

The BaKhurutshe Anglicans of Tonota Religious Persecution in the Bechuanaland Protectorate

By Bruce S. Bennett and Maitseo M.M. Bolaane

University of Botswana (bennett@info.bw; bolaanem@mopipi.ub.bw)

The case of the BaKhurutshe of Tonota¹ was a curious episode in the inter-war history of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, in which it was alleged that Tshekedi Khama, regent of the BaNgwato 1925–49,² was persecuting a small group of people for practicing Anglicanism, thus violating the official monopoly of the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.). Although the colonial administration's response ostensibly started strongly with support for religious freedom, it did not, and (as we shall see) was never likely to, maintain this stance.

The sparsely populated Bechuanaland Protectorate had been acquired by Britain mainly for now-obsolete strategic reasons, and was seen as having little economic value. It was one of the three "High Commission Territories" under the high commissioner for South Africa but actually ruled mainly by its own resident commissioner. It was run on a minimalist basis, with most of the territory being administered as large "Tribal Reserves." These chiefdoms were not the same as the precolonial kingdoms, but neither were they British creations; they were the outcome of a fusion between the traditional kingdoms and British overlordship, administered by the chiefs under the supervision of a few officials whose resources seldom stretched beyond tax collection and avoiding trouble. The Bamangwato Reserve (GammaNgwato) was the largest. As in other Tswana societies, different ethnic groups were incorporated in a hierarchy within it; at the top were the true BaNgwato³ whose totem was the *phuti* (duiker).

The general policy of the chiefs was to have only one missionary society—one church—in their reserve. In most cases, including the Bamangwato Reserve, this was the (Congregationalist) L.M.S. The classic case was GammaNgwato, where King Khama III, an early Christian convert and staunch believer, had used the Church as part of his state-building.⁴ The pattern of Tswana adoption of a neo-Erastian church as an institution of state-building emerges even more clearly if the Southern Tswana, who by the twentieth

¹ Sometimes "Tonoto" in contemporary sources.

² Tshekedi was one of the most dynamic figures in the colony: young, highly intelligent, autocratic, intransigent, manipulative but visionary, and determined both to maintain his autonomy and to resist local insubordination.

³ The original core group, as opposed to other Tswana groups such as BaKwena who had become incorporated within the polity but whose totems reflected a different history.

⁴ See Q.N. Parsons, "Khama III, The Bamangwato, and the British, with Special Reference to 1895–1923" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1973), Ch. 6. The irony of the Congregationalists founding state churches was noted at the time.

century had been absorbed into South Africa, are also considered.⁵ Such patterns were not unknown elsewhere⁶; what was unusual was the continuation of such arrangements into the colonial period.

In some other reserves, chiefs had allowed other missions to enter in order to provide services (notably, the Seventh Day Adventists established health services, an area where the L.M.S. was very weak) and inroads were made by rival churches in some places, including the Anglicans. Also, other chiefs, when in conflict with the L.M.S., did not have the position of strength Khama had built up over the years.

For most of the twentieth century, until the approach of independence, rival churches were considered a threat to the authority of the chief. An important early case occurred in 1901–1903 when an African preacher named Mothowagae, in the Bangwaketse Reserve, split from the L.M.S. and formed his own church. Initially he was allowed to do so, but when his church reached a critical mass it became an open challenge to the chief, with Mothowagae declaring that he (Mothowagae) had bewitched the rain. Only when this became clear did the colonial government decide that Mothowagae must be forced to submit to the chief's authority. He was still allowed to carry on his church, although it lost popularity.⁷ It has been noted that in this case the chief, churches and colonial authorities did not follow a consistent pattern of support, but leaned first one way then another. This episode may have been a significant learning experience, but if so the lessons learned were unfortunate. An alternative church had initially been allowed and it is clear that the resident commissioner, Ralph Williams, was opposed to any interference in religious activity as such.⁸ Nevertheless, the result was political trouble.

A possible parallel to the BaKhurutshe case had occurred shortly after this when the BaKgatla ba-ga-Mmanana, who were trying to assert independence from their BaNgwaketse overlords, broke from the L.M.S. and established a national Bo-Mothowagae church.⁹ Although this was suppressed, Tshekedi was no doubt aware of the example.

Thus, rival churches could indeed be a real political threat, at least sometimes. This raises the question of whether these movements should be seen as “really” religious, as political challenges, or interpreted in some other way. An example may help here. In 1937 a political movement called *Ipelegeng* formed with the aim of restoring Molefi, the

⁵ Q.N. Parsons, “Independency and Ethiopianism among the Tswana in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” *Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, October 1969–April 1970), 56–71.

⁶ See Claire Laux, “‘Modèle Clovis,’ ‘modèle Moshesh,’ ou ‘malentendu productif?’: Part des missionnaires et des chefs dans l’installation de ‘théocraties chrétiennes’ à Tahiti, Hawaii, aux Tonga, aux îles Cook, dans l’archipel des Gambier et à Wallis et Fortuna,” *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 113 (2001–2002), 121–33.

⁷ Don Rempel Boschman, *The Conflict Between New Religious Movements and the State in the Bechuanaland Protectorate Prior to 1949* (Gaborone: University of Botswana, 1994), 9–14.

⁸ Boschman, *Conflict*, 13.

⁹ Parsons, “Independency and Ethiopianism,” 63.

suspended chief of the BaKgatla. When this was suppressed, it was relaunched as a branch of the Zion Christian Church.¹⁰ In 1945, a restored Molefi tried to dispense with it, but found it was now far more than just a pro-Molefi church. After a persecution, which included the flogging of Molefi's own mother, the Zionists left the Reserve and eventually settled their own village in the Tuli area.¹¹ As this illustrates, the significance of a movement did not necessarily remain constant, with an apparent trend toward religious significance as original additional meanings become less relevant. In the final analysis, African religious believers are entitled to have their own self-classification taken seriously.

More new churches arose after the Mothowagae case, and the trend was to suppress them, with the British backing the chiefs.¹² Chiefs routinely suppressed and penalized breakaway and dissident churches. Again and again Ethiopian churches, Zionists, and Pentecostals inspired by preaching heard in South Africa were banned, and sometimes punished. Most cases probably never came to European attention at all. This went on as late as the 1950s, when Zionists were physically abused in the Bamangwato Reserve.¹³

The case of the BaKhurutshe was exceptional not because of the events, as some contemporary observers seem to have thought, but because the colonial government felt unable either to ignore them or simply to support them. This was, of course, because the people involved belonged to the Anglican Church,¹⁴ which ought normally to have had the best connections in a British colony.

Although the case has been mentioned in many accounts of Tshekedi's career, few of these examine it in detail.¹⁵ Diana Wylie deals with the episode in her study of the decline of the Ngwato state, concluding that Tshekedi's policy was ultimately a failure: he was unable to force loyalty, and the end result demonstrated "the power of ordinary people

¹⁰ A large church, the central organization of which is located in South Africa.

¹¹ Cheneso Maphorisa, "The Zionist Village of Lentswe-le-Moriti," *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 13, 1-2 (1999), 108-39.

¹² Boschman, *Conflict*, 21.

¹³ Susan Williams, *Colour Bar: The Triumph of Seretse Khama and His Nation* (London: Allen Lane, 2006). This was in the period of "Native Authority" rule following the Seretse Khama marriage affair. Further examples can be found in J.N. Amanze, *Botswana Handbook of Churches* (Gaborone: Pula Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Contemporary sources often refer to the "Church of England," but in South Africa, this title had been legally appropriated by a schismatic group, and it should be avoided for the main Anglican Church in communion with Canterbury, then officially named the Church of the Province of South Africa. It was the latter that was involved in the events of this article.

