see that the people listened carefully to their message of Jesus. After the service, Rabothata and other members of the congregation had a discussion with the *Häuptling* and his elders during which the ruler expressed that he liked the Lutheran church the most because of their strong and strict rules. In contrast, he mentioned the Bapedi Lutheran church under the preacher Jeremia Madzaga which had provided beer for New Years day and which had come to visit him with their drums to ring in the new year, things not practiced by the Lutheran church. Rabothata commented in his report that *heathens* were able to see the difference between the various churches and "showed preference for that church which followed the word of the Lord Jesus".[15] What is important to note in this report is the fact that congregations and Rabothata as their pastor were willing and eager to incorporate the rulers, and through him the *heathen* population, into their Christian services, perhaps opening up to them the possibility of getting to know the Christian calendar of important dates and events and the Christian manner of celebrating them. In fact, with the congregations agreeing to hold the service in Mulambilu's homestead, the ruler appears as something of an overlord over the church. It is also important to note that, as Rabothata himself observed, the ruler at least had formed a clear opinion of what was proper and appropriate Christian behavior, showing that he, if not other people, was consciously and carefully comparing different churches and forming criteria for this evaluation. (It is important to note that, during the course of the year

[15] " … und derjenigen den Vorzug geben, die sich richtet nach dem Wort unseres Herrn Jesus" (BMW 1/5768, Document 20, S. Rabothata, 31 August 1933, "Arbeitsbericht von Pastor S. Rabothata, Tshakoma", p.1).

of 1933, Häuptling Mulambilu must have changed his opinion about the Bapedi Lutheran church. He was soon afterwards baptized into that church).

In mid-February, Rabothata again reported how he held a Sunday service at the homestead of a ruler, this time of *Landschaftsoberhaupt* Hasani in the area of Dzwerani.[16] Again, the ruler had called together a large number of people to attend the service. Rabothata also reported that Hasani "was not averse to the preaching of the word".[17] When, barely a month later, Rabothata traveled not far from Hasani's homestead when returning home from a preaching trip, the ruler called him in to preach to him and a group of people he had already called together, saying that "'Preachers live from the food of Jesus; do not pass by, but come in, I have already called together a congregation of people to whom you can also apportion a word of Jesus'".[18] Rabothata then reported that after he and the people accompanying him had finished preaching to the people, the attendees had asked them a lot of questions in order to better understand the sermon.

It is critical to note that it was not the pastor himself, or a Christian congregation, which initiated contact with the Christian message, but the ruler and his subjects. We see here a group of people who, under their own auspices and fully embedded in their own local situation and everyday life, are taking the initiative to get to know the Christian message and are controlling the means by which this is taking place. We thus see people who are not forced into Christianity, due to the wider historical situation in segregationist and racist South Africa, but who seem to have the scope to initiate the manner in which they are exposed to and engage with Christianity.

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[16] The term "Landschaftsoberhaupt" is imprecise but refers to the person ruling over a region. It is unclear whether Hasani had the status of a *Häuptling* or an *Unterhäuptling* in the terminology normally used by the mission.

[17] "… der der Wortverkündigung nicht abhold ist." (BMW 1/5768, Document 20, S. Rabothata, 31 August 1933, "Arbeitsbericht von Pastor S. Rabothata, Tshakoma", p.2). See also the visit by Rabothata and the members of the Tshakhuma congregation to Ha-Mutsha and Dzwerani in March 1933 where Häuptling Madale of Mukanye had assembled more than one hundred people for a service (BMW BMW 1/5768, Document 20, S. Rabothata, 31 August 1933, "Arbeitsbericht von Pastor S. Rabothata, Tshakoma", p.2-3).

[18] "'Prediger leben von der Speise Jesu; geht nicht vorbei, sondern kommt herein, ich habe hier schon eine Gemeinde versammelt, der ihr auch noch ein Wort von Jesus zuteilen könnt'" (BMW 1/5768, Document 20, S. Rabothata, 31 August 1933, "Arbeitsbericht von Pastor S. Rabothata, Tshakoma", p.2).

