

A STUDY OF THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED  
THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ETHIOPIANISM  
WITHIN THE METHODIST CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA  
( 1874 - 1910 )

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Ethiopianism as an African Independent Church Movement

The study of Ethiopianism is generally understood to be an intrinsic part of the wider study of African Independent Churches. Historically, scholars consider there to be three main waves in the drive for religious independency among Africans, each with its own general character. The first is Ethiopianism which dates from the late nineteenth century, the second is the more popular "Zionist" or "Spirit" churches which date from approximately 1910 and the third wave located after 1940, is called Messianism. Of particular interest to most scholars has been the causative factors for independency. Investigations here have been possible as there is a rich diversity among the many independent churches.

Investigators have, however, generally tried to reduce the complexity of causative factors to a few basic background influences. Sundkler (Bantu Prophets in South Africa) lays great stress on the social injustice arising from racial segregation and on the alienation of tribal lands.

Separatism is, to a very large extent, the result of the presence of colour bar within the Church. Membership of an independent church increases as the Africans are estranged from their ancestral lands through colonial legislation. Ethiopianism would thus function primarily as a movement of political protest against colonial paternalism.

Oosthuizen (Post-Christianity in Africa) regards it a mistake to see independent movements, especially the Ethiopian movements, as nationalistic enterprises with political aspirations. Ethiopianism is a reaction against the inborn Western assumption of superiority, which led to financial domination of the church by the missions. Whilst the deepest motive has been religious, one of the essential points is the transferring to the spiritual and ecclesiastical plane of opposition

to white authority, which could be made effective only by reconstructing the African communities under African leadership. Religion was the only field where emancipation was possible.

Hastings (A History of African Christianity 1950-1975), on the other hand, maintains that independent movements are not to be seen, purely or even primarily, as a reaction against missionary Christianity. The motivation for independency must be investigated positively in what it offered, rather than negatively in what it rejected. The locus for independency is therefore an area sufficiently close to missionary activity for the seed to have been sown - expectations raised, new ideas unleashed but not harvested, limitations in missionary personnel and the tight disciplinary measures which often excluded from baptism those eager to receive it. Yet, however, Ethiopianism is understood primarily a protest movement against white domination in the mission churches, the moral responsibility of the promotion of blacks above a certain level.

Barret (Schism and Renewal in Africa) has attempted to analyse the causative factors of independency in a wide study over a number of societies in Africa. His basic theory of a failure in love is based on an initial hypothesis that independency is a societal reaction to mission arising out of a tribal Zeitgeist in which Christian missions were believed to be illegitimately mounting an attack against African traditional society and in particular its basic unit, the family. The phenomenon, however, cannot be qualified as a reaction to colonialism but rather a reaction to mission.

The most exhaustive study on Ethiopianism thus far is that of Erhard Kamphausen (Anfänge der kirchlichen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung in Südafrika. Geschichte und Theologie der Äthiopischen Bewegung, 1872-1912). While advancing no particular theory, he has drawn attention to some important themes in the development of Ethiopianism - the colonial situation as the locus for

theological reflection and praxis, rejection of mission Christianity, the example of the white churches, links with Afro-America, the unity of the African people and the principle of nationalism. Kamphausen is also one of few investigators to identify Unzondelelo in tracing the roots of religious independency.

## 2. Origins of the Present Enquiry

The paucity of the above studies attempting to deal with Ethiopianism as a whole suggested the direction that the present enquiry should take. The remarkable parallels that exist between each successive phase of Ethiopianism in different parts of the country constituted a major challenge. It was then decided that the enquiry should determine what it was that caused dissatisfaction and subsequent reaction to European missions. The tendency of African converts to react to foreign missions needs a close scrutiny, lest one indulge in what might prove to be misleading generalizations.

In the effort to provide a penetrating analysis of the causative factors involved in the development of Ethiopianism, we concern ourselves with the origins of the movement. These are to be found in the Methodist stream of mission Christianity. It was further decided that the enquiry should be undertaken in such manner as to arrive at some overall explanation to account for the phenomenon of Ethiopianism as it occurred in all parts of the country.

No attempt shall be made at a total description or assessment of all the characteristics of the movement. The present study does not enter in any depth into the histories, features, doctrinal differences or personalities involved. Neither does it attempt to analyse the variety of immediate causes of secession - the misunderstandings, delaying tactics, jealousies, rivalries and ambitions. Nor does it discuss

evidence for the high quality of Christian faith present in much of the Ethiopian movement.

### 3. Methodology and Sources

The method adopted amounts to an effort to investigate one basic problem: what were the conditions necessary for the emergence of Ethiopianism? The attempt is therefore made to get beneath the vast range of more immediate local and regional causes to answer a further question: what was the fundamental political, socio-economic and religious climate out of which Ethiopianism was born? Our discovery in this way will help identify the background factors that are shared in common.

The underlying assumption is that the Ethiopian movements do not represent unrelated religious changes, that they are not products of exceptional and unique circumstances and personalities which are completely explained by regional factors, and whose further expansion is therefore largely unpredictable. On the contrary, we shall attempt to determine to what extent they are explicable in terms of a common missionary structure and colonial situation, based on their common social contexts and histories.

The entire movement for religious independency among Africans has given rise to an unprecedentedly large literature. Usually written from a sympathetic viewpoint, the studies are mostly historical and deal with one particular prophet, movement or area. No attempt was made to consult all the literature, except all available and accessible material relating directly to the Ethiopian movement in Southern Africa. This was found to be insufficient for the purposes of this enquiry. Since the wealth of archival material served as the point of departure for this study, this deficiency was minimised. In view of the nature of this

enquiry, no oral sources were sought other than the two leading authorities in South African Methodism and Ethiopianism respectively.

#### 4. Phenomenon in History

Only when the type of circumstances under which Ethiopianism emerged are considered on a historical-structural point of view, can one begin to identify the crucial causative factors. This necessitates an explanation, not in terms of isolated, self-contained events or individual personalities, but as part of a wider structure - the emphasis is not based so much on the properties of the individual as on the place the individual or individual movement occupies in a particular society at a given time and the significance their acts have to the general mass of African people. In the light of this imperative, the first chapter attempts to sketch the socio-economic and political-ideological factors which accompanied the rise of Ethiopianism.

Chapter two offers some salient facts about early Methodism relevant to our study. It must also be seen as constituting the background in which the historically rooted attitudes the Methodist colonialist had about other groups were shaped. Colonial imperialism necessitated that Africans be deprived of power, opportunity, and reward for their labour and African people thus fell into a condition of deliberately arrested development. Historically, Methodism was a decisive instrument in this process.

The next three Chapters trace the evolution of Ethiopianism in the Unzondelelo movement, the Tembu Church and the first Ethiopian Church. The inherent imperatives of the background processes begin to affect relations between people of different "races" resulting in conflict. Inherently

exploitative relations began to be explained as inevitable consequences of "ministerial" inequality between black and white. To ensure the structures of inequality, Africans were treated as, and trained to become unequal. The African, however, did not remain a passive victim. Ethiopianism proves this conclusively in that it shows Africans striving for independence, trying to regain their human dignity and creating new structures that allowed for people's participation.

The first part of the final chapter locates the influencing factors for the development of Ethiopianism within the wider independent church movement. The second part concerns some of the attempts of the dominant class to undermine the newly-found African unity. The third part is more particular with a reflection on the immediate and individual factors involved in Ethiopian grievances. The last part defines Ethiopianism within the framework of a complex and total structure, with some internal references.

## Chapter 1

### Colonialism, destabilisation of African traditional society and acculturation - A Synopsis

#### 1. Colonial Expansionism

The roots of colonial rule and white supremacy in South Africa stretch back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the first Dutch settlers began to arrive. Since then, the history of white colonization has included conquests, plunder and dispossession of the indigenous Black peoples and societies. A brief history of South Africa in the nineteenth century is now offered in order to describe the factors that led to the rise of frustration within African societies. This is best understood by first examining the events of the Cape Colony prior to the Great Trek by the Boers.

In 1795, when the French revolutionary armies overran the Netherlands, Britain occupied the Cape briefly until 1803. The military governor, Earl of Macartney issued a proclamation barring all blacks from the colony. With the second British occupation of 1806, a more permanent settlement was possible for the Europeans. Transfers of territory were common in those days and the feelings of the population involved was a matter of minor importance. In "redrawing" the map of the world, Britain kept the Cape as one of the colonies she regarded as essential to the engagement and security of her dominion.<sup>1</sup> With British rule established, a new struggle was launched between two hardy and obstinate races: Boer and Briton.

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1. Neame L.E., White Man's Africa. The problem of a  
White Nation in a Black Continent (1952) Cape Town:  
Stoward, p.19.

Britain further strengthened her position at the Cape through the immigration of the 1820 settlers. Suffering the effects of the Industrial Revolution and a surplus population, prosperity was sought in the lucrative, unravished Cape. The settlers were oppressed in the early years by natural disasters, and by periodic Xhosa cattle raids. They gradually became acclimatised to their new surroundings, developing the physical and moral toughness and the harder race attitudes common to the inhabitants of turbulent frontier districts, yet helping to bridge the gap between colonial and African society. The bonds of African societies were weakened through their trade, missionary activities, and, increasingly, the employment of Africans as labourers within the settlements.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence is also clear that a very large proportion of the non-slave population was already in the service of the white population. As early as the first British occupation, their plight had been noticed. They were outside the protection of the law and were at the mercy of their employers. By a code of law passed in 1809, all Khoikhoi working for whites were given passes. Those without passes were classed as vagrants, arrested and hired out to farmers.

