Once one has seen God, what is the remedy?[1] Review of Tilman Dedering, *Hate the old and follow the new: Khoekhoe and missionaries in early nineteenth-century Namibia.*
Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997, 205 pages. Hardback.

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> All societies develop moral codes to regulate the social behaviour of their members. These codes are justified in the name of some supernatural being or in reference to a set of sacrosanct principles. The members of any society are more or less imperfectly socialized into accepting the validity of its ethical imperatives and into conforming to its corresponding behavioural norms.[2]

It's been noted more than once that scholarly work on Namibian history is slight. Saunders summarises the status quo some fifteen years ago as follows:

> No professional historian has attempted a general survey; the general histories we have in English are by a sociologist, a lawyer and an amateur who presents a very readable but highly descriptive account.[3]

Since then, Briggite Lau has filled in parts of this hiatus, but the work under review surpasses the scope of these earlier accounts, both by setting out to appraise the socio-economic changes at the onset of the nineteenth century in what is present-day Namibia, as well as examining the cultural-religious component. The publication of Dedering's 1990 dissertation thus not only makes valuable archival material accessible beyond the confines of academic inquiry, but also breaks with a past of conspicuous silence on this topic.

The book is well organised. After the introductory Chapter I, the next three chapters detail the *dramatis personae*. In Chapter II, "Land and People" the setting is described, while Chapter III, "Hat wearers, sheep hunters and Oorlams", sketches the socio-political situation at the Cape's northwestern frontier, and Chapter IV, "Hate the old and follow the new" depicts the various missionaries, as well as the attitudes and desires of their Societies at the time. Chapter V, "The North-Western frontier in turmoil" and Chapter VI, "Southern Namibia in the 1830s and 1840s" focus on the interaction between these people in Nama- and Damaraland. Chapter VII recapitulates and concludes the presentation. The text is supplemented with an extensive bibliography and index.

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[1] Sylvia Plath, 'Ariel'.

[2] Richard Ned Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland. The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy (* 1976), pp. 15-16.

[3] C. Saunders, *Namibia: Past and Present*, Occasional Papers No. 4, Centre for African Studies (1983), University of Cape Town.

This detailed account of events in Southern Namibia is very good reading, and on this level, the author displays both sensitivity and erudition. Apart from a few inaccuracies in footnotes, for example no. 88, on p. 26 should read no. 8 and a few typographical errors, this is a well-prepared edition.

It is somewhat regrettable then, that the book was brought out as part of a series on "Mission history" (in the series *Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv, no. 2*), for it is very much the history of the Namibian people as a whole from around 1800 till 1840, during which missionaries played only a minor role. In fact the missionaries at that time merely paved the way for their successors, whose influence was decisive in the colonisation of South West Africa by Germany in 1884.

Although early missionary activity in this region was not absent, Dedering begins his evaluation of missionary labours with the arrival of the first London Missionary Society representatives in 1805, namely, the brothers C. and A. Albrecht and Br. Seidenfaden.[4] Through reports back to their employers, we are presented with a picture of these missionaries as "ordinary" people working in an extraordinary environment, a viewpoint also adopted by J. and J. Comaroff.[5] Any discussion of missionaries, however, must surely bring questions of interpretation to the fore and in order to provide a balanced perspective, it is also obviously important to provide material from the indigenous perspective.

Although first hand information regarding indigenous attitudes to the missionaries is sparse, is not altogether absent.[6] It is surprising, therefore, to note that Dedering has

[4] Cf. N. Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone, 1700-1815", Ph.D, University of Cape Town (1995), p. 435.

[5] J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution. The dialectics of Modernity on a South African frontier*, Vol. 2 (1997).

[6] There is one letter dated "Bijna aan de onderkant van de Groot Rivier, de 9. Februarij, 1803" [*Almost at the bottom of the Great River, 9th of February 1803*] two years before Dedering's account commences, from Jager and Titus Afrikaner asking the Cape Colony officials for a missionary:

> Gehoort hebbende van een leraar die een van de andere leraars de groot revier is af gekomen om naa Kammis te gaan; dat de vroome mensche aan de Cab Leraars rond uit stuure, Zoo verzoek ik alschoon [ofschoon] dat ik de Groote Kwaad doender ben evenwel ootmoedig om een Leraar want ik kan niet zonder Leraar meer blyven en ik zal van nu af aan alle kwaad af laate en zoeke hulpe voor myne ziele die ander verlooren moet gaan."ag help mij schielik eer is sterfs en bij de andere Leraars boven in de Revier zou ik wel gaan maar die menschen zoude mij niet verdraagen ten minste al zouden de kinders die dag stout zyn kwaad spreeken en hier is ook nog veel volk die gaan leeren wiel."
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> [*Having heard from a missionary who is one of the missionaries who came down to the Orange River to travel further to Kammis, that the pious people in the Cape sent out missionaries, I request, although I am a big sinner, nevertheless [I ask] humbly for a missionary, because I cannot stay any longer without a missionary and from now on I will forsake all evil and seek help for my soul, which otherwise would be lost. Oh, help me please before I die. [Although] I would like to go to the other missionaries, up the river, but the people there would not accept me, at least when the children were to be naughty [they would] speak evil [of us]. Furthermore there are other people here who would also like to learn.*]