¹⁵ See Mary Benson, *Tshekedi Khama* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 57; Boschman, *Conflict*, 28-29. The episode is referred to in a Ngwato praise poem to Tshekedi Khama, c. 1936, which seems to attribute Tshekedi's intervention to the need to resolve conflict between Anglican and other BaKhurutshe (*Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs*, trans. and ed. I. Schapera [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965], 241); this interpretation lacks support in contemporary sources.

to evade the directives of the Ngwato state.”¹⁶ British policy is seen as contradictory in the face of such a difficult situation. Paul Landau, in a more detailed analysis,¹⁷ argues that the BaKhurutshe’s Anglicanism posed a threat to the legitimacy of the theocratic Ngwato state. By invoking the status of the Anglican Church, the BaKhurutshe “short-circuited” the logic of Khama’s state church. Landau’s work undermines the suggestion that the religious issue was merely a cloak for particularism, and confirms the degree of ill treatment suffered by the dissidents—something about which even later Anglicans had been skeptical.¹⁸ The present article, building especially on the work of Landau, attempts a detailed analysis of the trajectory of British policy, and sets it in the context of the subtle relationship between religion and power in the Protectorate.

There have been a number of studies of new religious movements in Botswana history. These have often tended to see conflicts in terms of attitudes to “Ethiopianism,” but the BaKhurutshe case indicates that this may be a red herring. Ethiopian churches got into trouble because they were the churches that operated illegally. When, in Tonota, a mainstream church broke the monopoly, it also got into trouble.

The one-church monopoly did not necessarily mean that members of the *morafe*¹⁹ were compelled to attend the monopoly church (although sometimes attendance was enforced), and the Congregationalist churches set a high standard that meant only a minority qualified as full members. In most reserves, many remained outside even nominal adherence, and traditional religion was not formally proscribed. Tswana traditional religion had to a large extent lacked public institutions separable from the chiefship—perhaps a factor making state churches a logical development—and the major rituals performed by or under the aegis of the chief tended to lapse with his conversion. Some rituals disappeared, some were replaced with Christian ceremonies, and some were continued less formally and publicly, either by the chief or others. The household aspects of the traditional belief system, above all the practices of “doctoring,” remained current even among many Christians. What was excluded was less rival theology than rival organization: schism rather than heresy was the issue. The Tonota Anglicans were a threat because they would constitute a new organization independent of the chief. More fundamentally, both the pre-conversion identification of public ritual with chiefship and the subsequent identification of the church with the nation meant that religious pluralism was construed as political disaffection.

The sensitivity of Bechuanaland Protectorate chiefs to alternative churches may be connected to the peculiar nature of the Tswana chiefship. The Tswana pattern of settlement

¹⁶ Diane Wylie, *A Little God: The Twilight of Patriarchy in a Southern African Chieftom* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1991), 160.

¹⁷ Paul Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995), 161–73.

¹⁸ See Bessie Head, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1981), 32, in which a later Anglican priest sees the story as somewhat comic.

¹⁹ Traditionally translated “tribe”: the Tswana polity, headed by a *kgosi kgolo* (paramount chief or king).

involved very large concentrations of people in villages (*metse*). This concentration entailed travel over considerable distances, between village, lands, and cattle post. It is very doubtful that such large concentrations were natural economic units: rather, it seems more likely that they reflected social and political functions.²⁰ The maintenance of such a large settlement made possible the ordered social life that was the Tswana ideal. In precolonial times, it also facilitated defense. The community had to be constituted by political authority. Although there were of course some economic functions attached to the central village, in terms of trade and cattle, it was a unit that ordinary people had to be held within. In contrast to an urban settlement to which people are attracted by economic incentives even against political will, the village was becoming a unit larger than the economic optimum, in which people were forced to remain. Nineteenth-century observers noted the temptation to desert the village for lands and cattle post, and after the breakdown in chiefly authority in the late twentieth century a similar tendency was noted,²¹ though villages have since acquired new economic functions.

The center was maintained by the political control of the chief, both in direct control of settlement and in ritual that defined and celebrated the social order. No one could begin to plough before the chief gave permission, even though this could mean lost ploughing time in some areas.²² The power of the chief and the centralization of the *motse* were related reciprocally. The large settlement made the chief powerful, and a powerful chief was needed to hold the center together. It is significant that the small communities of dispersed Batswana who had fled chiefly power typically had no identifiable center at all.²³ *Bogosi* (chiefship) did not merely preside over large-scale Tswana society, it constituted it.

This peculiar significance of *bogosi* may help to explain why a relatively open political system should be so sensitive to the appearance of an alternative organization. The Anglican Church was particularly threatening to Tshekedi because of its unusually good links with the upper levels of British administration. Tshekedi showed a particular resentment of the bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman.²⁴ Prickly enough about the resident

²⁰ See R.M.K. Silitshena, "Chiefly Authority and the Organization of Space in Botswana," *Botswana Notes and Records* 11 (1979), 55–67; R.M.K. Silitshena, "Migration and Permanent Settlement at the Lands Area," in R. Renée Hitchcock and Mary R. Smith, eds., *Settlement in Botswana: Proceedings of the Symposium on Settlement in Botswana—the Historical Development of a Human Landscape, National Museum, Gaborone, Botswana, August 4th to 8th, 1980* (Gaborone: Heinemann and Botswana Society, 1982), 220–31.

²¹ Silitshena, "Migration and Permanent Settlement at the Lands Area."

²² This is one of a number of rituals that may have originated, and been quite unproblematic, when the chief ruled only one village, but which became inconvenient once rulers controlled large areas of country and multiple villages. A modern example can be found in the requirement for Swazi princes to be out of the kingdom when the king dies. (We are grateful to Prof. Q.N. Parsons for this point.) Such inconvenience is not of course necessarily useless; in the case of the plowing restriction it had the function of demonstrating power.

²³ J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), I, 147.

²⁴ Wilfrid Gore-Browne until his death in 1928, thereafter Theodore Gibson.

commissioner's power, he resented even more the intrusion of a figure outside the official structure, siding with insubordinate subjects, who might have the ear of high authority. The bishop, once admitted as a legitimate player, would be difficult to deal with; his social standing would give him ready access to the high commissioner, and Establishment-minded English officials might be inclined to extend to him the sorts of informal consultation that existed between the British government and the Church of England hierarchy.

The monopoly church in each reserve has conventionally been referred to as a mission church. These churches were after all started by European missionaries, and were formally affiliated to European-based denominational structures in Southern Africa and beyond. It used to be assumed, therefore, that these churches reflected European initiative and African passive compliance; for African initiative in religion one would have to look to the Ethiopian and African-Independent church movements.

Paul Landau has argued otherwise in his important book *The Realm of the Word*. Landau contends that in the case of GammaNgwato, the church should be seen (after its initial mission origins) more as the artifact of an African initiative, namely that of Khama III's theocratic state-building. Landau significantly refers to this church, as it existed spread throughout Khama's Country, not as the L.M.S., but as the Ngwato Church.²⁵ One could illustrate Landau's point by asking what would have happened had (as might have happened in 1911)²⁶ Khama broken his links with the L.M.S. and called in some other Protestant mission instead. There would have been new missionaries in Serowe, and perhaps a few new hymns. But would it have made much difference to the church spread throughout his kingdom by Batswana *baruti* who answered at least as much to Khama as to any missionary? This was, indeed, recognized at the time: the L.M.S. missionary Jennings complained in 1912 that Khama was the real "head of the church," while the missionary merely "occupies the place of a distinguished stranger."²⁷

The BaKhurutshe were a small Tswana *morafe* seeking to escape the rule of the Tati Company—originally a mining concession, but now exploiting its ownership of a large district in the Northeast. The BaKhurutshe had been L.M.S., but in a mixture of "political factions, dynastic ambitions, and personality clashes"²⁸ a split produced a "Free Church." In 1908 they became Anglican through the ministry of James Toy, a priest of the

²⁵ Some contemporary observers referred to the monopoly churches as "National Churches," drawing a parallel with the Reformation Church of England. See e.g., Benson, *Tshekedi Khama*, 57; I. Schapera, *A History of the BaKgatla-bagaKgafêla* (1942; reprint, Mochudi, Botswana: Phuthadikobo Museum, 1980), 24.

