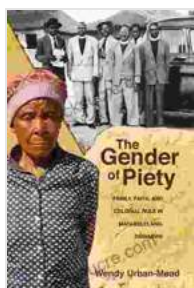


# Family, Faith, and Colonial Rule in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe: A Historical Analysis of the Impact of Christianity on Indigenous Belief Systems

The arrival of European missionaries in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, in the late 19th century marked a turning point in the region's history. Christianity, with its emphasis on monotheism, individual salvation, and Western moral values, profoundly challenged the traditional beliefs and practices of the Ndebele people. This article explores the complex interplay between family, faith, and colonial rule in Matabeleland during this period, examining how the of Christianity led to both conflict and adaptation within indigenous communities.



## The Gender of Piety: Family, Faith, and Colonial Rule in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe by Carol Felsenthal

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 1219 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 298 pages



## The Traditional Ndebele Family Structure

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the Ndebele family was the central unit of social organization. Families were typically large and extended, with multiple generations living together in a single homestead. The father was the head of the household, with authority over all family members. Women were responsible for domestic duties, childcare, and agricultural work, while men were responsible for hunting, warfare, and political affairs.

The Ndebele family was closely tied to the traditional religion, which revolved around the worship of ancestral spirits. Ancestors were believed to have a powerful influence over the lives of the living, and they were often consulted for guidance and protection. Religious rituals and ceremonies were an integral part of family life, and they served to strengthen the bonds between family members.

## **The of Christianity**

In the late 19th century, European missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) began to arrive in Matabeleland. They established mission stations throughout the region, and they began to preach the Christian gospel to the Ndebele people. Christianity offered a new and appealing message of hope and salvation, and it quickly gained converts among the Ndebele.

However, the of Christianity also caused significant social and cultural upheaval. Christian missionaries condemned traditional Ndebele beliefs and practices as pagan and immoral. They preached against polygamy, ancestor worship, and the use of traditional medicines. This led to tensions between Christian converts and their traditionalist family members.

## **Conflict and Adaptation**

The conflict between Christianity and traditional Ndebele beliefs often played out within the family. Christian converts often faced pressure from their family members to renounce their new faith. In some cases, this pressure could lead to violence and even death. However, many Christian converts were able to adapt their new faith to their traditional beliefs and practices. They continued to honor their ancestors, but they did so in a Christian context. They also incorporated Christian symbols and rituals into their family life.

The of Christianity also had a significant impact on gender roles within the Ndebele family. Christian missionaries promoted the idea of the nuclear family, with a husband and wife as the head of the household. This challenged the traditional Ndebele family structure, which gave greater authority to the father. However, some Christian converts were able to reconcile the Christian ideal of the nuclear family with the traditional Ndebele values of respect for elders and communal living.

### **The Impact of Colonial Rule**

The arrival of Christianity in Matabeleland coincided with the imposition of British colonial rule. The British government supported the efforts of Christian missionaries, and they used Christianity as a tool to pacify and control the Ndebele people. Christian converts were often rewarded with land and other privileges, while those who resisted Christianity were marginalized and punished.

The combined forces of Christianity and colonial rule had a profound impact on Ndebele family life. The traditional family structure was weakened, and the authority of the father was diminished. The of Western

education and wage labor also led to changes in gender roles, as women began to play a more active role in the public sphere.

The of Christianity to Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries had a profound impact on family, faith, and colonial rule in the region. Christianity challenged traditional Ndebele beliefs and practices, leading to both conflict and adaptation within indigenous communities. The combined forces of Christianity and colonial rule transformed Ndebele family life, the authority of the father, and the roles of women in society.

Despite the challenges they faced, the Ndebele people were able to adapt and survive under colonial rule. They incorporated Christianity into their traditional beliefs and practices, and they continued to maintain strong family ties. The Ndebele family remains a central pillar of society in Matabeleland today, and it continues to play an important role in preserving and transmitting the region's cultural heritage.



## Further Reading

- Christianity and Colonialism in Southern Africa: Studies in Historical and Anthropological Perspective by Richard Gray
- The Ndebele of Zimbabwe: A Historical Ethnography by Terence Ranger
- The Impact of Christianity on the Ndebele of Zimbabwe by David Beach

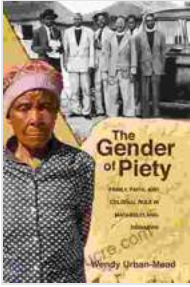
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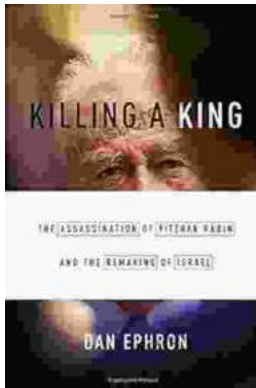
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