only made reference to the "Quellen",[7] a typescript of missionary sources from the Namibian State archives, which inevitably gives the book an albocentric touch.

Dedering continues to cling to his characterization of the missionaries as "ordinary" people, a perception that is perhaps understandable when his primary material was largely limited to those missionary reports sent back to Europe. But, the very real limitations implicit in this Von Rankean paradigm is that it tends to restrict the range of interpretative questions asked of this material.[8] Not surprisingly, this narrows the cognizance of missionary activities as a whole and it is hard, as a result, to infer what it was that these missionaries were up against. (Infra.)

On one level it is perhaps possible to adopt Dedering's somewhat disingenuous argument that it is unrewarding to speculate on changes in indigenous social/cultural structures because the earlier composition of these socio-economic arrangements is hidden from history (p. 175). Yet, if one accepts this dismissive argument with regard to one side of the equation, it is hard to see how Dedering avoids discussing the nature of the missionaries and vocation; how "ordinary" could a person be, who would go to such lengths to follow a calling or engage in a desire to travel to unknown and/or dangerous African territories during the early nineteenth century?

In other words, the socio-cultural context of this work is largely missing; the parameters that defined both what the missionaries and indigenous people could do, as well as the their own perceptions of the reasons and consequences of their actions, are nowhere clearly explicated.

Dedering also advocates the view that the culture of the Cape-Oorlam Khoekhoe was basically the same as that of the Namaland Khoekhoe, and infers that the Cape-Oorlams did not "invade" these territories, as was previously believed.[9] Instead, he argues that the Oorlams initially settled down with the full consent of the local inhabitants (applying for the necessary permits and paying tribute). His references, however, are from later periods and as transpires from Jager and Titus Afrikaner's letter, (quoted in full in footnote 6) these initial contacts were far from being free of animosity, and the issue is thus far from being resolved.

In this respect it is also unclear why Dedering neglects to differentiate between the Bergdamara and the Beestdamara.[10] Moreover, the Damara (in general) are

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And one cannot help wondering how history would have changed if the "Heeren alle die God lief het Vroome menschen aan de Caab" [*Gentlemen, all who love God, pious people in the Cape*] to whom this letter is addressed, had given Jager and Titus a positive answer.

[7] 'Quellen zur Geschichte Südafrikas', (typescript; missionary sources compiled by Heinrich Vedder, 1928.)

[8] John Bottomley, "Paradigmatic confusion in the history of the 'New South Africa'", *New Contree*, 39 (1997), p. 33.

[9] Dedering, *Hate the Old*, p. 64, "The Oorlam newcomers, did not enter Namibia as conquerors, as the common view of an "Oorlam invasion" insinuates". This view is refuted in B. Lau, *Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time* (1987) and B. Lau (ed.), *Charles John Andersson. Trade and Politics in Central Namibia, 1860-1864* (1989).

[10] The former are a Nama-speaking tributary group, whereas the latter were cattle owning, Bantu-speaking people.

characterised as being the victims of Khoekhoe activities.[11] From the correspondence of the Oorlam leader Jan Jonker Afrikaner (1820-1889), however, it is known that he was raised together with the paramount-chief of the Beestdamara, Kamaharero (c. 1820-1890), whereas Jan Jonker Afrikaner always speaks of the Bergdamaras as his subjects.[12]

It seems unwarranted, furthermore, that Dedering portrays central Namibian trade relations solely in terms of "*stolen* Herero cattle" (p. 173), and identifies the Nama-Oorlams as the thieves: "From the 1840s, the upper echelons of the raiding-trading network were mainly occupied by Oorlams, or acculturated Nama, who had access to European goods and firearms. Many Damara, Herero and San were forced into a new underclass of exploited servants and herders. (p. 177)

In short, the book leaves one with the monocausal impression that the missionaries were "poor", "ordinary people" in an inhospitable, harsh environment, confronted by "cunning" Africans. Yet, in later years the missionary Hahn characterized his missionary colleagues as being largely "dumb".[13] At the same time, even if we assume the Afrikaner Oorlam leaders to be capable (or even shrewd) chiefs who were manipulating the missionaries for their own ends, this would not be an unnatural situation, for doubtless, they would have been imprudent or even derelict in their duty as leaders of their people not to have done so.

