

Progress and Remembrance of the Finnish Lutheran Work in the Ondonga Kingdom in South West Africa

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Abstract

The concept of progress has always been pivotal in the Protestant missionary movement. At the same time, this movement has had an ambivalent relationship with progress. On the one hand, progress has been needed in terms of advancement of the missionary and development of his or her work. On the other hand, the concept of progress has been questioned, as something worldly, self-seeking and potentially immoral.

Under scrutiny in this article is the work of the Lutheran Finnish Missionary Society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Ovamboland in South West Africa, in what is today northern Namibia. Both among Finnish Lutherans and among Ovambo traditionalists there was a desire for progress. The encounter between Lutheran Pietism and Ovambo culture was at times uneasy. Yet, at the end of the day, it gave rise to other, sometimes unexpected, kinds of progress.

In this article, also the legacy of the Finnish Missionary Society in Namibia is studied. In the cultural memory among the Ovambo, the relative tension between faith and culture is visible. Nonetheless, the progressive dimensions in, and discernible achievements through, the Finnish-Ovambo relationship assume a far more prominent position in northern Namibian remembrance.

Keywords: Ondonga, Namibia, Lutheran mission, initiation rites, cultural memory