Under the influence of the new "humanitarianism" of the nineteenth century and the emergence of the "emancipation movement", represented chiefly by the notable Dr. John Philip of the London Missionary Society, the British administration at the Cape introduced at a later stage what became known as the "Cape liberal policy" which differed from that which was applied in the other parts of the sub-continent. However, most of the settled colonialists resented this policy because it threatened their economic privileges and social prestige.

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1. Davenport T.R.H., South Africa, A Modern History (1977) London: Macmillan, p. 31.

In 1828, Ordinance 50 was passed and it removed the previous restrictive laws affecting the Khoikhoi. For the Boer farmers, this was the last straw, the ".... almost inevitable sequel to the irritations of twenty years, beginning with the application of the Rule of Law to the offices of Masters .... The grievances on which all the spokesmen of the Voortrekkers are at one are those which have to do with slave regulations and emancipation, vagrancy and 'unchecked vagabondage'".<sup>1</sup> This precipitated a gradual trek of farmers from the colony, culminating in the Great Trek of 1834 - 1854.

However, according to Anna Steenkamp, Piet Retief's sister, the main reason for the exodus was biblical for, she wrote, ".... it is not so much their freeing which drove us to such lengths, as their being placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinctions of race and colour, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow down beneath such a yoke; wherefore we rather withdraw in order to preserve our doctrines in purity."<sup>2</sup> The burden of her argument, as in Retief's Manifesto, was that the authorities had abandoned the proper way of handling white-black, master-servant relations and offended the law of God as well as human susceptibilities in doing so, all at the behest of 'interested and dishonest persons acting under the cloak of religion.'<sup>3</sup>

If the causes of the Great Trek are attributed primarily to the questions of race and slave labour, it was also induced by certain economic considerations. The farmers' wasteful use of the land must have created a dire need for new

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1. Macmillan W.M., Cape Colour Question, A Historical Survey, London: Farber and Gwyer, p. 245.
  2. Paton A., Hope for South Africa (1958) London: Pall Mall Press, p. 27.
  3. Davenport T.R.H., op. cit, p. 40.

pastures and so land hunger must have been a very real motivation. Fundamental innovations in the use of the land were not easily made in their minds. The colonialists clamoured for the "open" interior to satisfy their hunger. But "the great acreages" were not vacant for their occupation. European settlement took place in a land settled by a relatively numerous black population.<sup>1</sup> The common Voortrekker practice was to enter a settlement comprising extensive areas in which blacks lived with their herds, while tilling the land and continuing their pastoral life. The Trekkers could then overpower them and establish their own farmsteads all over the country. The Africans were then also often forced to work for the Trekkers.<sup>2</sup>

Gradually the farmers extended their lands, splitting the African into smaller groups and driving them further away from the settled parts. Soon small hamlets, or "dorps", came into existence, comprising a central settlement of a number of farms. As the power of the Bantu people was broken, the tribes split up and small groups and families remained on the land which had passed into possession of the white farmer. In such cases, the whole family was compelled to till the land or guard the herds of the farmer, retaining for their own use only a small piece of ground.<sup>3</sup>

The Voortrekkers entered Natal and proclaimed it a republic, after their conquest in defeating the Zulus at Blood River in 1838. They pursued their destructive policy of unsettling the local inhabitants by marking off large tracts of land for white occupation, while retaining sufficient

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1. Paton A., op.cit., p. 73.

2. Harsch E., South Africa, White Rule Black Revolt (1980) New York: Monad Press, p. 24.

3. Wolton D.G., Whither South Africa (1947) London: Lawrence and Wiscart, p. 28.

blacks within for agricultural labour purposes, and always keeping them in a position of complete subordination. The Boer's Constitution of March 1839 featured the principle of representative democracy, coupled with an insistence on an ethnically restricted suffrage, which, as Davenport has shown, was "so pronounced a feature of all subsequent trekker constitutions, that this suffrage was not even a debating point among a self-contained volk living in isolated pockets and ruling over a territory from which non-members of the volk had not been physically excluded. It was a natural precaution, on which group survival depended at a time when frontiers were still impoverished."<sup>1</sup>

Britain's annexation of Natal in 1843 brought Theophilus Shepstone to the colony. He established his famous system of native reserves, which was the first large-scale scheme for the complete segregation of blacks and whites. The Natal colonialist demanded a plentiful supply of reliable labour, courts of law that carried out the Masters and Servants Laws in a proper manner, a minimum of expenditure for purely "native" purposes and security against uprisings. Not unlike the farmers of the Republics, "he believed that the natives held too much land, which was an encouragement to idleness, that they held it in too large areas, which made them a military menace. There was a need for policy, in his view, to reduce in the amount of land held by natives, and a system of taxation calculated to force them more freely into the labour market."<sup>2</sup>

In 1846 a Commission was appointed to assign land to the blacks, but "the commission worked in the midst of a popular

1. Davenport T.R.H., op. cit., p.59.
2. De Kiewiet C.W., The Imperial Factor in South Africa (1937) Cambridge University Press, p.31.

belief that Natal's natives should be expelled northwards into Zululand or southwards into Pondoland, leaving behind only enough to satisfy the need for labour."<sup>1</sup> British colonial policy towards blacks offered no more sympathy than did the Voortrekker policy. The British aimed to contain the development of black peoples in such manner as not to conflict with European interests.

Soon after the British invasion of Natal, the Trekkers moved back towards the mountains, into the high plateaux of the interior and spread themselves out on the vast territory that later became known as the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. The Boers however had to fight a succession of frontier wars against the African nations (mostly the Zulu, Ndebele and Sotho) in order to take the land. These wars lasted until 1880, and the defeated Africans were either pushed back into the mountains of Basutoland and the arid regions of the Northern Transvaal, or reduced to serfdom on the Boer farms.<sup>2</sup>

In 1852, the Sand River Convention was signed, recognising the "independence" of the Boers living north of the Vaal River. This was nothing more than a "cementing of a defensive alliance of British and Boers against the natives. British recognition of the Republics came thus as an act of friendship, marking a season of harmonious co-operation between the two white peoples."<sup>3</sup> The Boers were now free to manage their own relations with the Africans. The Transvaalers drew up their "Grondwet" (Constitution) wherein the solution of the African "problem" was defined as keeping him in order and forcing him to do his duty i.e. to come out to labour as

1. De Kiewiet C.W., History of South Africa, social and economic (1941) O.U.P., p. 74.
2. Van Den Berghe P.L., South Africa: A Study in Conflict (1970) Barkeley: California University Press, p. 31.
3. Macmillan W.M., op. cit., p. 289.

and when required. "This obligation carried with it no corresponding right even to security of land tenure, and the "Kafir" question ended, so far as any chief or tribe when their power was broken and their people finally crushed."<sup>1</sup>

In demarcating their farms, the Boers frequently ignored existing lines of Native occupation.<sup>2</sup> Soon the Republics increased in strength and farming operations were extended. However, the mass of the African tribesman, as white farming was consolidated, was increasingly compressed into certain areas largely determined by their geographical position at the time of African defeat, but also in areas where the land was less fertile and therefore less desirable for the Europeans. Such areas were totally insufficient for the African and could offer no refuge to the mass of dispossessed tribesmen who were roaming the veld.<sup>3</sup>

With the European discovery of gold and diamonds, the influx of whites into the interior Republic increased rapidly, as also, British imperialistic interest. The impact of the mineral discoveries had rippled through the whole fabric of African society, penetrating to the remotest rural areas. This accounts for some of the major changes that took place on the farms. A new society was born where black and white were bound together in the closest dependence upon one another. Thus Wilson argues that "whether one considers urbanisation, the shortage of labour, or the quality of rural life, it is abundantly clear that the effect of economic development was to bind black and white more closely together than they had ever been tied before."<sup>4</sup>

1. Macmillan, W.M., op.cit., p. 309.
2. Brookes E.H., History of Native Policy in South Africa (1924) Cape Town: Nationale Pers, p. 122.
3. Wolton D.G., op. cit., p. 30.
4. Wilson M., Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.11, Ed. Thomson L., Wilson M. (1969-1971) p. 126.

In 1877, Britain annexed the Transvaal. It is important to observe as Brookes does, that "the annexation of 1877 did not involve the deliverance of multitudes of oppressed Natives from cruelty and semi-slavery ... It was a deliberate and flagrant international crime."<sup>1</sup> The British believed that the government of the blacks could not be carried out under the common law of the country, since they were not "sufficiently advanced in civilization" to understand or be ruled by it. Thus lobola, for example, was regarded as a practice inconsistent with civilization and the white courts therefore refused to undertake lobola cases. What the white landowners, farmers and their elected representatives had failed by legislation to bring about - the diminution of African's freedom of choice and their diversion into labour upon white farms - the droughts and wars of the years 1877-1881 were partially to achieve.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous laws were enacted to restrict the Africans in almost every facet of their life. The demand for cheap "native" labour increased and this occasioned the Glen Grey Act in 1894, in an attempt to regulate its supply. This Act laid the basis for the building up of a labour reserve which could be drawn on as required. It struck a severe blow at Bantu "squattling" and confined "vagrants" to the Transkeian territories. The Glen Grey Act also established the principle of "indirect rule" which was later to become the pattern of government for all British territories. It further began the process of the transformation of the Bantu system of communal land tenure into a gradually introduced system of individual tenure.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Brookes E.H., History of Native Policy in South Africa (1924) Cape Town: Nationale Pers, p. 123.
  2. Bundy C., Rise and Fall of the African Peasantry, London: Heinemann, p. 83.
  3. Wolton D.G., op. cit., p. 33.

