

TOPIC : EARLY EUROPEAN CONTACTS WITH ZIMBABWE

SUBTOPICS : EARLY MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THE SUBTOPIC LEARNERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- ✓ Identify early missionary groups and their areas of operation in Zimbabwe.
- ✓ Outline the aims of missionaries in Africa.
- ✓ Describe early missionary activities in Zimbabwe.
- ✓ Explain challenges faced by the missionaries.
- ✓ Assess the impacts of early missionary activities in Zimbabwe.

Background



Symbol for Christianity

- The role of the Europeans leading up to the colonial era had always been a bone of contention beginning from the Mutapa state in the 16th century.

- A missionary is a person sent on a religious mission that is preaching and baptizing people in a foreign country promoting Christianity.
- Missionaries came in Zimbabwe in the name of spreading civilisation in Africa through Christianity, they labelled Africa as a Dark Continent.

Aims of the Missionaries

- The missionaries who came to Zimbabwe had several aims such as to:
 - Spread the gospel and abolish cruel acts such as killing of twins and suspected witches and wizards.
 - Spread western civilisation to the Dark Continent.
 - Teach people to read and write.
 - Teach local people new farming methods.
 - Establish mission stations and schools.
 - Promote European rule.
 - Help treat sick people.
 - Pave way for other agents such as hunters, traders and political agents.

Missionaries in Zimbabwe

- The Portuguese Christian missionaries were the first group to arrive in the Mutapa region.
- They were few and some of them combined preaching with trading.
- Gonzalo da Silveira arrived in 1559 and succeeded in converting and baptizing Mutapa and his mother.
- His presence at the court was short-lived as he was murdered in 1561.
- After the death of Silveira, very few Portuguese were willing to venture into the Mutapa interior.

- Portuguese Missionary activities in the interior remained largely restricted.
- Later some missionary groups such as the London Missionary Society, Roman Catholic church, Dutch reformed church, Paris evangelical Mission ,Anglican church, Methodists, Berlin missionary society and many others arrived in the country.
- They established mission stations where they preached the gospel.
- Missionaries engaged in a number of activities.
- Some of the missionaries who arrived in Zimbabwe included the following:

Portuguese missionaries

- Father Gonzalo Da Silveria
- Vasco Da Gama
- Francisco Barreto
- Francisco Ferrarodos

British missionaries

- Robert Moffat
- John smith Moffat
- William Sykes
- Robert laws
- Charles Helm
- David Carnegie

Early missionary groups

- Different missionary groups came to Zimbabwe in the 19th century in the name of spreading Christianity.

Missionary group	Area of operations / station
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London Missionary society	Inyati Mission Hope fountain
Roman catholic Church	Empandeni
Dutch reformed church	Morgenster
Berlin Missionary society	Matibe, Mposi Gutu
Paris Evangelical mission	Zimuto and Chivi
Anglican church	St Augustine St Faith (Rusape)
The Methodists	Kwenda, Pakame and Msengezi

Missionary Activities in Zimbabwe

- Missionaries were engaged in various activities in Zimbabwe that made them to have relations with the Africans. The activities of the European missionaries were coined by their aims.

(a) Spreading Christianity

- The creation of stations such as Hope Fountain, Solusi, Inyathi and Chishawasha were examples of positive developments brought through the cause to spread Christianity.
- Despite the missionaries failing to get many converts initially during the reign of Lobengula, they were able to make converts in Mashonaland at a faster rate.
- Through religion they denounced the killing of twins, acts of witchcraft as well as other barbaric and hideous acts such as worship of ancestors.
- They also preached against slave trade.

(b) Introduced civilization

- The European missionaries introduced civilisation through education.
- The mission stations established by the missionaries served several purposes such as housing the sick, protecting the outcasts in society as well as teaching natives how to read and write.



Missionaries assisting Africans

- New translated books were made and this helped improve communication between the natives and whites.
- They taught Africans new skills such as building, carpentry and metalworking.

(c) Improved health

- At the same stations, missionaries' also assisted to treat natives of killer diseases such as measles, malaria and small pox.
- King Lobengula was also at one time treated for gout.
- The missionaries also educated people on good hygiene, such as sanitary for women.

- This helped improve the life expectancy of the natives in Mashonaland and Matabeleland.

(d) Improved agriculture

- Also missionaries were able to teach natives new farming methods such as crop rotation, shifting cultivation as introduction of new crops.
- New seeds which were treated were also used and this increased yield output in drought prone areas such as Matabeleland.
- They were also involved in inoculating of cattle which were very valuable to the Ndebele people.

(e) Improved infrastructure

- As already mentioned the missionaries built stations in addition to these were schools, hospitals and paved roads which opened up linkages between Mashonaland and Matabeleland.