²⁶ The L.M.S. unwisely sought to merge the Ngwato Church into a broad Congregational union, with the declared object of reducing the power of chiefs. Norman Goodall, *A History of the London Missionary Society 1895–1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 285–86; Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 42–45.

²⁷ Boschman, *Conflict*, 41.

²⁸ Parsons, "Independency and Ethiopianism," 63. See also Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 163–64.

Anglican Railway Mission,²⁹ who dealt with them in his “spare time.”³⁰ They decided to seek refuge in Khama’s Country, and their *kgosi* Rauwe³¹ made an agreement with Khama in 1913. Colonial officials played only a minor role in the negotiations, as intermediaries and witnesses. The government was neutral as to whether the BaKhurutshe moved or not; they merely wished to ensure that if they did, no trouble should ensue. “[T]o avoid any misconstruction in the future, the terms of the agreement are left entirely to the decision of the chiefs concerned.”³² Rauwe was asked by the administration to confirm that his people would abstain from beer³³ and “generally ... comply with Chief Khama’s laws.”³⁴

An agreement was made in *kgotla*³⁵ between Khama and Rauwe, and a written statement of the terms was delivered to the resident commissioner. In the written agreement, the BaKhurutshe agreed to be subject to Khama “as in former times,” a reference to an earlier sojourn in Khama’s Country. They agreed “to submit to all the laws which are enforced by Chief Khama some of which are hereunder recorded.”³⁶ Beer was mentioned, but not religion, though the L.M.S.’s monopoly could clearly be described as a law “enforced by Chief Khama.” However, as the phrase “some of which” hinted, there were other terms agreed orally. About 2600 BaKhurutshe settled at Tonota.³⁷

Although it seems clear that the oral terms included some provision about religion, its precise form was later disputed. The acting resident commissioner, in reporting the agreement to the high commissioner, wrote:

One question remains to be decided by Khama and that is a religious one. Rawe belongs to the Church of England and desires that the Catechist and Schoolmaster of that Church at present resident with him shall accompany him. Khama, fearing trouble with the nonconformist missionaries of the London Missionary Society if native ministers, who are apt to take too much upon themselves, are left in charge, is disposed to insist on a white clergyman. The idea seems to me quite sound, but

²⁹ The Railway Mission operated in the “railway corridor” which was outside the chiefs’ jurisdiction. Its ministry was mainly to railway workers, many of whom were Coloureds or poor whites. James Roden, *Northward from Cape Town: The Anglican Church Railway Mission in Southern Africa 1885–1980* (Appleton Roebuck, UK: Sacram Publishing, 1999).

³⁰ Archdeacon Etheridge (Salisbury) to S.P.G., 18 December 1913, SPG/CLR Mashonaland, U.S.P.G. Papers (from notes by Neil Parsons); Roden, *Northward from Cape Town*, 91–92.

³¹ “Rauwe” is the standard orthography, but he himself usually signed his name “Rawe.”

³² Assistant Commissioner Francistown to Resident General Manager, Tati Concessions Ltd, 5 May 1913, S.34/5, Botswana National Archives, Gaborone (hereinafter B.N.A.). (Until 1923 the Protectorate had two divisions, north and south, each under an assistant commissioner.) If such language was used in discussions with Khama, it is perhaps understandable that Tshekedi was nonplussed when the administration queried the agreement only a few years later.

³³ GammaNgwato was strictly prohibitionist.

³⁴ Assistant Commissioner Francistown to Rawe, 20 May 1913, S.34/5, B.N.A.

³⁵ Public assembly of the polity for political or judicial business, presided over by the *kgosi*.

³⁶ Agreement signed by Rawe, Khama, and Rawe’s headmen, 1913, S.34/5, B.N.A.

³⁷ Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 165, giving reasons for discounting an alternative higher figure.

whether Rawe will be able to procure and support a European clergyman is very doubtful.³⁸

Most later accounts, however, held that Rauwe had agreed to join the Ngwato Church. One version is that it was agreed not to “bring the English Church into Khama’s country.”³⁹ Tshekedi Khama, in appealing to this agreement, stressed the point that the oral agreement in *kgotla* was to Batswana the substantive agreement, no less binding than the written version. In fact, the colonial officials never disputed this, arguing rather that such an agreement was invalid whatever its form. The fact that it was not written may not, however, be accidental: Khama was no doubt well aware that to put it in writing, and on record with the colonial government, might attract attention and cause trouble. A verbal agreement gave him obedience; a written agreement would merely expose him to possible criticism. It is possible that Khama had, as Macgregor, the acting resident commissioner reported, left the question open to a compromise whereby the BaKhurutshe would have a white priest; but at the least it seems that Khama expressed himself differently to Rauwe and to the officials. Like Tshekedi, he could make use of the differences between European and Tswana custom when it suited him. It would appear, incidentally, that the L.M.S. missionary was aware of the agreement and indeed advised Khama on how to block access to the Anglicans.⁴⁰

The first reports of trouble to reach the administration came in September 1925, during the brief reign of Sekgoma II following Khama’s death (although there had in fact been some earlier clashes⁴¹). The BaKhurutshe of Tonota had heard that Sekgoma planned to bring them to Serowe, and it was rumored that they were planning to resist.⁴² On enquiry, it was found that Sekgoma was investigating reported insubordination of the BaKhurutshe, including unsatisfactory tax collection and “excessive beer drinking.” It had been decided in *kgotla* that the BaKhurutshe’s settlement should be moved closer to Serowe, though no action had been taken and Sekgoma was still making enquiries. It was noted that there was a religious aspect, with Anglicans being allegedly the principal offenders, but Sekgoma professed himself unwilling to interfere in the religious question even though he upheld the L.M.S. monopoly. As he presented it, that was a secondary issue.⁴³

³⁸ Acting Resident Commissioner (J.C. Macgregor) to High Commissioner, 28 July 1913, S.34/5, B.N.A.

³⁹ Bishop of Kimberley & Kuruman to High Commissioner, 26 January 1928, S.34/5, B.N.A. (Tshekedi quoted Khama as having said “If you want to come to the Reserve, there is only one denomination ... you needn’t come unless under these conditions.” Resident Magistrate Serowe to Government Secretary, 22 September 1926, S.34/5, B.N.A.)

⁴⁰ Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 165–66.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 166–67.

⁴² Resident Magistrate Francistown to Government Secretary, 11 September 1925, DCS6/1, B.N.A.

⁴³ Acting Resident Magistrate Serowe to Government Secretary, Mafeking, 19 September 1925, DCS6/1, B.N.A.

The death of Sekgoma prevented the matter going any further at this point. In 1926, however, the new regent, Tshekedi Khama, took up the issue, and the BaKhurutshe were ordered to move. They reported this to the police early in September 1926, presenting the issue as one of religious persecution. The resident magistrate⁴⁴ advised them to comply, and complain later.⁴⁵

Acting Resident Commissioner R.M. Daniel asked for clarification. He found the allegation of religious persecution “difficult to believe.”⁴⁶ It is worth noting that Daniel was generally sympathetic to Tshekedi. When in November 1929 the high commissioner indicated that he was becoming dissatisfied with Tshekedi’s behavior—mentioning the BaKhurutshe case as an example⁴⁷—Daniel wrote a comprehensive defense of the Chief, rejecting all the charges made against him. “In the first place,” Daniel wrote, “I do not consider that Tshekedi’s decisions on important matters are his own, except where he is quite certain that they are in accordance with the views of the tribe, nor do I think that the Chief can be said to have mismanaged his affairs.” All important matters were discussed with senior BaNgwato or in the *kgotla*. “As you know he is most careful not to do anything for which he will not be able to account in a satisfactory manner when the time comes to relinquish his regency.” The Batswana were “very tenacious of their privilege to rule themselves under the tribal system” and some of Tshekedi’s actions stemmed from a fear of compromising this situation. Daniel noted that the chiefs of the Bechuanaland Protectorate had traditionally understood “advice” from the administration to be advice in the colloquial sense, and not in the British constitutional sense of something binding. Tshekedi had always obeyed instructions that were presented as such.