Rabothata described the event very differently from how the missionaries described events of preaching to the *heathens* and royals. In situations where they had been called in or encouraged by rulers to give a Christian sermon to rulers and their subjects, the missionaries often reported on them in ways that emphasized their sudden hope that this ruler would be converted. In Rabothata's texts, on the other hand, we have a much better sense that he knew conversion would be a long process, and that people needed time to integrate what they were hearing. In fact, Rabothata's texts seem to reveal that he thought of Christianity as something that is integrated into a person's existing life and understandings, rather than something that breaks completely with past conceptions. There is thus no sense of a hope in Rabothata's texts of an imminent conversion. In this manner, there is not the sense in Rabothata's texts, as in those of the missionaries, of a black/white situation between the non-Christian, traditionalist past and a Christian presence, which excluded each other.

In similar events, the missionaries would have used the situation to preach on issues of good and bad, highlighting the badness of how people led their lives and conceptualized their existence. Rabothata does not seem to have imposed himself onto the people in this manner. It could, of course, be that Rabothata does not tell us that this, too, was a theme in his sermons to *heathens*. The indication is, however, rather the opposite, namely that he attempted to preach the Christian message as something that could be part of people's lives, and not as something that demanded a break from them. Thus, at the end of his report, Rabothata stated that he and the people accompanying him "tried to answer the questions according to our best capabilities".[19] The manner in which Rabothata formulated this comment suggests that he had no sense of himself or the Christians with him as being higher or better than the people they were talking to.

Hasani and the people who had congregated in his homestead were interested in Christianity per se, that is in the issues of Christianity as ideas, but not in issues of materiality and status. This is suggested by the stunning call which Hasani made to convince Rabothata to come and preach to him and his subjects, namely his definition of Christianity as the food provided by Jesus. This definition suggests that Hasani had already understood a very fundamental Christian principle, namely the symbolic equivalence between the sacrifice of Jesus for human beings, a theoretical and theological concept, and the image of food. In

[19] "Wir antworteten nach bestem Vermögen" (BMW 1/5768, Document 20, S. Rabothata, 31 August 1933, "Arbeitsbericht von Pastor S. Rabothata, Tshakoma", p.2).

addition, he had understood that Christianity was a "word" and not real literal food, thus that it sustained people on a spiritual level rather than on a physical level. What this suggests is that Hasani at least, if not his subjects as well, had listened very carefully to what the Christians were preaching and had integrated it sufficiently to be able to formulate it back to the Christians in such a "Christian" manner that they could not decline to come and preach to him. The relationship of rulers to Christianity took a different, seemingly more material form as well. This is that Rabothata's reports reveal that schools had become of great concern to rulers.

Thus, Rabothata reported on the opening of a new school in the area of Tshifulanani under *Häuptling* Mugaguli in January 1933. He commented that the *heathens* there were very happy that a school was now available to them in their area.[20] It is possibly the same *Häuptling*, a couple of months later, who, together with his elders, attended the Sunday service at Tshifulanani, an outstation of Matatani congregation. Rabothata reported how, when they discussed the theme of Jesus as King and his victorious influence on all peoples in the service, the *Häuptling* stood up and said: "'You must also not forget about and dismiss the king of this land. He too, the old one, was once a pupil of Jesus and attended the school at Tshakhuma for a long time. When a smallpox epidemic broke out and the whole country rose in unrest, he returned home. Now there is a school in his country, it is his school. Believe us that we too like to hear the word of Jesus'".[21]

In his report, Rabothata explained that the *Häuptling* was here talking about his father who had died a couple of years previously. His son, the speaker of the words, was one of the first pupils at the new school and was, in Rabothata's description, one of the most advanced. What is important to note in the words of the *Häuptling* is the equivalence that he creates between the word of Jesus, in the expression that his father was a "pupil of Jesus" and the indication that they liked to "hear the word of Jesus", and learning at school. It could, of course, be that the *Häuptling* created this equivalence purposefully, in that the school was his

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[20] BMW 1/5768, Document 20, S. Rabothata, 31 August 1933, "Arbeitsbericht von Pastor S. Rabothata, Tshakoma", p.1.