Soon the Master and Servants Act followed which was intended to bind servant to master for a specific period. This made it impossible for an African to leave his work either on a farm or in a town, or to change his employment without the permission of his master. A series of pass laws was introduced, making it necessary for Africans to carry various identification documents. Ownership of the land by Africans was now strictly prohibited. The Hut Tax ordinance of 1880 compelled all Africans to pay such tax for their dwellings. At the same time "The Superintendent of Natives" officially exhorted all Africans to work on the mines and so earn their hut tax money. The number of "reserves" increased with appalling conditions: lack of water supplies, drainage and lavatory facilities. This nevertheless ensured the availability of a vast reservoir of cheap black labour which could be efficiently moved as required.

Britain was also canvassing for a confederation or union of states and colonies at this time. A Customs Union Conference met in 1903 to deal with certain aspects of the "native question". One of the Natal delegates, F.R. Moor, proposed the following resolution at this meeting: "The population of South Africa being in the approximate proportion of six natives to one European, it follows that the political status of the native should conform to conditions which will assure the constant dominance of the White races."<sup>1</sup> Moor's proposal deserves mention as it reflected the prevailing attitudes of the colonies, towards blacks. In line with her prevailing colonial policy, Britain granted responsible self-government to the Transvaal and Orange River Colony in 1906 and 1907 respectively.

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1. Minutes, Customs Union Conference, Bloemfontein  
10 March 1903.

The celebrated South African Native Affairs Commission was appointed in September 1903, so that it could offer recommendations to the colonial government, with the object of arriving at a common understanding on questions of "Native" policy. Described as "one of the most brilliant gatherings of Native Administrators ever brought together in South Africa", it is of some significance that the Commission itself was predominantly British.<sup>1</sup> Some of the important principles that emerged from the commission's conclusions were that the basis for policy should be white domination, the granting of political rights to be determined by race or colour, and 'native' political equality to be removed or prevented. Further, though this commission recognised a measure of concern for the black, it ruled that representations by blacks must be separate and apart from white representation. This Commission also made some interesting observations about the Ethiopian movement, which we shall consider in the last chapter.

Disarmed and defeated in the colonial wars, stripped of their independence, deprived of their land, and compelled by legislation and economic necessity to labour for an "alien", millions of Africans were now engulfed by the new colonial society. Its major sociological legacy was the definitive consolidation of the whites as a ruling and hegemonic class.<sup>2</sup> The British, having usurped power, installed capitalism as the predominant socio-economic system under which Africans were reduced to a secondary labour force without any influence over the political and economic processes of the evolving society.<sup>3</sup>

The colonial system of domination and capitalist exploitation closed off any means of independent livelihood for the African

1. Brookes E.H., op.cit., p. 131.
2. Mugubane B.M., The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa (1979) New York, p. 52.
3. Loc.cit.

people; the subordinated were impressed with the notion that any improvement in their condition could be achieved only on terms set by the oppressors.<sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century, as we have seen, the colonialists were so strong that they thought they could rearrange everything and everybody to serve their interests. At the same time they affirmed certain progressive and democratic ideals which they claimed to be universally applicable.

Throughout the development of colonialism, Africans have not remained passive victims. They resisted conquest, but given the European technological and military superiority, guns triumphed over spears and assegais. This superiority was translated into a political and ideological conflict that assumed intellectual and moral overtures. The colonialists claimed that God was on their side, and thus, on 16 December 1838, God was in favour of those inside the laager. It was therefore also contrary to the will of God to place Blacks and Whites on the same footing.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional African societies themselves had been shattered by the upheavals of the colonial conquest and an expanding capitalist economic system. Being subjected to a common national oppression, Africans of varied tribal backgrounds gradually acquired a new sense of solidarity and of a common identity and purpose. They were now recognising themselves as drawn into a single fraternity by their common interests. In the late nineteenth century and in response to specific historical developments, a diversity of latent forces emerged which would define African resistance in the years to come.

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1. Ibid., p. 260.

2. Mphahlele M.C.J., The Historical and Religious Roots of the Present Polarisation Between Black and White in South Africa (unpublished paper) p. 33.

## 2. Some Crucial African Religio-Cultural Institutions

The conquest of the Africans was not a momentary act of violence which stunned their ancestors and then ended. The physical struggle against African societies was only the beginning of a process in which the initial act of conquest was buttressed and institutionalized by ideological activities. The supremacy of the whites, their values and civilization, was only won when the cultural and religious system of the defeated African was reduced to nothing and when the Africans themselves loudly admitted the cultural hegemony of their conquerors.<sup>1</sup>

Though their societies were not free of strife, early African peoples were at least able to enjoy their self-determination. They had some say over the social relationships and norms that governed their daily lives. Almost everyone in a tribe lived at the same general level of subsistence as everyone else. There had to be equality because one person's labour could not support both himself and a non-producer. There were no special productive techniques to supersede demand. Exploitation was thus impossible, for all were engaged in the struggle with nature, all had to work or die. Since the means of production belonged not to individuals but to all, none died of want in the midst of plenty.<sup>2</sup>

This early egalitarianism did not long survive after the Dutch and British settlers landed on South African soil. It was shattered by the advance of European civilization. In order to clarify one of the claims of this thesis that Ethiopiansim was an African response to the destruction of African cultural and religious systems by Europeans, a brief appraisal of these systems is necessary.

1. Mugubane B.M., op. cit., p. 55.

2. Harsch E., op. cit., p. 16.

African tribes placed great importance on the family unit ✓ NS  
 which usually consisted of the father, his wives and  
 children, plus any unmarried relatives attached to him.  
 Because of the people's close ties to the land in subsistence  
 economy, it was important to have enough labour to work it.  
 More labour produced more food and this labour came from the  
 family. Thus the families were usually large, since more  
 people made work easier to share out.<sup>1</sup>

The continuity of the family was secured by a recognised  
 system of devolution, the eldest son of the principal  
 wife being heir to property, responsibilities, duties and  
 also liabilities, financial or otherwise. The families  
 lived in small settlements or kraals. The kraals in any  
 one area or district would generally compose a unit or  
 village over which a "headsman", recognised by the chief  
 and subject to him, would rule.

The chief was the embodiment of the tribe, the centre of  
 the whole society and its representative. Where there were  
 several tribes in a single area of land, a paramount chief  
 presided over all the chiefs. The rules of inheritance  
 restricted chieftainship to males, who usually came from  
 the reigning dynasty. The eldest son of the "great" wife  
 (not always the first wife) would be first in the line for  
 succession. The chief was head of the government, the  
 "high priest", and often the leader in war. He administered  
 the law, distributed land, controlled agriculture and  
 organised hunting. If he accumulated wealth, it was for  
 the purpose of redistribution. These autocratic powers of

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1. Callinicos L., A People's History of South Africa  
 Vol.1 (1980) Johannesburg, p. 3.

the chief, while seeming despotic were in fact conferred on him only to ensure the protection and the stability of the tribe. The chief therefore also consulted his council of reputable men who, in some measure, reflected and voiced the opinion of the tribe. He thus ruled on behalf of his people.<sup>1</sup>

The livelihood of the African people was intimately bound up with their system of land tenure. The chief parcelled out large tracts of land to his subordinate chieftains, who in turn granted the heads of the households under their jurisdiction land to cultivate and upon which to erect their dwellings. The family head used the land undisturbed until his death when it was then inherited by his children. Only in the case of revolt against the chief could the land be confiscated. Land was never bought or sold, though it was sometimes given up freely or lent for a time by its holder. Boundary rights were respected and in the case of an infringement, the guilty one was punished by the chief.<sup>2</sup>

Land was not only the property of the living, but of the total community of the living and the living dead. The latter's good disposition made possible rain in season, the harvest and plenty for all. People were tied to the land, body, mind and soul. A child's umbilical cord is buried into the soil, the same soil into which his ancestors are buried, thus linking him to them there where they are. If he is removed permanently from that place, the cord which ties him to them is broken.<sup>3</sup>

1. Evans M.S., Black and White in South East Africa (1916) p. 70.
2. Schapera I., op. cit., p. 11.
3. Setiloane G., How the traditional world-view persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana, p. 402.

African agriculture, contrary to popular opinion, was, as Bundy points out, "rationally directed, informed by experience, and possessed of definite skills adequate to supply the wants of a society that in any case placed far greater importance in the possession of livestock."<sup>1</sup> The cattle were rarely slaughtered for food; meat was obtained by hunting. Cattle was a major source for wealth accumulation and a disposable asset. There were well organised grazing seasons, methods of protection from disease and wild animal attacks and sound overall management to ensure optimum production. Those who had no cattle would often be herdsman for the more fortunate, and could freely use the milk of the cattle they herded.<sup>2</sup>

This précis of the African concepts of family, government, land, agriculture and livestock does not speak of a poorness, hardness, narrowness or joylessness of human existence. It speaks rather of a coherent worldview and viable cultural institutions, which enabled the African to order his life and morality. This traditional order was, however, increasingly to be destroyed in contact with the European aliens. Some of the main features of this acculturation are now discussed.

