

The two most interesting missionaries in southern Africa in the first half of the 19th century were with little doubt Johannes Van der Kemp and John Philip. The one was Dutch, the other a Scot, but both belonged to the London Missionary Society. Both were much maligned, bitterly hated and criticised, yet have also been immensely lauded and loved. A good deal has been written about each yet neither has hitherto received an at all adequate modern biography. Now we have one for each, and very valuable additions to African Christian history they both are.

Dr En克拉尔’s life of Van der Kemp is a meticulously detailed study based on all the available primary sources in Holland, England and South Africa. One learns a great deal about this extraordinary man, who was a soldier, doctor, philosopher and linguist of distinction before he became a missionary quite late in a life much of which was by no means given to piety. He appears in some ways as a Protestant Charles de Foucauld—an officer and a rake in youth, an ascetic living immensely close to his beloved Khoikoi in old age. Without shoes or hat but married to a native wife, a slave girl he had redeemed, Van der Kemp made no sense at all to whites. To blacks he was a saint they could not forget: nearly a century later in places he never visited Christians could still be called ‘the people of Van der Kemp’.

This book is not too easy to read. It follows events extremely closely, in almost chronicle fashion, but the concluding evaluative chapter provides a very fair assessment of an exceptionally enigmatic character. For the wider context of missionary history at the time this book needs to be read in conjunction with Jane Sales’s *Mission Stations and the Coloured Communities of the Eastern Cape*.

John Philip was thirty-six when Van der Kemp died in 1811 and he arrived in South Africa, effectively as his successor, eight years later. His temperament was very different and his life exhibited an exceptional consistency entirely unlike that of his great predecessor. It is not surprising that, initially, he was unduly critical of Van der Kemp.

*Journal of Religion in Africa* XX, 3 (1990)
Kemp, but he took up the latter's mantle as principal defender of African rights and liberties. Philip was in many ways the most important missionary in African history prior to Livingstone in the range and impact of his influence. And of all 19th century missionaries he seems the most modern. If most of them were poorly educated and theologically simplistic, Van der Kemp was undoubtedly the great exception in terms of sheer intellect and learning. But in terms of a sophisticated theological and practical ability to relate the evangelical to the social and the political, Philip was far beyond all his contemporaries. He was a missionary tactician of the first rank, someone neither resident for long years at a single mission station nor based in a missionary headquarters in London or elsewhere. Continually on the move, whether between Cape Town and London or up and down South Africa, and continually in correspondence with the powers that be in Cape Town and Westminster as well as with his fellow directors in the London Missionary Society and leaders of other missions, American and French, Philip was all in all a figure the like of which cannot easily be found in African missionary history, above all in the ranks of the Free Churches.

At the heart of his work as he saw it was a ceaseless struggle for the rights of Africans. He recognised the inherent necessity for the missionary in the circumstances of the time to become deeply involved in what others could regard as essentially political issues, and he did this from a personal position in which he profoundly trusted non-whites and collaborated with them as equals. Perhaps it was this willingness to trust which, more than anything else, rendered him so intensely unpopular with the majority of white settlers and their spokesmen and historians ever since.

Andrew Ross's book is important not only because it really sets out the character and work of Philip with a comprehensive reliability hitherto lacking in any study, but it also takes issue again and again, in a very detailed way, with other historians of South Africa, old and new, who have dismissed the seriousness and effectiveness of Philip or have blackened his character as aggressive and unreliable. It is an immensely valuable part of the book that it gives us so considerable an account of his pre-South African years, just as it is a fascinating part of Enklaar's book that it does the same for its hero. Perhaps Ross spends too much space dismantling the arguments of other writers—they are, after all, mostly