As to the central question concerning how the missionaries were able to gain control over a fundamentally different, yet otherwise perfectly functioning society,[14] the best

[11] In later years, Jan Jonker Afrikaner explains it as follows:

> "And they also say that we enslaved the Damaras, but it is not true, what they say. See, the Damaras, which were a nation, made peace with my father. Thus the Damaras stand underneath us as much as we stand underneath the Damaras, for we are two peace-loving nations. When something befalls the Damaras we help them; if something befalls us, the Damaras help us. That is how it was, not slavery. Then, missionary Hahn gave the Damaras advice: that the Damaras should stand up and fight us, drive us away and that they then would own the land. That is the advice he gave, that is how the war between us started, because of the advice of the missionary." (Jan Jonker Afrikaner to Wodehouse, 22 April 1869, CA GH19/10)

[12] See also A. Heywood, B. Kau and R. Ohly, *Warrior leaders sages and outcasts in the Namibian past. Narratives collected from Herero sources for the Michael Scott Oral Records Project 1985-1986* (1992), pp. 16-17.

[13] B. Lau (ed.), *Carl Hugo Hahn Tagebucher, 1837-1860* (1985), p. 669. Carl Hahn 1853: "Die Gesellschaften sind dem Maxim gefolgt, für dummen Hottentotten passten dumme Missionare, wenigstens ungebildete, ..." [*The societies have followed the maxim that for the dumb Hottentots (Khoekhoe), dumb missionaries, at least uneducated ones, suited best....*]

[14] In his account of the northern Cape frontier a few decades earlier N. Penn, "Northern Cape", p. 434 offers us the following deliberations:

> What is more debatable, however, is whether the San were ever able to conceptualise, adequately, the nature of the forces that were overwhelming them. The stories and myths of the /xam, which were collected by Bleek and Lloyd, suggest an essentially ahistorical understanding, where events and things were fitted into a conceptual grid of essentially mythic significance. Theirs was a reality which included dreams, trance, out of body travel, therianthropic forms, spirit possession and shamanistic powers. Ancient stories had great explanatory power. Certain animals had magical properties and were much easier to understand than strange white men. "They think we are lions", said Gordon, and

Dedering can offer is that "[The] chiefs [must have] found it more difficult to assemble and control followers, because the missionaries offered at least a temporary alternative to ambitious clan heads, impoverished individuals and women looking for a more prestigious social position" (p. 173); and that:

> [The] missionaries offered spiritual and ideological innovation that attracted a larger following of Africans, especially women and children who found themselves excluded from socially rewarding position. [...] that those who had no role to play in the patriarchal society found a second voice at the mission stations where they were appreciated. (p. 93)

These sort of explanations fly in the face of what contemporary observers mention about social role-modeling in Khoekhoe societies.[15] It may be true that the earlier accounts are not entirely devoid of romantic ideas about "noble savages" and what is now termed "the Otherness", but Dedering's story also unfolds rather one-sidedly, by failing to offer any context within which to examine such issues. As a touchstone, Penn, writing from the perspective of the indigenous people observes, that there may have been "the cruel disappointment of betrayed expectations - [that] the missionaries had not played their part."[16]

From the vantage point of the late twentieth century one cannot help but have a different view, but there can be little doubt that the native populations violated the behavioural norms of the missionaries. Because of the scarcity of written documentation however, the Khoekhoe are necessarily under-represented in this portrait. It seems unwarranted to me, to provide an interpretative accent, where so little is known for certain.

Regardless of these criticisms, this book is a welcome contribution, for it ministers to direct our attention to, and augment our knowledge of, these distant societies. This investigation has clearly opened the door for a deeper and more profound reassessment of the impact religio-cultural colonialism has had on radically different societies.

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here we should understand that sorcerers who worked evil at night were thought to assume the form of lions. None of this is meant to imply that the San's mental universe was inferior to, or more absurd than, that of a Dutch frontier farmer. It is merely to say that the focussed drive of the Europeans, with a cluster of concepts based upon Christian certainties and a notion of power which derived from material gain, proved to be of greater utility, in the long struggle for survival on the Cape frontier, than a world view ....."

[15] E. E. Mossop, (ed.) *The journal of Hendrik Jakob Wikar (1779)*, Van Riebeeck Society No. 15 (1935); T. Hahn, *Tsuni-IGoam. The supreme being of the Khoi-Khoi.*(1881), pp. 19, 21, 28; and details presented in Penn, "Northern Cape" (passim).

[16] Penn, "Northern Cape", p. 483.