Africans were increasingly alienated from their ancestral lands. The historic pattern of African settlement, involved little or no change in land ownership or usage. Under the impact of high level demand for the best pastoral lands by the European farmers and the world demand for minerals from Southern Africa, land alienation proceeded at a staggering rate. This involved not only African slavery in the form of forced labour, but also, the systematic eviction of the indigenous population from its lands and ancestral homes. This expropriation of land belonging to the Africans, incessant

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1. Bundy C., Rise and Fall of the African Peasantry, p. 25.
  2. Schapera I., *op. cit.*, p. 13.

demands for their labour and frequent interference in the traditional organisations of the indigenous population proved too great a strain for the traditional political institutions to withstand.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the punitive raids undertaken by the Europeans seriously disrupted African life and thus greatly weakened the political autonomy of the Africans. Africans, as we saw earlier, were dispersed from their lands and became refugees, were enslaved, exterminated, forcibly subdued and put under European control, and exploited. The authority of the African chiefs was severely undermined by the assumption of direct control of the Africans by the Europeans. This central source of authority in African life was thus weakened. The question of controlling Africans by military means became crucial, since there was no other way the fewer Europeans could rule the larger number of Africans. Thus the department most appropriately placed to deal with the Africans was that of the commandos.<sup>2</sup>

The kind of society that was being formed under the impact of colonialism bore within itself cultural contradictions which forced the Africans to adopt a new direction in their struggle for liberation from European oppression. Being deprived of their traditional hierarchies, their lands expropriated, impoverished and enslaved to masters who belonged to a foreign culture, the African communities began to understand their fundamental problem as being one of "survival as a unit". This led to the formation of a new kind of solidarity of class within a society that was

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1. Moeti M.T., Ethiopianism: Separatist Roots of African Nationalism (1981) Syracuse University, p. 91.

2. Brookes E.H., White Rule in South Africa 1830-1910 (1974) p. 98. The commandos constituted a pseudo-army.

now moving toward becoming more capitalist and industrialised, regrouping the members of the diverse African community.

183 ✓ Ethiopianism provided this still "unorganised" group of Africans, suffering from the devastating effects of European population, with that indispensable inter-ethnic solidarity.<sup>1</sup> This nationalistic impulse, coupled with a sense of enlightened self-interest and ecclesiastical inspired "independence" stimulated a small number of African Methodist ministers to break from the Wesleyan church structure. to forge this newly found solidarity.

Furthermore, the traditional religious system appears to have been little understood, a further facilitating factor for radical African reaction to European interpretation of Christianity. Within traditional life, the African is immersed in a religious system. Religion permeates all aspects of life. For him therefore, and for the larger community, the whole of life is a religious drama. Practically all his activities are experienced through religious understanding and meaning. The times and seasons of the year speak a religious language, names of people have religious meaning, the sound of the drum echoes a religious note - the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

184 ✓ Failure to understand this basic premise of African life, among other things, led many missionaries to the tragedy of establishing a very superficial type of Christianity on the African soil. This African religious background was often viewed as devilish, fit only to be swept away by Euro - American civilization. Yet, as Mbiti has shown, "Christianity and traditional religions are to a great extent compatible. If we seek after compatibility, the search will help us see also where the line of incompatibility is to be drawn."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Moeti M.T., op. cit., p. 104.

2. Mbiti J.S., African religions and philosophy (1969) p.2.

3. Mbiti J.S., Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa, in Crucial Issues in Missions Tomorrow, Ed. McGavaran D.A., p. 150.

This search was not undertaken, with the result that a gospel bound in European culture did not penetrate deeply enough into the religious world of the African. Since religion permeated all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and material areas of life. Where the African is, there is his religion: he takes it to work, to the beer party, to school. His religion consisted of a number of beliefs and practices which are not formulated into a systematic set of dogmas which a person is expected to accept. People simply assimilated whatever religious ideas and practices had been held or observed by their families and communities. There were no creeds to be recited; instead, the creeds are written in the heart of the individual and each one was himself a living creed of his religion.<sup>1</sup>

✓ To be human in an African society is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, and his kinship with the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements is to be "inhuman". Therefore, to be without religion amounts to self-excommunication from the entire life of society, for African people do not know how to exist without religion.<sup>2</sup>

To illustrate this markedly "different" world view, we consider now the African concept of "time" in some detail which also is

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1. Mbiti, J.S., African religions and philosophy, p.2.

2. Loc.-cit.

linked to one of the fundamental causes for religious independence. The academic questions of time are of no concern to Africans in traditional thought. For them, time is a composition of events which have been realised, those which are occurring simultaneously or which are immediately to occur. That which has not been realised belongs in reality to No-Time, though it may become actualised into the realm of time or composition of events. The linear concept of time, with its past, present and future, stretching from infinity to infinity, is foreign to African thinking, in which the dominant factor is the virtual absence of the 'future'. To Africans, time has to be experienced to make sense. Therefore the essence of time is what is present and what is past. Time moves backwards, rather than forwards, from the NOW (present) to the past.<sup>1</sup>

Sasa (present) is not only a point of now in time. It is a period in which people exist and within which they project themselves primarily into the past, and to a lesser extent into the future. The Sasa period is not mathematically constant and different people have different quantities and qualities of Sasa. Individual Sasa is constantly changing, but never ending. Sasa has the sense of immediacy, nearness, and 'nowness' and is the period of immediate concern for the people, since that is 'where' and 'when' they exist.<sup>2</sup>

The Zamani period (past), on the other hand, has its own past, present and future, and overlaps into the Sasa period. Before events are incorporated into the Zamani, they have to be realised in Sasa. Then they move backwards, into the Zamani period, in which everything finds its termination, its halting point. It is the storehouse for all phenomenon and events, a vast ocean of time, where everything gets absorbed into an

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1. Mbiti J.S., op.cit., p.17. See also his New Testament Eschatology in an African Background (1971)

2. Ibid, p.22.

✓ aspect of reality which is neither after nor before. The Zamani may also be long, good, bad or short and cannot be described mathematically. If Sasa is the period of conscious living, which binds individuals and their immediate environment together, Zamani is the period of myth, giving a sense of foundation or 'security' to the Sasa period.<sup>1</sup> This traditional concept of time is intimately bound up with the life of the African people in general, and it may help us to understand the beliefs and practices of Africans in the traditional and modern situation.<sup>2</sup>

No account of African religion would be complete without mentioning their concepts of God. These are strongly influenced and coloured by the historical, geographical, social and cultural background or environment of each tribe of African people. Expressed ontologically, God is the origin and sustenance of all things. He is 'older' than the Zamani period and is outside and beyond His creation. Yet, he is also personally involved in His creation through His agents. In all African societies, without a single exception, people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being. This is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths and ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on to other people, since there are no sacred writings in traditional societies. Long dissertations of God are therefore not expected, but God is no stranger to African peoples, and in traditional life, there are no atheists. This is summarised in an African proverb which states that "no one shows a child the Supreme Being". Thus everyone knows about God's existence almost by instinct.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Mbiti, J.S., op.cit., p.23.

2. Ibid, p. 16.

3. Ibid, p.29ff. See also his Concept of God in Africa S.P.C.K. (1969).

This brief account of African traditional religion and culture shows that the 'idea of revelation' is found, even if in a perspicuous form, in African religions; we could also say in African culture. The early missionaries were not ignorant of this, since some confessed their knowledge of "broken lights of God" in African religions and social customs and individual characteristics which they considered to be wholly admirable.<sup>1</sup>

However, many missionaries viewed African cultural and religious backgrounds as a rotten heap of superstitions, taboos, magic and cruelty. The African longing and seeking for God "runs through their religion like a vein of gold in a dirty rock". The "terrible social degradation, misery, lack of consciousness of sin, baseness of superstition felt by the even lowest type of savage", was on the whole an oppressive power under which to live.<sup>2</sup> What message could the Christian missionaries bring to people whom they believed to be in such a 'barbaric and inhuman' state?

The attitude of the Wesleyan missionaries was well expressed by pioneer missionary, Samuel Broadbent, when he wrote that, "it would be a mistaken philanthropy and a palpable contradiction of St. Paul's description of the Gentile world, to represent mere heathen men as combining in their character all that is noble and excellent. It is not their virtue which entitles them to our sympathy, but their bondage to demoralizing and cruel superstitions, and their need of that gospel which alone can save foreign man, and the fearful energy of their vices tends only to strengthen the appeal in their behalf."<sup>1</sup> This gospel the Wesleyan missionaries did bring, but as we shall see, it was couched in a Western institutional framework and cultural embodiment, foreign to the African culture and religious heritage.

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1. Eveleigh W., Story of a Century (1923) Cape Town, p. 5.
  2. Hewson L., Introduction to South African Methodists (1950) Standard Press, p. 17 - 19.
  3. Ibid, p.26.

So money was invested in overseas missionary work to convert and to eradicate pernicious customs and to promote acceptance of the moral and political code of the conqueror. The missionaries, whether they were aware of it or not, were used by the colonialists to justify their own position and to psychologically enslave the colonized peoples. They condemned African institutions and customs, and encouraged the social norms of a capitalist civilization as if they comprised a universal moral code, and thus translated African peasant life in a methodical way to the life of industrial capitalism.

Thus, conquest and enculturation abruptly cut short the historical development of the African people and their civilization, which in several places had reached a highly advanced level. Having been subjugated, the African was declared a pagan, a savage, a member of an inferior race, destined by the Christian God to slave to superior Europeans. This arrogance was to cause serious tensions and further divisions among the people. In the ferment of these dialectics, a new consciousness evolved whose urgent task was to build unity among people, to foster a sense of brotherhood among all, to overcome their dependence and alienation. The African, estranged from the authentic possibilities of the new order, was now forced to create new alternatives for growth.

## CHAPTER 2

### Background to South African Methodism

#### 1. Early Methodist History

In 1795, British soldiers were for the first time stationed at the Cape and among them were four or five Methodists. They hired a very small room in the town for two hours in the week, to hold a prayer meeting where they read the scriptures, sang and prayed. These meetings were maintained until four of the leading men in the group were transferred with their regiments to the East Indies.<sup>1</sup> During the second British occupation of the Cape in 1806, there was in the regiment serving under General Board, a fervent Methodist, George Middlemiss, who enthusiastically shared his faith with his fellow soldiers.