Daniel listed examples of Tshekedi’s progressive policies, notably in the fields of education and stock improvement, and quoted comments from resident magistrates on Tshekedi’s politeness to officials. He summed up his opinion thus: “I think Tshekedi as a Chief is one of the best in the Protectorate. He does not drink or squander his own or the tribal funds, his whole outlook is for the good of the tribe.”⁴⁸

In Serowe, Tshekedi held a *kgotla* meeting over three days from 19 to 21 October 1926. In ordering the recalcitrant BaKhurutshe to come to Serowe, he made a confusing speech in which he both asserted and denied that religion was a major issue. On the one hand, he defended the validity of the original agreement between Khama and Rauwe. The

⁴⁴ Title of the main colonial official in a district. Officially renamed “district commissioner” in 1936, although this title was apparently in use from 1930.

⁴⁵ Resident Magistrate Serowe to Government Secretary, 13 September 1926, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁴⁶ Acting Resident Commissioner (Daniel) to Resident Magistrate Serowe, 16 September 1926, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁴⁷ “Although His Excellency has consistently upheld the authority of the Chief, he feels that Tshekedi has shown an increasing tendency to resist and even to disregard the advice that has been given him, or at best to accept it sulkily. His attitude to ... the Tonoto affair was not altogether satisfactory....” B.E.H. Clifford to Lt-Col. Daniel, 5 November 1929, DO119/1009, Public Record Office, London (hereinafter P.R.O.).

⁴⁸ Daniel to Clifford, 7 December 1929, DO119/1009, P.R.O.

fact that religion was not mentioned in the written terms was irrelevant: it had been agreed in *kgotla*, and the BaKhurutshe must keep to the agreement. They were not forced to change religion, since they had the choice of leaving the Reserve and practicing Anglicanism in the Tati District. On the other hand, he argued that religion was being used as a pretext: “we are not discussing a religious matter.” The BaKhurutshe were being urged by their Anglican priests to resist.

Tshekedi then reverted to the theme that a new religion was not permissible. Pluralism must be nipped in the bud: “We never wanted two denominations in this country. No man will say ‘I’ll allow this fire to spread and then put it out when it is a big fire.’”⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Daniel had already written to the high commissioner. He proposed to endorse Tshekedi’s exclusion of the Anglican Church from the reserve, though the BaKhurutshe must be allowed to cross into the Tati District for worship without harassment. “It seems to me that as the tribe as a whole (owing no doubt to past experience of splits over religious matters in other tribes) wishes to have adherents of the London Missionary Society only in the Bamangwato Reserve, and, as the BaKhurutshe in consequence of being allowed to reside in that Reserve agreed to have no Church of England teachers or Ministers amongst them, the Chief should be supported in his contention that these 37 natives should leave his Reserve if they persist in introducing Church of England teaching at Tonoto—provided of course that this is the conclusion come to on the 19th October.”⁵⁰

The high commissioner, Lord Athlone,⁵¹ was horrified. He did not approve of the agreement between Khama and Rauwe, and Tshekedi could not be allowed to enforce it. Religious freedom must be protected. Tshekedi must understand that the government’s support would not extend to “a licence to act in a tyrannical manner.” The resident magistrate should be instructed, “to see that no conditions of residence are extorted from Anglican BaKhurutshe which would constitute interference with free exercise of their religion.”⁵² Athlone does not seem to have been aware, at this stage, of the limits on religious liberty in the Protectorate.

By this stage the BaKhurutshe had already been threatened by Tshekedi’s men,⁵³ and had taken refuge at the police camp at Shashi Siding.⁵⁴ Not much more seems to have

⁴⁹ Notes taken at a meeting of the Bamangwato on the third day of the meeting, 21 October 1926, DCS6/1, B.N.A.

⁵⁰ Acting Resident Commissioner (Daniel) to High Commissioner, 30 September 1926, DCS6/1, B.N.A.

⁵¹ A brother of Queen Mary. The position of high commissioner was originally held by the governor of Cape Colony. From 1910 to 1931 the position was linked to that of governor-general of South Africa, and after 1931 the position was linked to that of the new high commissioner to South Africa (Britain’s diplomatic representative).

⁵² High Commissioner to Acting Resident Commissioner, telegram, 9 October 1926, DO9/3, P.R.O.

⁵³ According to one (Khurutshe) account, “a great fight of sticks drove us out men and women from the village” (translation in file of Joseph S. Taumpe to Col. Daniel, 5 September 1926, S.34/5, B.N.A.).

happened until early 1927. Jules Ellenberger, having resumed duties as resident commissioner, asked Daniel to deal with the matter, as it had been in his hands up till that point.⁵⁵ On 7 January 1927, Daniel presented the high commissioner's ruling to a *kgotla* meeting in Serowe. The response was one of marked discontent. A number of speakers, supporting Tshekedi, insisted that rival religions were unacceptable and would undermine the chiefship. "We natives are not like people in England who know the difference between a Chief and religion. We do not know. We take religion and the Chief to be the same thing," said Mathiba (in a comment indicating the identification of chiefship and public ritual). "If a man goes to an opposite denomination to the Chief's he considers he has no use for the Chieftainship," said Disang. "The Chief does not object to any religion. He refuses to have two religions.... Religion belongs to the chieftainship," said Keeditse.⁵⁶

Tshekedi himself argued that standards of religious freedom accepted in Britain could not be applied in African societies. He mentioned the point that the BaKhurutshe's situation was not unique: the Damara, for example, had agreed to change from Lutheranism to the L.M.S. on entering the Reserve. Daniel, in reply, tried to distinguish religious belief from obedience to the chief. Religious freedom would not exempt them from ordinary laws; for example no new church building could be constructed without the chief's permission. He was however having difficulty, and his speech seems confused in places. He ended "There is only one Church and if anyone is disobeying the Chief's order, the Government will support the Chief as long as you do not compel people to believe in a religion they do not believe in."⁵⁷

Tshekedi immediately announced his intention of going to Cape Town to see the high commissioner.⁵⁸ The government secretary asked hopefully if Tshekedi's grievance was limited to the question of his power to banish,⁵⁹ but the resident magistrate had to reply that Tshekedi was still upholding the religious agreement.⁶⁰ Jules Ellenberger, the resident commissioner, wrote to Athlone that he would support Tshekedi if he was satisfied religion was being used as a cover for politics, but that he was not yet convinced of this.⁶¹ In general Ellenberger was apparently less sympathetic to the Anglicans than

⁵⁴ Acting Resident Commissioner (Daniel) to High Commissioner, 30 September 1926, DCS6/1, B.N.A.

⁵⁵ Resident Commissioner (Ellenberger) to Assistant Commissioner Francistown (Daniel), 3 January 1927, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁵⁶ Notes of a Meeting held at Serowe, 7 January 1927, DCS43/8, item 3, B.N.A.

⁵⁷ Notes of a Meeting held at Serowe, 7 January 1927, DCS43/8, item 3, B.N.A. The reference to "only one Church" probably referred back to an earlier reference to proper authority for the establishment of a second church in the reserve rather than a theological point.

⁵⁸ Resident Magistrate Serowe (A.L. Cuzen) to Government Secretary, 8 January 1927, DCS43/8, B.N.A.

⁵⁹ Government Secretary to Resident Magistrate Serowe, 12 January 1927, DCS43/8, B.N.A.

⁶⁰ Resident Magistrate Serowe to Government Secretary, 13 January 1927, DCS43/8, B.N.A.