[21] "'Ihr müsst auch nicht den König dieses Landes vergessen und verwerfen. Auch er, der Alte, war einst ein Schüler Jesu und hat lange in Tshakoma die Schule besucht. Als dann die Poken[sic] ausbrachen und das ganze Land darnach in Unruhe kam.,[sic] kehrte er in seine Heimat zurück. Nun ist hier in seinem Lande diese Schule, es ist seine Schule. Glaubt uns dass auch wir gerne Jesu Wort hören'" (BMW 1/5768, Document 24, Simson Ravhuthatha [Rabothata], 22 February 1935, "Jahresbericht 1934", p.1).

primary purpose but that he hid that behind a veneer of Christian talk which he knew was necessary to retain the support of the missionaries for the school. I suggest, however, that a further indication in the quote suggests otherwise.

In his speech, the *Häuptling* mentioned that his father had been a pupil at the school on Tshakhuma mission station until a smallpox epidemic broke out in the Soutpansberg. The manner in which the *Häuptling* related this event, as reported through Rabothata and then translated by Ludwig Giesekke, suggests that the smallpox epidemic might not only have been the *occasion* when the father had returned home, but that the epidemic had been the direct *reason* for the return. When the *Häuptling* stated that the whole region had been in unrest, there might be a suggestion in his words that the people at the time saw the epidemic as a direct consequence of a royal and heir to a throne attending school and engaging with Christianity. If I am identifying the real reason for the unrest correctly, the father of the *Häuptling* had engaged with Christianity in its own terms, as a spiritual matter transmitted to a large extent through the vehicles of textuality which needed to be acquired through the reading and writing skills learnt at school. I would argue that in this sense the father of the *Häuptling*, as well as the subjects of his family's area, saw Christianity as more than just a means to acquire an education that could grant access to a wider set of resources and opportunities, but as a thought structure that could, in spiritual and physical ways, endanger their own worldview and being. This is expressed in a statement made by people attending the service that "it is not good to be without the teaching of Jesus and we heathens also like to hear God's word".[22]

A similar support for education was expressed in 1938 by *Häuptling* Khangale at Manamani who, as Rabothata explained, "respects the growth of the school and loves God's word".[23] When Rabothata visited Khangale who was ill, the *Häuptling* expressed that he wanted to see the school grow and for the school building to be covered with zinc sheets. He wished to see the Lutheran church open a proper school in his village.

What becomes evident from these descriptions is that the equation of education and the school is not just made by the royal rulers and possibly their subjects, but also by

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[22] "'Es ist nicht gut ohne Jesu Lehre zu sein und auch wir Heiden hören gerne Gottes Wort'" (BMW 1/5768, Document 24, Simson Ravhuthatha [Rabothata], 22 February 1935, "Jahresbericht 1934", p.2).

[23] "Der Häuptling Khangale ehrt das Wachsen derselben und hat Gottes Wort lieb" (BMW 1/5768, Document 39, Simson Rabothata, January 1939, "Bericht vom IV. Quartal 1938. Aus der Arbeit des Pastors Simson Rabothata", p.1).

Rabothata. In 1936, for example, he visited *Häuptling* Nyatema in the vicinity of Vhulaudzi, Tshitavha and Maniini congregations and managed to convince the Häuptling to send the children of his area to school.[24] It is an equivalence that seems automatic and yet, as argued above, an equivalence in which the spiritual nature of the Christian message seems always to have been placed before the more material benefits that education could bring.

Finally, we need to note that it was Rabothata in particular who described the positive reaction of people outside the mission and royals to Christianity in this manner. This raises the possibility that Rabothata was so much more integrated into the communities amongst whom he was working that people did not see his own life as Christian as a possible danger to their own, but as an avenue through which to question and deal with the challenge posed by Christian ideas.

Conclusion

This paper argues that mission Christians did not understand the secular and the sacred to be separated, so that the religious sphere was not considered as separate from the economic, political and social spheres. Thus, when mission Christians were engaged in the local community, this is not because they were driving to be good citizens but because, to them, being a member of the political community was centrally part of being a religious being. The missionaries would have understood these activities with the chiefs as lying outside of the reference of religion.

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[24] BMW 1/5768, Document 35, Simson Ravhuthata [Rabothata], "Bericht des Pastors Simson Ravhuthata in Tshakhuma, Venda, Transvaal, Südafrika, über das Jahr 1936, 1. Januar 1936 bis 31. Dezember 1936. Durch Missionar Karl Drescher in Tshakhuma, zuletzt Dienstes, den 9. Februar 1937 erhalten und durch denselben Sonnabend, den 17. April 1937 aus dem Venda in das Deutsche übersetzt", p.2.

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