Middlemiss was succeeded by Sergeant Kendrick in 1812 who came as class leader and lay preacher. Services and prayer meetings were regularly held, in spite of intense opposition from the regimental officers, and some scores of people in and around Cape Town gathered in Methodist meetings. Kendrick sent an urgent request to the Wesleyan Missionary Committee in England for a minister to take charge of the flourishing work. In response Rev. J. McKenny was sent in 1814 but permission for him to exercise his ministerial duties was refused as the soldiers had chaplains provided by the government. Even if McKenny assumed a missionary role, preaching to slaves and "heathens" would have been offensive to the Europeans. He waited in vain for the restrictions to be removed, and after some months, left for Ceylon.

However, the Methodist soldiers at the Cape reaffirmed their

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1. The Christian Magazine or Evangelical Repository for 1802. Edinburgh, p. 24.

appeal for their own minister and in 1816 <sup>(4)</sup> Barnabas Shaw <sup>1/3/3</sup> landed in Cape Town. He also had to apply to the Governor of the Colony for permission to perform his duties. He wrote, "Having been refused the sanction of the governor, I was resolved what to do, and commenced without it on the following Sabbath. My congregation at first were chiefly composed of pious soldiers, and it was in a room hired by them that I first preached Christ crucified in South Africa."<sup>1</sup> Shaw also had an exalted passion for the salvation of the "heathen" and was determined to explore the immense interior. "If the British Missionary Society is offended, tell them we will bear the expense ourselves. We have a little property in England and for this we will let it go."<sup>2</sup>

With such fervour and dedication, Shaw and his wife left the Cape to commence the Methodist mission to the people of Namaqualand. The nomadic lifestyle of the Namaqua people proved unfavourable for the development of more mission stations than the three that were founded, and the work overall proved statistically unproductive. In these early years, there were others like Shaw who were "boldly blazing trails" of their own. <sup>(3)</sup> Stephen Kay began the Bechuanaland missions in 1821 and <sup>(4)</sup> Samuel Broadbent went to work among the Barolong in 1823. Shaw returned to Cape Town in 1826. By this time the Colonial authorities had relaxed their restrictions and were obliged to tolerate the growing number of Methodists.

Further east, the need for a defensive barrier on the frontiers of the Cape Colony and the lack of funds to finance troops led the authorities to change official policy and favour the colonizing of the Eastern Cape with emigrants

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1. Shaw B., Memorials of South Africa (1970) New York, p.79.
  2. Davey C., The March of Methodism (1951) Epworth, p. 36.

from Britain. William Shaw came as chaplain to the Sephton party of British settlers who landed in Algoa Bay during April, 1820. Shaw believed that it was wise to provide for the spiritual needs of the colonialists, while simultaneously making every effort to evangelize the African. Shaw worked in the newly-named District of Albany and shared the inevitably hardships of pioneer settlements, but he was unfailing in ministering across denominational and ethnic barriers, even learning "frontier Dutch" to preach to the Boers.

Shaw considered Kaffraria to be a great field for future mission. He wrote, "I resolved, God being my helper steadily to pursue the openings of Divine Providence in this direction ... to use my utmost efforts to establish a "chain of Wesleyan Mission Stations" beginning near the border of the colony, and extending along the coast country of Kaffraria to Natal and Delagoa Bay."<sup>1</sup>

*not approach to African tribes*  
On the 13 November 1823, Shaw and William Shepstone left Albany to establish the first link in the chain of stations at Wesleyville, with the Gqunukhwebe tribe under Phatho! For the chief, as with others, "the prevailing idea seemed to be that a resident missionary would add to their political importance and provide an easy method of communication with the government."<sup>2</sup> For the missionary, this was "... the only possible means of civilizing rude and barbarous people ... Who else but the missionary will go and reside among 'barbarians' to improve their morals and their habits?"<sup>3</sup>

*Belief that Africans are inferior*

1. Shaw W., Story of my Mission (London) p. 327.
2. Whiteside J., History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in South Africa (1906) London, p. 176.
3. Report of Select Comm. on Aborigines 1BB VII 538, p. 124. cf. Seton B.E., Wesleyan Missions and the Sixth Frontier War 1834-1835 (1962) UCT, p. 45.

The second in the "chain of stations" was called Mount Coke<sup>2</sup>, established some sixty kilometers east of Wesleyville, where the powerful Ndlambe dwelt. The third was Butterworth<sup>3</sup>, founded among the Gcaleka tribe in 1827. Later, Morley<sup>4</sup> was established at the kraals of Depa, a Pondo sub-chief and Clarkebury for the Tembus<sup>5</sup>. Buntingville<sup>6</sup> was the sixth station, built more than a hundred kilometers north of the Umtata River among that part of the Pondo nation over which Chief Faku ruled. This "chain of stations" now formed, covered a distance of some three hundred kilometers and were sustained by dedicated and prayerful toil. The stations acted as centres for trade and agriculture, but also for Christian influence. Stations were manned as long as possible, and proved to be cities of refuge for Europeans in the vicinity, especially in times of war.<sup>1</sup>

Natal was not to be left untouched by Wesleyan missions, since Shaw had included the area in his chain of stations. After the Boers had massacred the Zulus at Blood River, they began to harrass the Africans on the southern border of their "Republic of Natalia". In 1842, Sir George Napier, Governor of the Cape Colony, sent a small task force to occupy Durban, and accompanying the troops was the Rev. James Archbell, the first Wesleyan minister to settle in Natal. He was later joined by others, notably W.C. Holden<sup>?</sup>, who whilst ministering to the Europeans, attempted to evangelize the "thousands of kaffirs" who, in his words, were "in a state of perfect barbarism."<sup>2</sup> British immigrants of 1849-1851 served to increase the prosperity and penetrate the influence of Methodism in Natal. Many churches were erected, especially for the Europeans. In 1850, a new church was

1. Hewson L., op. cit., p. 23.

2. Holden W.C., Brief History of Methodism, and of Methodist Missions in South Africa (1877) London: Wesleyan Conference Office, p. 432.

*Methodist church in Natal*

erected in Aliwal Street, Durban. The old chapel was handed to the Africans who hitherto had been compelled to worship in the open air.<sup>1</sup>

*Transvaal*

Methodism in the Transvaal owes its origins to the missionary endeavours of the arduous and devoted Wesleyan, David Magatha. Magatha had become a Christian after attending services at the Wesleyan Church in Thaba Nchu. He eventually settled in Potchefstroom where he daily proclaimed the message of salvation to the local people. The Boers were offended that a "native" should preach Christianity, and soon they had him thrashed and banished from their Republic. During his wanderings, he met Paul Kruger who gave him a permit to return.<sup>2</sup>

Magatha seems never to have received a salary, nor did he ask anybody for money, but for years he stood alone as a Methodist, holding prayer meetings with unflinching regularity. By 1873 he was joined by George Blencowe and George Weavind, both pioneers of the Transvaal missions. The painful ravages of the Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902) was to dramatically change the pattern of Wesleyan missions in the Transvaal, bringing the work to an almost untimely end. Yet those Methodists who remained and those who returned after the war, were able to continue with renewed vigour the work that had begun with the preaching and dedication of an African convert.

## 2. History of the Clarkebury Mission

Some account of this history is necessary, since Clarkebury was one of the oldest Wesleyan Missions in the Transkeian territory, situated in the heart of Tembuland and being the circuit that Nehemiah Tile was attached to for most of his years in the Methodist ministry.

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1. Whiteside J., op. cit., p. 360.

2. Ibid, p. 420. See also Hewson L., op. cit., p.68.

*Transvaal*

On the 9 April 1825, William Shaw while on a journey of observation among the "Native" tribes on the Eastern frontier, met Ngubencuka (Vusani), Paramount Chief of the Tembus who promised co-operation in allowing a missionary to settle in Tembuland. Five years later in April, 1830, Richard Haddy arrived and was given a site near a hill called Noni.<sup>1</sup> He was accompanied by Mr. J.C. Warner, a catechist, who soon mastered the Tembu language. The initial response, measured in terms of church membership was disappointing, as few showed interest in the Christian message.<sup>2</sup> But there was also commerce and trade to engage in. Each year at the time of the District Meeting, or sometimes more often, the mission wagon was stocked at Grahamstown with goods which were likely to be in demand amongst the "native" people. The cost price was noted and when disposed off by barter their value appeared in their accounts.<sup>3</sup>

The first baptism recorded on the 27 August, 1831 was of a Tembu woman who was named Ann Ninia. Later, numerous families gathered around the mission station, some being drawn by a desire for Christian instruction, others by the security which the station offered from raiding parties. Still others came for tobacco and beads. The missionaries gradually began to rule the people, assuming the duties of the local chiefs who became alarmed when they found that the Wesleyan brand of Christianity lessened their power. Land for gardening and building sites were allocated by the missionary, disputes

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1. Methodist Archives, Cory Library, Grahamstown. (hereafter MACL) MS 15, 207.
  2. MACL, Minutes of Albany District Meeting 1834, shows a total of 12 members.
  3. Lennard A.J., Brief History of Clarkebury in The Deathless Years, A Centenary Souvenir Clarkebury Mission Wesley Methodist Church of S.A., p. 9.

settled, and offences punishable or the offenders warned by him. Coming from England where even in the villages, houses were built close together and where narrow streets were the rule and not the exception, it is not remarkable that in endeavouring to "civilize" the local "natives", the missionaries encouraged them to build their huts along the sides of "streets", but this arrangement was altogether unsuited.<sup>1</sup> When colonial law was exercised and European magistrates appointed, the missionaries, relieved of their civil duties, were able to pursue their spiritual work more earnestly.<sup>2</sup>

In 1856, the Rev. J.S. Thomas, who was in charge of the Clarkebury Mission, deemed it beneficial to move the station to the more favourable Ncambele, some fifty kilometers from Clarkebury. Ncambele was a tract of country fiercely contended for and as a consequence, unoccupied. The Tembu chiefs did not object, but the Pondo chiefs were not consulted. Thomas took a party of men from Clarkebury and proceeded to erect some buildings on the new site with the object of a complete removal of the station later. But barely few days after taking up residence at Ncambele, Thomas was stabbed with an assegai in an attack on Ncambele by Umbola, a Pondo sub-chief. He was buried here, and the rest of the missionary party returned to Clarkebury.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas' death brought Rev. Peter Hargreaves to Clarkebury where he remained for some 24 years. His first work was to ensure the building of a new church, which when completed, was a testimony to the substantial character of a type of building then almost unknown. While the new church was good enough for some years, the rapid growth of the mission necessitated the erection of a larger one twelve years later.