⁶¹ Resident Commissioner (Ellenberger) to High Commissioner (Athlone), 15 January 1927, DCS43/8, B.N.A.

were other officials. His own background, French Protestant, was close to that of the L.M.S.

Tshekedi met the high commissioner in Cape Town on 1 February 1927. The history of the case was reviewed. Tshekedi mentioned, apparently to show the previous acceptance of the agreement, an incident when in the time of Khama some BaKhurutshe had been summoned for the offense of attending the Anglican Church outside the reserve. Tshekedi did not conceal the fact that he was attempting to prevent the introduction of Anglicanism.⁶²

The high commissioner had apparently been persuaded, since his October 1926 declaration, that there were real issues of disobedience apart from the religious question.⁶³ He told Tshekedi: "no mention should be made of religion. Their punishment should be for disobeying the Chief's orders."⁶⁴ While this was a sad decline from his initial zeal, it was not entirely disingenuous. The high commissioner was attempting to create a distinction: he realized that Tshekedi was not yet making such a distinction, but hoped that he could be led to do so in time. Athlone believed that there were "trouble-makers" who were using Anglicanism as a badge of BaKhurutshe separatist tendencies. In support of this view he claimed that two leading figures among the BaKhurutshe dissidents (Molefhe and Tumedi) were not even Anglicans. This point, which was drawn to his attention by Daniel in November 1926, seems to have assisted him to change his attitude.⁶⁵ (But in fact Tumedi was an Anglican.⁶⁶ The Protectorate officials were using incorrect information to sway Athlone.) The separatism and disobedience must be distinguished from their religious symbol. The high commissioner told Tshekedi, as Daniel had done before, that as chief he was entitled to refuse the construction of a new church building, though he should consult the administration before taking such an action, but this was different from banning a religion as such.⁶⁷

The high commissioner issued a new written ruling stating that although there must be no persecution, "disobedience" could be punished. "[W]hen religion is used as a cloak under cover of which plans are prepared against the Ruler of a nation or tribe or to disturb the public peace of the country, then the matter is no longer a religious one.... It is then the duty of the Ruler to intervene in the interests of peace and good order ... if they [the

⁶² Notes of the interview between Tshekedi Khama and the High Commissioner, Cape Town, Tuesday 1 February 1927, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁶³ "After careful enquiry I came to the conclusion that Tshekedi was correct in stating that these people were merely using the Anglican religion as a means of defying him." High Commissioner (Athlone) to Dominions Secretary (Amery), 9 February 1927, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁶⁴ Notes of the interview between Tshekedi Khama and the High Commissioner, Cape Town, Tuesday 1 February 1927, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁶⁵ Daniel (Acting Resident Commissioner) to High Commissioner, 15 November 1926; High Commissioner to Daniel, 9 December 1926, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁶⁶ Seatholo Tumedi, granddaughter, email communication, 5 October 2006. Schapera, ed., *Praise Poems*, 241, n. 2, implies that Molefhe was also an Anglican.

⁶⁷ Athlone to Amery, 7 February 1927, DO9/5/2118, P.R.O.

BaKhurutshe] could have shown that they had been punished on account of their religion I should have felt compelled to intervene.⁶⁸ As it is they have disobeyed the Chief and I consider that they have merited punishment for disobedience.”⁶⁹ It is not entirely clear what the “disobedience” consisted of; it seems to refer to the original order to move to Serowe—even though that order was based on grounds the high commissioner had ruled invalid.⁷⁰

Athlone had been persuaded to support Tshekedi’s action as being “not really” about religion. It seems likely, from the way the Protectorate officials briefed him, that he remained unaware of the full extent of suppression of religious dissidence.

The BaKhurutshe were now forcibly moved, apparently with considerable violence. The administration clearly wished not to become involved in how such matters were dealt with Tshekedi’s men, and there are some signs of bad conscience about this.⁷¹ Such use of force was by no means uncommon against subject peoples, and was a regular part of the chiefly government on which the Protectorate relied. If the administration objected now, they would have to object in other cases.

The BaKhurutshe concerned remained at Serowe, in a state of discontent and passive protest, for several years.⁷² It is not quite clear how many had been brought there: figures are no more than in the scores, though it is unclear if individuals or householders were counted, and what their status was in relation to the Khurutshe *morafe* and church. The threat that Tshekedi felt was not that of a large group, but of a breach in the dam. He continued to regard them with strong hostility, and was especially unhappy about visits from the bishop of Kimberley, who he believed was actively encouraging insubordination.⁷³ Tshekedi continued to argue for the validity of the original agreement.⁷⁴

Ironically, it was Charles Rey, an atheist,⁷⁵ who finally took the BaKhurutshe’s religion seriously. Rey was an outsider, appointed in 1930 to shake things up and initiate development in anticipation of the “inevitable” transfer to South Africa, and he intended to assert the administration’s power over the chiefs. (Ultimately his plans went nowhere,

⁶⁸ As he had in fact intervened in October 1926, when he believed that this was the situation.

⁶⁹ Copy of High Commissioner’s judgment of February 1927, S.218/5, item 12, B.N.A.; see also Notes of the interview between Tshekedi Khama and the High Commissioner, Cape Town, Tuesday 1 February 1927, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁷⁰ Athlone was congratulated by the Dominions Secretary for his handling of the case (Amery to Athlone, 12 March 1927, DO9/5, P.R.O.) It is, however, not entirely clear whether the Dominions Office staff entirely grasped at this point what had actually happened.

⁷¹ Native Eye-witness Report, n.d., encl. to Bishop of Kimberley & Kuruman to High Commissioner, 26 January 1928, S.34/5, B.N.A.; see notations by unknown official.

⁷² See Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 170–72; Wylie, *A Little God*, 159–61.

⁷³ E.g., Tshekedi Khama to Resident Magistrate Serowe, 16 September 1927, DCS6/4, B.N.A.

⁷⁴ Tshekedi Khama to Resident Magistrate Serowe, 21 April 1927, DCS6/4, B.N.A.

⁷⁵ Charles F. Rey, *Monarch of All I Survey: Bechuanaland Diaries 1929–37*, ed. N. Parsons and M. Crowder (Gaborone: Botswana Society, 1988), 222, 27 December 1936.

partly because of a lack of imperial support and partly because of his misreadings of the situation.) In February 1932, he wrote that he thought the case was probably an example of “the subservience to the views of the Chief which characterised the Administration in the past.”⁷⁶ Rey believed that at some point the issue had to be resolved, but Tshekedi had indicated to him that he regarded the settlement of the BaKhurutshe in Serowe as permanent.⁷⁷ Rey eventually concluded (in a reversal of earlier official opinion) that Tshekedi’s talk of BaKhurutshe plots was a cover for religious opposition.⁷⁸ Rey disliked all missions, but especially hated the L.M.S., partly because of its support for Tshekedi, but also because of what he saw as its dog-in-the-manger blocking of other missions who might have provided broader social services.⁷⁹

In February 1932, Rey put the matter to the high commissioner (Sir Herbert Stanley),⁸⁰ who replied that he did not wish to reverse his predecessor’s ruling. Instead he wanted the matter dealt with within the “tribal” system. The BaKhurutshe should be told to apply to Tshekedi for permission to return, and Tshekedi should be given a strong hint that he should agree.⁸¹ This procedure was followed, and the BaKhurutshe made their application in September 1932. However, the plan broke down because Tshekedi, departing from the script, refused the application.⁸²

In July 1933 Rey asked the resident magistrate to make another attempt. Tshekedi should be made to realize that if he refused again, the administration would if necessary overrule him.⁸³ Rey was by this time rather eager for a confrontation with Tshekedi, on the general grounds that he had come to see Tshekedi as an obstacle to his plans for the Protectorate. Nevertheless his attempt at persuasion was genuine: he was careful to warn the resident magistrate not to mention the bishop of Kimberley, as this would irritate

⁷⁶ Memo by Resident Commissioner (Rey), 3 February 1932, S.218/5, B.N.A.