Hope Fountain mission

(f) They facilitated colonization

- The role of missionaries' in colonial Zimbabwe definitely did enhance colonization.

This may be supported by the fact that:

- Missionaries used their trust by the Ndebele King to trick him into signing the Rudd concession they acted as mediators between the Europeans and Africans.
- Missionaries also played a role in translating false information tricking Lobengula into signing.
- They also signed treaties and wrote diplomatic letters for the king.
- The missionaries largely portrayed the white men as good, by building schools, treating the sick and educating the poor. This made Africans become sub-servant.
- Missionaries built the paved roads linking Matabeleland, Mashonaland and South Africa which were used by the colonial agents as well as the BSAC.
- The stations built were also used to house agents.

Problems faced by the missionaries

- The presence of strong African religious leaders meant that the Portuguese missionaries could not easily enter the interior denouncing local customs to spread Christianity.
- The missionaries' activities were strictly monitored and they had to do gatherings only at the king's palace. This made missionaries fail to increase their influence and convert many converts.



David Livingston preaching at the King's court

- The Ndebele army was well organized and trained and was tasked with protecting the monarchy and ensuring that the missionary activities were controlled.
- In Matabeleland, missionaries were also affected by diseases such as Malaria and this led to other missionaries from fearing to come into Matabeleland and moving further north in fear for their lives.
- The missionaries also faced problems with language translation and interpretation. This made their activities ineffective in the initial stages as they failed to express themselves.
- The killing of father Goncalo Da Silveira and other converts greatly discouraged other missionaries and weakened Christianity.
- The local people were also hostile to missionaries. They viewed them with suspicion and some missionaries were brutally killed by locals together with their families.
- Missionary activities were hindered by delays in granting of permission to build stations by the king.

- Lack of supplies of European goods such as medicine and tools at the stations discouraged missionaries.
- Warfare and raiding that was done in Matabeleland created fear among missionaries.
- Some missionaries were killed by wild animals on their way to preach the gospel.



David Livingstone being attacked by a lion

- The missionaries also faced climatic problems in areas which were very hot as compared to their climate in Europe.

Ways used by Africans to resist missionary influence

- Africans resisted missionary influence by restricting missionary activities such as king Lobengula who monitored the activities of European missionaries.
- The king also discouraged his people from attending church services and punished converts through exiling them or killing them.
- Africans also resisted by settling far away from missionary stations.

- Some converts continued with their traditional beliefs of rainmaking ceremonies and others and imparting these customs to their children.
- Some Africans refused to give missionaries food so that they could die of hunger and even killing them.

Impact of early missionary activities in Zimbabwe

Positive impacts

- Missionaries succeeded in converting some Africans to Christianity for example, a Kalanga chief Majila called upon his people to help in the building of schools and houses as well as a Shona Chief Chihota who gave up his healing power after being converted.
- Through Christianity they denounced barbaric acts such as killing of twins, albinos and suspects of witchcraft.
- Through Christianity they also created tolerance, love and peaceful relations among natives reducing violence and conflict.
- They taught Africans how to read and write, translating books and making communication easier.



Africans being taught to read

- They managed to establish mission stations and built roads, schools churches and hospitals which all are still benefitting natives to this day.
- New crops were introduced such as melons, maize and citrus as well as improved farming methods.
- Africans were taught new skills such as carpentry, building and metalwork.

Negative impacts

- The missionaries made people sub-serviette preparing them for colonial rule.
- The missionaries only taught natives basic skills so that they would be inferior and serve their white masters.

- Missionaries used the trust and loyalty they had gained in the Ndebele Empire to trick Lobengula into signing away his territory through the Rudd Concession.
- The missionaries made few converts in Matabeleland. Most of those who were converted continued with their African traditional beliefs.

Role played by missionaries in the colonisation of Zimbabwe

- Missionaries played a significant role in the colonisation of Zimbabwe as they were active supporters of European political control which gave them security.
- Robert Moffat was influential in the colonisation of Zimbabwe as he was Mzilikazi's friend.
- Lobengula was convinced by Robert Moffat to sign the Moffat Treaty in 1888 which renewed friendship between the Ndebele and the British.
- These treaties led to the signing of the Rudd Concession which led to the occupation of Zimbabwe as it gave Europeans the power to do what they deem necessary.
- The Missionaries played a role in persuading and cheating African chiefs during negotiations for treaties.
- Rev Charles Helm persuaded king Lobengula to sign the Rudd Concession.
- Missionaries were interpreters and also wrote letters for the king, misrepresenting some details.
- They were used to link African chiefs with concession seekers.