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1. Lennard A.J., op.cit., p.11

2. Whiteside J., op. cit., p. 192.

3. Lennard A.J., op. cit., p. 14.

The entire cost of the new building, amounting to over 500 pounds was fully met by the local people.<sup>1</sup>

Hargreaves was also often instrumental in subsiding Tembu. chief Ngangelizwe and preventing him from engaging in battle, even over a cup of tea.<sup>2</sup> He believed the gospel to be the power of God and the only thing capable of curbing Ngangelizwe's "wild and turbulent spirit" and placing his clothes and his right mind at the feet of Jesus. For this reason, he urged the District Meeting to seriously consider Ngangelizwe's request for the formation of a mission station at his "Great Place", especially since the chief was also willing to contribute towards all the expenses connected with the erection of the Mission House and chapel.<sup>3</sup>

Hargreaves also used his influence to protect colonial troops and traders. He was once warned by Dalisile, a Tembu chief, that the mission station would be burned unless he refrained from using it as a military centre for British troops. Hargreaves once saved a Mr. E. Heddings' trading store from plunder after telling the would-be attackers that they would be disgracing their chief, Ngangelizwe, if they carried out their attack. So while the missionaries had a far nobler object than to promote commerce, merchants and store keepers were indebted to them for opening up avenues of trade, and protecting their capitalistic interest.<sup>4</sup>

In 1875, an Institution for the education and training of young Africans was built. To Rev. Hargreaves' appeals for help, the Tembus responded nobly, and towards the £ 1,500

1. Lennard A.J., op.cit., p.15.

2. Whiteside J., op.cit., p.243.

3. MACL, Minutes of Queenstown District Meeting January 1872, p. 230.

4. Lennard A.J., op. cit., p.17.

which the first buildings cost, they contributed £ 1,000.<sup>1</sup> African ministers also received their training here, while others were trained as teachers and tradesmen. Missionary work among European residents of the area also began to seriously develop once the institution was fully established.<sup>2</sup> In the time of Rev. Theo Chubb (1882 - 1885), a large carpenter's workshop was added to the buildings. Many houses were later erected for the teachers. A beautiful church known as Emmanuel Church was built for the European congregation, which consisted of Europeans attached to the institution and the families of surrounding traders.<sup>3</sup> Chubb was succeeded by W.S. Davis who remained in Clarkebury until 1895.

Thus from a strong missionary motive sprang the flourishing witness of the Wesleyan Church in the lives of the Tembu people. The gospel which the Methodists brought to Tembuland sowed a new seed; those receptive to the gospel assimilated aspects of a new culture also. Methodism was thus to have a profound impact on the Tembu people, not only in terms of a new religion, but of a new lifestyle, which initially evolved around the missionary and his station.

### 3. Missionary Policy

The early Wesleyan Missionaries were not always well guided and trained men who really understood the "natives" - they were regarded more as a host of savages accustomed to war and bloodshed, strong in heathenism with its diabolical passions, a great mass who as a result of their persevering labours should be brought to submit themselves to the Divine

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1. Lennard A.J., op. cit., p. 17.
  2. MACL: MS 15, 207.
  3. Loc.cit.

Word of the King of Peace and to their white civilization.<sup>1</sup>  
If the Africans were not regarded as "born thieves" who had  
 to be domesticated, then they were certainly "heathen men"  
 in bondage to demoralizing and cruel superstitions and vices  
 whose need was for a gospel to atone for their fallen state.<sup>2</sup>

From the start, the Wesleyan Missionaries were in a unique position. The Dutch Reformed Church had its ministers ordained to the pastoral charge of European congregations, and a clear distinction was made between the "predikant" and "Zendeling", or missionary, whose status was inferior. The Moravian missionaries as well as missionaries sent out by the London and Glasgow Missionary Societies devoted themselves exclusively to the Africans. The Wesleyans came in a dual capacity: minister and missionary.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore a task of peculiar difficulty to trace the history and estimate the progress of Wesleyan missions, since in the reports rendered, no distinction is drawn between work done on behalf of Africans and European work. Even in the division of circuits and the allocation of the spheres of work, the mission station and the white congregation, the missionary and the colonial pastor stand upon an equal footing.<sup>4</sup>

Rev. William Holden worked in Natal in the 1850's, minister-  
ing to Africans whom he regarded as "degraded creatures".  
 His five conversion principles offer some indication of  
 the type of missionary policy then followed.<sup>5</sup>

1. Hewson L., op. cit., p.24-25.

2. Ibid, p. 26.

3. Loc. cit.

4. Du Plessis J., History of Christian Missions in South Africa (1911) London: Longmans and Green, p. 294.

5. Holden W.C., loc. cit.

1. Not to admit any person into church membership except by the ordinance of baptism upon a profession of faith in Christianity in general, but only upon professed personal faith in Christ and actual conversion.
2. Not to admit any polygamist, or person living in a state of concubinage, into Church membership... I required them to be married according to Christian order and custom.
3. To allow no remaining heathen customs or ungodly practices, with the exception of their giving cattle in marriage, which it did not appear desirable or needful to remove at once ...
4. To use all available means for detecting evil; and my means were large and reliable.
5. To put away evil when detected, without favour or partiality ...

The African people often demanded schools as soon as they were converted.<sup>1</sup> Methodist missions were not slow in responding to this need. Beginning with Barnabas Shaw, instruction was given in the arts, crafts, agriculture, carpentry and forestry. Throughout their missionary advance, the Wesleyans were instrumental in establishing industrial and elementary schools, teacher training colleges and colleges for biblical instruction. Thus by 1953, the Methodist Church found itself with some 1,370 day schools and 30 other institutions, employing over 4,000 teachers and accommodating some 200,000 scholars.<sup>2</sup> Many of the Wesleyan converts, and increasingly those who had received training in Methodist schools, offered themselves for the ministry, to become agents for the spread

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1. Hewson L., op. cit., p. 49.

2. Pitts S.G., African Education in South African Methodism, Her Missionary Witness Ed. Garret A.F., Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, p. 77.

of the Gospel. When the Wesleyan Church sought to minimize this activity, she lost spiritual vitality and effectiveness and this may have resulted in some mission stations closing down. Whenever she received new accessions of power and influence, whenever she enlarged her frontiers, the process was initiated and accompanied by great evangelistic activity.<sup>1</sup>

The church had always recognised the need of those specially called and equipped by God for this ministry, African men and women ordained specifically to the full-time ministry. But she was forever a "tortoise" in executing this recognition. The injunction to "lay hands suddenly on no man" was obeyed to the letter, and almost beyond the letter. "One principle in working our Mission we ever bear in mind, that we must use the minimum of white men and the maximum of native men."<sup>2</sup> This meant, however, maximum African evangelists, not ordained clergymen. It was claimed by some that the African would not be able, for an indefinite time, to undertake the onerous duties of the Ministerial Office; this seeming want of confidence had a repressive and deterrent effect. "On the whole, it was better to wait, even for a few years longer than might have been absolutely necessary, than to send forth a number of men unpossessed of that intellectual and spiritual training which the ministry of the church of God requires."<sup>3</sup>

The missionaries therefore placed more confidence in gradual development. Education in general knowledge and in the arts of life, European mannerisms and modes of thinking still remained imperfect and was limited to few of the Africans.

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1. Ibid, Rist H.W., The Training of Evangelists in South African Methodism. p. 45.

2. Hewson L., op. cit., p. 49.

3. Mason F., South African Methodist, London (hereafter SAM) 20 November 1981, p. 284.

There was also the element of fear. "If our father said little in their published writings (of an ordained African ministry), it was not because they never thought of the subject, for it was one which they pondered deeply; but they were afraid, let it even be said too much afraid."<sup>1</sup>

This fear was coupled with timidity and jealousy. "There were many men who doubtless had a call to the work who were kept back by a timid, if not a jealous hand".<sup>2</sup> If the African could be kept in their second class status, it would have undoubtedly given the white clergy the "upper-hand" in church matters, since casting of the vote in synods and conferences was restricted to the ordained clergy. If there were too many Africans, the white missionaries would have been swamped.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that little encouragement was at that time given from the mother church for an ordained African ministry. The missionaries in Southern Africa were left to their own discretion. Many strong convictions from Britain was nevertheless expressed. "You missionaries out yonder keep the Native men back. You ought to make more Ministers out of them. It is by this means that Africa must be converted."<sup>4</sup> Even the great William Taylor mission did not produce the effects it ought to have had.<sup>5</sup> The question must therefore remain, as to what the outcome would have been if more promptitude had been shown in bringing the African forward into the ordained ministry.

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1. Mason F., op.cit., p.284.

2. Hewson L., op. cit., p. 74.

3. Etherington N., Preachers, Peasants and Politics in South East Africa 1835-1880. (1978) London: Royal Historical Society. p.32.