⁷⁷ Notes by Rey of interview between Resident Commissioner and Tshekedi Khama, Mafeking, 28 January 1932, S.218/5, B.N.A.

⁷⁸ Rey, *Monarch of All I Survey*, 136 (26 June 1933). “Tshekedi won’t allow [them] to go back to Tonota because is afraid of their plotting against him—or so he says. Really Tshekedi has a down on them because they are Church of England.... Tshekedi loves his damned London Missionary Society people to the exclusion of all other brands of Christianity.”

⁷⁹ See C.F. Rey, “Notes on the Serowe Incident 1933,” in Rey, *Monarch of All I Survey*, 267. In Maun, Rey supported the establishment of a Seventh-Day Adventist hospital. He attributed local worries about a new mission to the machinations of “Sandilands and his beastly L.M.S. crowd” (Ibid., 168, 3 September 1934). “I reassured them [the people in *kgotla*] and explained that any form of religion was as good (I longed to say ‘as bad’) as any other. What damn nonsense all these dogmatic religions are....” (Ibid., 171, 14 September 1934).

⁸⁰ Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, 8 February 1932, S.218/5, B.N.A.

⁸¹ High Commissioner to Resident Commissioner, 2 March 1932, S.218/5, B.N.A.

⁸² Resident Magistrate Serowe to Government Secretary, 28 September 1932, S.218/5, B.N.A.

⁸³ Resident Commissioner (Rey) to Resident Magistrate Serowe (Potts), 20 July 1933, S.218/7, B.N.A.

Tshekedi.⁸⁴ Despite this caution, Tshekedi refused again, alleging continued disobedience and plots by the BaKhurutshe. He would be happy to let them return home if it were possible, he said, but “political developments” unfortunately ruled this out.⁸⁵ The resident magistrate reported that he thought Tshekedi was playing for time, knowing that the high commissioner would be going abroad.⁸⁶

Rey now asked the high commissioner for authority to overrule Tshekedi. “The talk of a conspiracy amongst the BaKhurutshe people to break off from the Bamangwato is of course absurd.” Whatever trouble they may have made was years ago, and now they only wanted to go home.⁸⁷ Stanley replied that it would best to hold an enquiry first, as Tshekedi apparently wanted. This would be conducted within the tribe but a government representative would take part.

The matter was put into abeyance by the crisis in which Tshekedi Khama was briefly suspended from the chiefship.⁸⁸ It resurfaced in 1934, when Stanley informed Rey that he had happened to meet Tshekedi at Gaberones⁸⁹ on the occasion of a royal visit, and in conversation with him had agreed that the enquiry could proceed, contrary to Rey’s wishes, *without* a government representative being present.⁹⁰ Stanley’s attitude is hard to gauge exactly. He was close to the Anglican hierarchy,⁹¹ but he also had a relatively benign view of Tshekedi, and saw the issue as a problem open to an amicable settlement between gentlemen.

⁸⁴ Resident Commissioner (Rey) to Resident Magistrate Serowe (Potts), 20 July 1933, B.N.A., S.218/7, B.N.A. Tshekedi claimed that “the Bishop has taken a prominent part in the political aspect of the question ... [is it] intended that I should rule these people through the Bishop[?]” (Tshekedi Khama to Resident Magistrate Serowe, 16 September 1927, DO9/7, P.R.O.).

⁸⁵ Resident Magistrate Serowe to Resident Commissioner, telegram, urgent, 25 July 1933, S.218/7, B.N.A.

⁸⁶ Resident Magistrate Serowe to Government Secretary, 26 July 1933, S.218/7, B.N.A.

⁸⁷ Resident Commissioner (Rey) to High Commissioner (Stanley), 28 July 1933, S.218/7, B.N.A.

⁸⁸ Michael Crowder, *The Flogging of Phineas McIntosh: A Tale of Colonial Folly and Injustice, Bechuanaland 1933* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁸⁹ Now Gaborone.

⁹⁰ Stanley to Rey, 4 June 1934, S.218/7, B.N.A. One can on this occasion at least understand Rey’s frustration with Stanley. As resident commissioner Rey’s role was in practice similar to a colonial governor’s (even if technically ranked lower), but unlike a governor his authority was limited by having to refer to an intermittently-interested high commissioner who might reverse his policies in the course of a casual conversation. Tshekedi was something of an expert at breaking the usual rules of communication at opportune moments (Michael Crowder, “‘I Want to be Taught How to Govern my Country, not to be Taught How to be Governed’: Tshekedi Khama and Opposition to the British administration in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1926–36,” in “Workshop on Bangwato Politics under Colonial Rule,” [collected papers in University of Botswana Library, n.d., 1984?]).

⁹¹ Rey commented of Stanley that “when a man ‘gets religion,’ it’s time he was shut up.” Rey, *Monarch of All I Survey*, 154, 4 May 1934.

The enquiry was held. Tshekedi still maintained that the removal to Serowe should be permanent, but his views had softened, and when Nettelton⁹² told him that the administration definitely wanted the BaKhurutshe allowed home, he at last agreed.⁹³ He announced the release of the BaKhurutshe in *kgotla* on 6 July 1934, stating publicly that he did not want to do so and that he expected more trouble.⁹⁴ After this, Rey wrote Tshekedi an ostensibly friendly letter congratulating him,⁹⁵ while Stanley wrote to Rey that he was “glad that Tshekedi has adopted so reasonable an attitude”⁹⁶; his several years’ unreasonableness apparently no longer mattering.

Athlone seems to have substantially revised his opinions after the start of the case. His initial impression was that it was a case of religious persecution, and that strong action should be taken on behalf of the BaKhurutshe. However, he was soon persuaded (presumably by the officials in the Bechuanaland Protectorate) that the matter was largely political. In the process he may have developed a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of the government in Bechuanaland and came to see the matter in the context of preserving the chiefs as usable intermediaries for British rule. He corresponded at some length with successive bishops of Kimberley, defending the government’s line. In February 1928 he wrote a long letter explaining in detail his view of the situation. He conceded that there was “a religious aspect to the question,”⁹⁷ but there was also an element of political struggle. He would like to separate these issues but there was a limit to how far he could do so, since the Bechuanaland Protectorate had to be run on a minimalist basis. There was no practical alternative to rule through the major chiefs, and their authority must therefore be protected. It followed that the native inhabitants must live under the chiefs’ traditional authority. “Stated briefly, the policy of the Government is based on the assumption that the mass of the population of the Protectorate is not sufficiently advanced for any section of it to be emancipated from the tribal system, and no land has been set aside in the Protectorate for the accommodation of Natives who wish to live under other conditions.”⁹⁸ Bechuanaland could as yet recognize no *évolués*.

Athlone saw the BaKhurutshe case as an event within this traditional system. Religion was involved, but it was also being used deliberately as a way of gaining

⁹² At that point resident magistrate in Serowe. Nettelton was (like Ellenberger, to whom he was related by marriage) born in Basutoland. He was an Anglican, but a Southern African Anglican rather than an English one. Described by Anthony Sillery as “cautious ... cynical ... mildly malicious ... immensely knowledgeable about the Protectorate” (Rey, *Monarch of All I Survey*, 239, n. 20), he seems to have been able to communicate with Tshekedi more effectively than some of his colleagues.

⁹³ Resident Magistrate Serowe (Nettelton) to Assistant Resident Commissioner, 4 July 1934, S.218/7, B.N.A.

⁹⁴ Resident Magistrate Serowe (Nettelton) to Assistant Resident Commissioner, 7 July 1934, S.218/7, B.N.A.

⁹⁵ Rey to Tshekedi Khama, 14 July 1934, S.218/7, B.N.A.

⁹⁶ Stanley to Rey, 23 July 1934, S.218/7, B.N.A.

⁹⁷ High Commissioner (Athlone) to Bishop of Kimberley, 15 February 1928, S.34/5, B.N.A.

⁹⁸ High Commissioner (Athlone) to Bishop of Kimberley, 15 February 1928, S.34/5, B.N.A.

European sympathy. The BaKhurutshe still had the final option of leaving the Bamangwato Reserve for the Tati District, where there was no religious restriction, but there they would have to pay rent.

Athlone's most interesting point was that the refusal to move when ordered by the chief was a particularly serious matter. Tswana chiefs' authority would not be maintained unless they retained the power to order their subjects' location. This point anticipates, in outline, the argument of Silitshena⁹⁹ that the authority of a Tswana *kgosi* was inextricably linked with his power to control land usage and place of settlement. Such orders must therefore be "rigidly enforced."¹⁰⁰ Implicitly, there would have been no question about supporting Tshekedi's order to move to Serowe, had he not given a reason for it.

Tshekedi was peculiarly adept at frustrating the administration's attempts to make him do things he did not want to. The Bechuanaland Protectorate was run on a shoestring even by the standards of other British African colonies, and the general view was that there was no plausible alternative to the continued use of the chiefs as intermediaries. Rey's refusal to accept Tshekedi's treatment of the BaKhurutshe was consistent with his intention of altering the basis of government so as to reduce the independence of the chiefs; he (unlike his predecessors) did not accept that there was no alternative to the chiefs' government.

A skillful chief such as Tshekedi could make things sufficiently difficult that administrators usually found it more sensible to let him have his way within limits—the limits generally being the internal affairs of the Reserve. In the BaKhurutshe case, Tshekedi attempted a typical strategy of delay and evasion, but eventually backed down under the pressure of a firm government decision. But it took several years. He benefited from the fact that many members of the administration had by 1927 at least partly persuaded themselves that the challenge was political. The principle of religious toleration, at least in the case of Anglicans, could not well be denied, but Athlone was able to state the principle while declaring the BaKhurutshe were being punished for "disobedience"¹⁰¹ and political disaffection. Officials did feel that Tshekedi was restricting religious liberty, and that this was in principle unacceptable. However they also saw the difficulty of dissociating the religious issue from the political position of the chief, which had to be supported if the system of indirect and minimalist government was to be maintained. Also, although religious freedom was seen as a universal good, officials did not discount the difference in circumstances between England and Bechuanaland. British observers sometimes compared Tswana society to England in earlier historical periods. The parallels used ranged from Anglo-Saxon kings, through the time of rebellious barons, to Henry VIII.

⁹⁹ See Silitshena, "Chiefly Authority and the Organization of Space in Botswana"; Silitshena, "Migration and Permanent Settlement at the Lands Area." See also Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, I, 146–47.

¹⁰⁰ High Commissioner (Athlone) to Bishop of Kimberley, 15 February 1928, S.34/5, B.N.A.

¹⁰¹ Copy of High Commissioner's Judgment of February 1927, S.218/5, item 12, B.N.A.; see also Notes of the interview between Tshekedi Khama and the High Commissioner, Cape Town, Tuesday, 1 February 1927, S.34/5, B.N.A.

Such parallels could make the absence of religious freedom seem more acceptable, since there had not been any such freedom in England at these earlier times, and the early-modern state church was indeed a useful comparison.

Nettelton wrote that although an Anglican himself, he did not like the prospect of rival missions in a native reserve.¹⁰² In stating this view, Nettelton was expressing a widespread view of European Christians in Africa: denominational differences seemed a distraction from the work of mission, or even an embarrassment. Indeed, such perceptions among missionaries played a role in the birth of the ecumenical movement, though in Bechuanaland at this time there was still serious hostility between missions.¹⁰³ Southern African Christianity, however, had inherited a powerful divisive impetus from its roots in Protestantism and especially Independency.¹⁰⁴ As in North America, church growth was often expressed in proliferation of denominations.

It is also worth noting that Nettelton, and other officials, saw mainly the capitals such as Serowe, where the L.M.S. seemed to be well established and serving the needs of the community. The view from the smaller villages was different, where the monopoly of the Ngwato Church could be seen as the theocratic aspect of the hegemony of the *phuti* BaNgwato. The L.M.S., as distinct from the Ngwato Church, had very little presence in the more remote villages.

The “persecution” was not very severe, consisting mainly of having to go to Francistown for services—or so the officials tried to think, despite evidence of more direct maltreatment of dissenters. Officials therefore found it possible, with only a slightly bad conscience, if not to discount the religious aspect of the case, at least to treat it as secondary.

Tshekedi protested more than once that the BaKhurutshe were seeking to be exempted from his rule: “I cannot afford to have men over whom I cannot rule. Even if this is religion, it has not been laid down that a religious man is exempt from being ruled.”¹⁰⁵ He had a point. The government agreed that he had an absolute right to order his subjects’ settlement. When the administration said that the BaKhurutshe should have freedom of religious practice, they meant that the BaKhurutshe should be able to practice their religion without being punished for it. But Tshekedi’s action against them—an order to relocate—was not a criminal sentence but something the regent had a right to do as he saw fit.¹⁰⁶ It

¹⁰² Resident Magistrate Serowe (Nettelton) to Government Secretary, 13 April 1929, S.218/4, B.N.A.

¹⁰³ The L.M.S. feared with some justification that the Anglicans saw the territory as ripe for takeover: R. Haydon Lewis to L.M.S. foreign secretary, 22 July 1912, L.M.S. archives 1912 box 74; Jules Clements to Sec. S.P.G., 3 February 1916, SPG/CLR. Bloemfontein, U.S.P.G. Papers (both from notes by Neil Parsons).

¹⁰⁴ Parsons, “Independency and Ethiopianism,” 58; Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 70.

¹⁰⁵ Extracts from Notes taken at Meeting of the Bamangwato on the Third Day of the Meeting, 21 October 1926, DCS6/1, B.N.A.

¹⁰⁶ Tshekedi’s subsequent harassment of the BaKhurutshe in Serowe was arguably different, but here too, if for different reasons, it was extremely hard to interfere without a degree of direct intervention, which the administration was unwilling to contemplate.

was not evident, therefore, in what sense the BaKhurutshe could have a right to do anything without being subject to such orders. Such a right would, as Tshekedi pointed out, amount to being exempted from his normal rule.

It was this dilemma that led to the administration's slide from initial insistence on religious freedom to a determination in somewhat bad faith that the issue was not "really" religious. Tshekedi could not be forced to give the BaKhurutshe religious freedom without compromising his authority, on which the government depended for the running of his reserve. In general the administration was prepared to recognize fairly openly that the major chiefs exercised a relatively arbitrary power over subordinate groups, such as the BaBirwa in the Tuli Block area who suffered a considerable degree of violence from Khama's men. The BaKhurutshe's case involved religious freedom, a matter on which the British could not easily concede the principle,¹⁰⁷ and there is no reason to doubt that the high commissioner's initial demand for freedom was genuinely meant. But it gradually became apparent that to insist on such a freedom in the circumstances of the existing form of government involved a contradiction. The easiest solution was for the officials to persuade themselves that the matter was not really religious. The officials endeavored to get Tshekedi to draw distinctions that would make sense of this view, such as the distinction between disobedience to specific orders and the religious origins of the dispute. Tshekedi generally refused to do so, but the officials persevered in elaborating the distinctions to each other and to outside critics. Periodically it was reported rather wishfully that Tshekedi now saw the need to separate the issues of religion and obedience and that he had accepted that the former was beyond his control,¹⁰⁸ but in fact Tshekedi continued to assert the validity of the original agreement. Immediately after the high commissioner's ruling authorizing the moving of the BaKhurutshe in 1927, the resident magistrate in Serowe wrote to Tshekedi declaring that "no one can be interfered with on account of his religion ... no Agreement, whether written or verbal, can be held to have deprived anyone living under the protection of the British Government of his protection in matters of religion."¹⁰⁹ Presumably this was an attempt to persuade Tshekedi to distinguish religion from "obedience": perhaps the writer was also attempting to persuade himself.