4. Mason F., loc. cit.

5. Hewson L., loc.cit.

The above synopsis, despite the evangelical zeal of the Wesleyan missionaries shows them to have been instrumental in initiating the process of disciplined adaptation to European cultural norms. Christianity in colonial areas, and in mission stations, meant a domestication of the indigenous population. Unlike the Boers, the British had to win the "hearts and minds" of their new subjects in order to incorporate them into the new economic order they were creating and to assert their right to act as rulers.<sup>1</sup> Their moral authority was aided by the implantation of "Wesleyan" Christianity.

In converting the Africans and casting them adrift from their former culture and moral codes, the Wesleyan missionaries were indirectly responding to the needs of capital to create labourers and consumers of British manufactured products. The peasants, once deprived of their means of subsistence, were expected to work for wages from their new masters. These wages in turn provided the colonial social order with the means to dispense with their products. Thus in proportion to the spread of missionary influence, the desire for articles of European origin spread.<sup>2</sup>

That a close bond existed between the Wesleyan missionary and the conqueror cannot be denied. The policies which the missionaries advocated seems to have legitimized colonial rule. The Christian Church and the mission school were important institutions assuring a close personal contact between the European colonist and the indigenous population. They contributed to bringing a spirit of harmony to relations between the exploiters and exploited.

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1. Mugubane B.M., op. cit., p. 57.

2. Ibid, p. 59.

If the Wesleyan missionaries exhorted the Africans to accept their miserable lot on earth in return for post mortem rewards in heaven, they also supplied the ideology that goes with absolute submission to conquest and colonial status.

The ideological and "religious" intention of the missionaries was obvious: the church rather than the traditional institution was to become the new centre of loyalty. Worse still, Methodism had developed in an altogether different historical context, and there was no effort to adequately adapt it to the experience of the African. The result, as we shall see, was spiritual and cultural indigestion. Thus imposition of settler rule and the role of Methodism herein interrupted the historical continuity of African societies causing their economy, technology and culture to become of marginal relevance. ✓

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## CHAPTER 3

### The Unzondelelo Movement

#### 1. Meaning of the Word 'Unzondelelo'

The word "ukuzondelela" means "to desire earnestly", or "to zealously endeavour after a thing", and is derived from "ukuzonda".<sup>1</sup> The New Testament, as translated into "frontier Kafir", contains the word in two or three of its forms, but always to indicate strong and active emotion. "Ukuzondelela kwami indlu yako kundidlile" ("the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." - John 2:17). "Uzondelelo lwenu lwavusa into eninzi yabo." ("your zeal hath stirred up very many of them" - 2 Cor. 9:2.) "Bezondelele imisebenzi elungileyo." ("they being zealous of good works." - Tit. 2:14). The form "unzondelelo" was adapted to indicate the fervent desire which had been awakened in the hearts of African Christians NB for the salvation of their countrymen.

As something new in their experience which had yet to be described, it was not unnatural that a new term was deemed needful. It is scarcely possible to give the exact equivalent of the word in English. An older phrase, "The Forward Movement" expressed the idea imperfectly. Unzondelelo is not always used in precisely the same sense. It was often used to describe the meeting (Conference) that is held, or the body of persons who compose the meeting, or the organised movement which the meeting is intended to promote; the last-mentioned being, perhaps,

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1. cf. Davis' Zulu Dictionary. Ukuzonda is to follow determinately after an object.

the most usual, and certainly the most expressive, application of it.<sup>1</sup>

The name 'Unzondelelo' was chosen at the Verulam meeting of African Methodists held in 1876. "Unzondelelo", indicated to the meeting ardent desire, an intense passion, an irresistible impulse to save souls, combined with practical endeavour. The Africans said at the time that its import was contained in St. Paul's words, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."<sup>2</sup> Such a concern for the salvation of their fellows was new to the mind and heart of the African people. Unzondelelo was to become an inspiring watch word to millions of Africans.

## 2. Origins of the Movement

The Unzondelelo story may be traced as far back as 1844 when Mswazi, the King of Swaziland, sent a delegation, led by Mjumba to the Rev. James Allison, at the Wesleyan Methodist Mission at Ficksburg, near Thaba 'Nchu. Mswazi invited Allison to speak to the Swazis about the "King of Kings". The District Meeting which assembled at Grahamstown, under the chairmanship of the renowned missionary, William Shaw, applauded the request, and the Rev. J. Allison assisted by the Rev. Richard Giddy were to preach the Gospel to the Swazis.

Several African families volunteered to accompany Allison. Among these families were several young men who were destined to bear the torch of evangelism for the greater

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1. Mason F., SAM 18 December 1891, p. 307.

2. Romans 10:1.

part of the nineteenth century. Johannes Kumalo, Job Kambule, Daniel Msimang, Jacob Tshabalala, Jonathan Xaba, Samson Mtembu, Abraham Twala, Abraham Malgas, Barnabas Mtembu, Thomas Molefe, Renben Caluza and Adam Molefe. These were men of different tribal origins who had discerned the great truth that there was no room for tribalism, parochialism and racialism for those in Christ Jesus, and who now enjoyed the transforming experience of being "born again".<sup>1</sup>

On the eve of Allison exodus, fervent prayers were offered and the ox wagons then left for Mahamba. Allison took a gift of an umbrella for the Swazi King. Soon a church building was started and the good tidings of salvation spread. Unhappily, there later arose some tribal misunderstanding and open conflict, and about fifty people were killed. Further bloodshed was prevented only by the persuasive voice of the indomitable Allison, whose magnetic influence was so great that he and his evangelists were left unharmed. However, the church and the mission were burnt down, and there was widespread desolation and distress as the congregation had to leave Mahamba.<sup>2</sup> ✓

These Christians and their families crossed to Natal in 1847 where they were eventually allowed to settle. The flame of evangelism was unquenchable in their hearts. They spread themselves at various centres such as Indaleni, Edendale and Verulam. The people who had been driven by the Holy Spirit to save souls in Mahamba were now dotted all over ✓

1. Mbatha P.V., The Stirring Story of Nzondelelo in Umlando ka Nzondelelo (Natal Native Home Mission) 1961, p. 78.

2. Ibid., p.79.

Natal, besieged by "the hosts of heathenism and superstition". They were in a dilemma: while desirous to invite all men to "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world", they were at the same time, anxious not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers", who often regarded them as traitors.<sup>1</sup>

On the 25 March 1873, Paul Mtembu of Indaleni decided to write several letters to his brethren at Edendale and Verulam to enquire about the progress of the mission and he urged them to be steadfast in the faith. That same day a group of elders in Verulam, among them Petros Mankengane and Cornelius Matiwane, met and expressed their anxiety about the witness of the word of God elsewhere. They accordingly decided to write to Edendale and Indaleni. Samuel Kumalo at Edendale received two letters, one from Indaleni and the other from Verulam, stating the same point in almost identical terms.

Kumalo considered this to be the leading of the Holy Spirit. He convened a meeting and stalwart elders like Daniel Msimang, Stephen Xaba, Stephanus Mzolo, Timothy Gule, Ezra Msimang, Williams Mlambo and John Zuma came to consider this remarkable matter. It dawned upon these God-fearing men that they should devise ways and means of coming together to re-affirm their faith and to make their missionary campaign more effective. Edendale was considered an ideal venue for such a meeting, since it was centrally situated. The date for the proposed conference was tentatively set for 7 August 1875. Letters were dispatched throughout the country and the idea was gladly received. Evangelical services were held throughout 1874 in preparation of the conference and these revivals bore outstanding results, especially at Jononoskop.<sup>2</sup>

1. Mbatha P.V., op. cit., p.78.

2. Ibid, p. 80.

### 3. The First Conference

Tears of joy and thanksgiving flowed at the welcome service of the First Unzondelelo Conference. Johannes Kumalo ably presided over the conference and Stephen Mlawu acted as secretary. During the sessions dealing with evangelism, it was pointed out that there was a serious lack of funds and full-time evangelists. Contributions amounting to nearly 100 pounds were instantly made by those present. This money was handed to the Chairman of the Natal District, Rev. J. Cameron. Formal application was made to the Natal Synod for permission to establish Unzondelelo.

Rev. Cameron, who was to present the Unzondelelo case to the Synod, died before that and this led to confusion of the aims and objects of Unzondelelo. The First Unzondelelo Conference was not "unconstitutional" as some whites thought, since a deputation of white missionaries had been appointed by the 1874 Synod to attend its sessions. The white missionaries' main concern was for a Native Training Institution, a subject which, however important in itself, was not considered by the Africans as within the sphere of the Unzondelelo.<sup>1</sup>

Unzondelelo had appointed a sub-committee to inform the white clergy of the results of their deliberations at Edendale. They chose their words carefully. They wished "to be entirely under" the superintendence of the missionaries and promised to conform in every respect to Methodist rules. At the same time, they insisted on having "the entire management of themselves", including the "fixing of the places to be visited". Methodist converts had experienced the ill effects of incompetent and obstinate missionaries, particularly at Edendale, and were determined that they should

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1. Mason F., loc.cit.

not threaten the success of their venture.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Second Conference

On Sunday, 6th August 1876, the second Unzondelelo Conference commenced at Verulam with prayers held at an early hour. During the day, three sermons were preached by three Africans from Edendale. On the following day two prayer-meetings and a preliminary sitting of a few of the leading men were held. On Tuesday, after a morning prayer-meeting, Rev. Allsopp formally opened the Conference on request. "Never can I forget the joy of that hour. The Lord was graciously and powerfully present during the prayer and my address, and we indeed felt our spiritual strength renewed."<sup>2</sup>

The District Meeting had appointed another deputation, which, however, like the former one, did not succeed in coming to a clear understanding with the leaders of Unzondelelo. It seems that the latter were decidedly of opinion that it would not be well to discuss educational matters, "native" customs, and so on, but rather that they should confine themselves only to matters relating to the immediate conversion of their countrymen. The deputation succeeded, however, in bringing the subject of the custom Ukulobola, or "sale of wives", for discussion, but through some misunderstanding as to the action of the last District Meeting, no conclusion was reached.<sup>3</sup>

1. Etherington N., op.cit., p. 152.
2. Allsopp J., Extract of this letter published in Wesleyan Missionary Notice (1876) p. 269.
3. Loc. cit.