The administration's attempted distinction between a religious issue and "disobedience" was thus both genuine in form and disingenuous in implication. Tshekedi would have been backed without question in an order to relocate, if only he had not given an embarrassing reason. The British position was that Tshekedi's action should be converted from an action based on an unacceptable reason to a completely arbitrary action,

¹⁰⁷ The League of Nations Covenant required members to "secure just treatment of the native inhabitants of territories under their control" (Article 23), a provision understood to be linked to the more explicit requirement to "guarantee freedom of conscience and religion" in Mandate territories (Article 22). See F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times 1920-1946* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1988), 324-25.

¹⁰⁸ E.g., Resident Magistrate Serowe (Nettelton) to Government Secretary, 23 September 1927, DCS6/4, B.N.A.

¹⁰⁹ Resident Magistrate Serowe to Chief Tshekedi Khama, 10 June 1927, B.41.S., Bamangwato Tribal Administration (BTA) archives, B.N.A.

because the latter would be more acceptable than the former. Since it could have overruled Tshekedi, the administration could not escape responsibility. But to have taken such an action would have contradicted the system on which Britain relied for the government of the Protectorate.

Contemporaries tended to ask whether the issue was “really” religious or a form of separatism, but since churches had become a central institution of Tswana polities, it was hardly surprising that dissident identity might be linked to a dissident church. There is no doubt that Khurutshe Anglicanism was part of a “not-Ngwato” identity, but the officials’ reflections on their own society’s history of church and state might have suggested to them that this need not make the religion any less genuine.

In any case, protection of religious liberty was simply not the norm in Bechuanaland. The BaKhurutshe’s case was a controversy only because of their unusual status as Anglicans and even then only because the case had happened to come to the attention of the outside world. The Protectorate officials were keen to explain it away. But the reality of religious intolerance continued undisguised in less noticeable cases. A useful comparison can be made with another, less well-known case, that of the Church of God in Christ in the Bakwena Reserve, to which our attention was drawn by the work of Don Rempel Boschman.¹¹⁰ This was one of the many African Independent Churches that were spreading from the mines of the Rand, part of that massive expansion of Christianity in Africa through African agency in the twentieth century, which has received less historical attention than the activities of nineteenth-century European missionaries. The appearance of the Church of God in the Bakwena Reserve was opposed by Chief Kgari, who ordered the members to stop preaching. They refused, were tried, and (being unable to pay fines) were sentenced to four months’ imprisonment. Although the sentence was reduced to six weeks, the conviction was confirmed by the resident magistrate.¹¹¹ This is something of a test case since it was admitted by all parties that the disobedience complained of was purely religious, with no suggestion of disorder,¹¹² and the dissidents suffered an explicitly criminal penalty, imprisonment, explicitly for religious activities.¹¹³ The resident magistrate wrote, in *non-public* correspondence, “It would be unwise to give Keikanetswe and his followers the impression that they are being persecuted....”¹¹⁴ This goes beyond

¹¹⁰ Boschman, *Conflict*, 31.

¹¹¹ Resident Magistrate Molepolole to Government Secretary, 14 December 1935, S.443/7, B.N.A. ref. from Boschman, *Conflict*, 31. A further prison sentence was passed on 18 May 1937, but it is not clear if it was confirmed; Asst. District Commissioner Molepolole to Government Secretary, 30 December 1937, S.443/7, B.N.A.

¹¹² There may have been some gender aspect to the complaints against the Church of God in Christ: it was said to attract women, who sometimes left their husbands unattended when they went on short pilgrimages; but this is first recorded some time after the initial banning. Asst. District Commissioner Molepolole to Government Secretary, 30 October 1937, S.443/7, B.N.A.

¹¹³ Resident Magistrate Molepolole to Government Secretary, 15 October 1935; Resident Magistrate Molepolole to Resident Magistrate Gaberones, 29 October 1935, S.443/7, B.N.A.

¹¹⁴ Resident Magistrate Molepolole to Resident Magistrate Gaberones, 29 October 1935, S.443/7, B.N.A.

the high commissioner's statement in the BaKhurstshe case that "no mention should be made of religion...."¹¹⁵ Protectorate officials had become so used to the situation of religious monopoly that they found it difficult to recognize the situation in which they were complicit, and almost impossible to admit the plain word that described it.

Many officials seem to have had fundamentally unsympathetic views of dissident religious movements, which undermined any commitment they had to freedom of religion, and which derived from several sources. Some officials, in an attitude shared with many settlers, were skeptical of and vaguely hostile to African Christianity. The early Resident Commissioner Ralph Williams wrote in his memoirs, after some very lukewarm praise of missions, "My own experience in Africa is that the native is far more trustworthy in his pagan than in his semi-Christian state.... The greatest thief I ever had in my employ was the most outwardly pious exponent of his religion."¹¹⁶ For others, who belonged to mainstream European churches, the new denominations were probably the equivalent of minor protestant sects in European society: marginal, of low social status, poorly educated biblical literalists, enthusiasts in both the old and new senses; not to be taken seriously by the respectable. A somewhat widespread indifferentism in both the European and Tswana elites also created the sense that additional churches needed to justify themselves by being "useful," an attitude that implied that religious freedom was irrelevant if not harmful. New missions had used the offer of medical services to gain permission to enter L.M.S. territory after the First World War. Even *ca.* 1957, Seretse Khama apparently declared that "new religious bodies were only acceptable in Gammangwato if they built schools or hospitals."¹¹⁷ This criterion was wholly irrelevant to the prophets and preachers who saw themselves as the bearers not of a useful institution but of a revelation, and to the followers who believed in their message.

The resident commissioner, Arden Clarke, however, expressed some doubts as to whether the original order had been legal,¹¹⁸ and it was decided to draw up a policy dispatch.¹¹⁹ The principle was to be that chiefs must respect the principle of religious toleration, but that they retained control of land, and the power to give orders without limitations of conscientious objection. They would be recommended to give land for churches, but not compelled. Rather puzzlingly, the draft referred also to chiefs being advised but not compelled to give permission for churches to work in their territory. It is not clear how this fits with religious freedom, but rather suggests that what was envisaged was not absolute freedom to organize a church so much as freedom from actually being sent to prison: decriminalization rather than legalization. The document was apparently shelved in 1940.

¹¹⁵ Notes of the interview between Tshekedi Khama and the High Commissioner, Cape Town, Tuesday 1 Feb 1927, S.34/5, B.N.A.

¹¹⁶ Ralph Williams, *How I Became a Governor* (London: John Murray, 1913), 316.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Tlou, Neil Parsons, and Willie Henderson, *Seretse Khama 1921-80* (Gaborone: Botswana Society and Macmillan, 1995), 163.

¹¹⁸ Note by Resident Commissioner inside front cover of S.443/7, B.N.A.

¹¹⁹ Draft dispatch, n.d., S.443/7, B.N.A.

The situation had existed so long that it perhaps ceased to be noticed how far it had diverged from the norms of either British law or international standards. No close parallel existed in Basutoland, Swaziland, or Southern and Northern Rhodesia. While colonial authorities did sometimes restrict or ban movements seen as subversive,¹²⁰ a colonial report of 1955 that found that the repression in religion in the Protectorate had “probably no parallel” in the rest of British Africa¹²¹ was broadly correct. In the course of the Tonota controversy, the British administration was perhaps satisfied that they had found an explanation for the reserves’ religious intolerance—but not a justification.

¹²⁰ Bryan R. Wilson, “Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kenya,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 5, 2 (1973) 128–49.

¹²¹ Boschman, *Conflict*, 42, n. 157.

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