The "lobola" question was then fully discussed the next day, and the meeting seems to have decided that the custom must be abandoned; but with the colonial laws of Natal, such a step could not be made compulsory. With this, Fredrick Mason fully agreed, "but urged the men to give it up and then stand behind us (the missionaries) in urging the Government to give the protection needed by the daughters of Christian men, who, for conscience sake, throw aside this custom of heathenism. Without doubt such questions are important, but, considering the character of the Unzondelelo movement, it was evident that simplicity of aim was essential to its success. How can we save the heathen? This was the concern which had stirred the hearts of many, and it was this which was set before the people in general. It was definite, momentous, and full of profound interest for the newly-awakened Native mind. To complicate it with other questions would have had the effect, at such a period almost inevitable, of diverting attention from the main issue, and of diminishing sympathy with it."<sup>1</sup>

The state of affairs in the Wesleyan Church was now such as to cause much anxiety. The English pastors did not seem to understand the African people. A new Chairman of the District had been appointed in Rev. Fredrick Mason who was scarcely willing to act in haste. Most of the Methodist clergy hardly knew how to receive this new African aggressiveness. London authorities had been insisting for years that more should be done to foster African self-support. Now that this had arrived unbidden, the missionaries could hardly turn their backs without creating a "scandal". There was surely a strong feeling of suspicion that this was a

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1. Mason F., op.cit., p.307. See also Rev. Allsopp, loc.cit., "the first object of these gatherings is to extend the redeemer's kingdom amongst the heathen of this land."

*surge for fear* 113 | "new departure" doomed to end in disorder, if not in dis-loyalty or secession, since Unzondelelo displayed some tendencies towards independence.<sup>1</sup>

The only thing that could be done was to negotiate quietly in the hope that the black surge for independence would not be carried too far. A Methodist clergyman in charge of a white circuit expressed his concern to Fredrick Mason thus: "I hear you had difficulties with our coloured brethren - and fear we have not good hold of them." Mason himself fretted, "We have arrived at a crisis in our native work, and shall need much caution, and help from above. If this thing be allowed to continue, it must be made to harmonize with our general arrangements."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the blacks saw that there was a lack of total confidence in their actions and abilities. Their white brothers seemed to be purposely hindering their way at a time when they were honestly and earnestly endeavouring to spread the Gospel amongst the heathen. If John Allsopp's view of the situation was sanguine, his colleagues did not share his sentiments.<sup>3</sup> It must be remembered that at this time there was only one black minister in the District, and he was a Probationer. No Native District Meeting had as yet been held, as was expected. The "native" agents had no other platform to assert their newly found desire. If some structure had been established to voice their aspirations, it is possible that Unzondelelo might have taken a different form. But the District was slow in regard to the fuller employment of "native" agents and this was one of the grounds of dissatisfaction in the African mind, though

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1. Etherington N., loc. cit.

2. Loc. cit.

3. cf. Mason F., loc.cit.

little or nothing had been said openly up to that date, and few Europeans knew of the existence of such a feeling. ✓ The work was not spreading fast enough and the people were disposed to believe that this was more or less the fault of the missionaries themselves. The leading men sensed that there was a disposition to keep them back from leadership. They rightly believed that if they were allowed a freer hand, greater results would be achieved.

The Unzondelelo Meeting itself was no ordinary gathering. It consisted of a heterogenous assembly of both sexes of all ages and conditions; mostly Christians, but not necessarily so. The conduct of the meeting, which continued for several days, was in the hands, practically, of the wisest, strongest, and best; still the right of speech was not formally restricted. A collection was taken during the meeting which again amounted to over a hundred pounds. The closing days were filled with blessed tidings of great joy.<sup>1</sup>

"Sunday, the 13th, was a day never to be forgotten. At seven a.m. a prayer-meeting. At eleven o'clock a sermon by one of the oldest native preachers from 2 Timothy 1:7; and I say not too much when I speak of it as one of the most eloquent and powerful sermons I have ever listened to. In the afternoon I preached from Mark 8:34, and administered the Lord's Supper to the largest number of natives I have ever seen assembled at one time. It was truly a season of great delight. In the evening one of the ordained Native Ministers of the American Missions preached a sound and faithful sermon. The next morning, at seven o'clock all met in the chapel, to commend each other to the grace of God and say their farewells; and

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1. Mason F., loc. cit.

thus ended eight days of the most blessed meetings I ever attended, and from which good to all Churches must result."<sup>1</sup>

### 5. The Third Conference

The third Unzondelelo Conference was held at Indaleni during the month of August 1877, by arrangements made the previous year. It was composed of the leading men from all the stations except Pondoland. Some men came from Griqualand as observers, but were not subsequently active in the movement. Some polygamists were also present, but they did not take an active part in the meeting.<sup>2</sup> The District Meeting that had been held appointed a deputation to the Conference, to ascertain the character and purpose of the Unzondelelo enterprise. The deputation attended for two full days which were spent in a thorough investigation of the whole movement. Rev. R. H. Stott, a missionary at Indaleni and part of the deputation, was present throughout the Conference.<sup>3</sup>

There was initially in the minds of the white ministers a rather unfriendly feeling towards the movement, and certain things were said in the meeting which tended to strengthen this. Some unpleasant remarks were sometimes made and during the discussions, words were uttered which afforded some ground for apprehension, if not suspicion. Both sides spoke freely, and this was necessary if the views and aims of each party were to be understood. The missionaries tried to assure the blacks that they did not wish to hinder them

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1. Allsopp J., op. cit., p. 270.

2. MACL: MS 15, 378.

3. MACL: Minutes, Natal District Meeting, 16 - 24 January, 1878.

in their efforts to convert their countrymen, and that their only object intended by the exercise of control, and restraint, was to sustain worthy endeavour and to eliminate hurtful elements. In the end, the suspicions began to dissipate, and light and understanding began to appear where there had only been darkness and confusion.

The discussion itself was memorable. In the eyes of the whites, "The native speakers showed great acuteness, strength of memory, skill in argument, and, for the most part, admirable temper. When the whole subject had been thrashed out, and full explanations given on the other side, it became evident that they (the native agents) did not wish to defy constituted authority, nor to break away from established usages; but they did desire to take a more active part than they had previously done in the word of God. If at the first there was any desire for independent action, it was soon felt that this would cause irregularity and weakness, and that the only effectual method was to work in connection with the rules and sanctions of the Church."<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Msimang from Driefontein, who by common consent was considered as the 'life' of the movement, related the stirring story of Unzondelelo to his white colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

"Explanations were given to the fathers at the outset and I can only repeat what has been stated before. In 1874 the Edendale people were moved in their hearts on account of the work of the Lord. Words came from Verulam and Indaleni; all were moved in the same way, feeling how low the nation still was. We heard the cries of those who

1. Mason F., SAM, 1 January 1892, p. 3.

2. cf. Minutes, loc.cit.

want to be saved. I said 'What can I do to help them? O that I could have a meeting of the people about this thing'. I considered it, and decided to speak to the people of Edendale. I also wrote letters; and another man at Verulam, moved at the same time, wrote letters also. The Edendale people thought that we two had agreed together, but that was not the case. Those letters touched the wounds in men's hearts. This was in 1874. When the meeting was held at Edendale, those present said 'What can we do? If we had the power we would call the people on all the stations together.' So we decided to ask our fathers for permission. The answer was that they gave their consent, and said they would send three Missionaries to attend the meeting."<sup>1</sup>

"In 1875 we met at Edendale; the Chairman and three others came. They said, 'We have heard your cry that you might have a Native Training Institution, and we wish to know if this thing is really in your heart.' Our reply was, 'We know about the Institution but we heard that the District Meeting had agreed to let us have this meeting.' We asked to have permission in writing. The deputation then said, 'Carry on your meeting and we hope you will get the training college'. Our answer was, 'We have a wound in our hearts, but we have nothing to do with the training college. If you put it up, we will send our children; but we cannot build it.' The Missionaries then retired, and our meeting continued. From every side came testimony as to the sad state of the natives all over the land. They were waiting and longing for the gospel. We felt that we ought to send people to them that their sins might be taken away. The meeting raised 100 pounds for this work and agreed to place this money in the hands of our fathers."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Mason F., loc.cit.

2. Loc. cit.

"We further decided that whenever there was a place needing a helper, we would tell our fathers; and if they said they could not send a man to that place, we would send one, and pay him out of this money. But we intended first to bring such a man to the great father to see if he would approve of him. We took the money to the Chairman and requested him to hold it. When he inquired what was to be done with it we answered, 'It is to help Ministers'. If they cannot send men to certain places, we will do so, and pay them out of this fund.' In reply to his questions we told him that we wished to retain control of the money, but before the eyes of our fathers. Mr. Cameron died before the next District Meeting. When we met at Verulam in August, 1876, we did not know what to do; for the Chairman, who was to have presented our request to the District Meeting was dead. The Ministers appointed to attend our meeting came, but they did not talk about the real question. They introduced a new question - the selling of girls. We declined to discuss it, and they retired. We then talked about the state of our nation, and raised another 100 pounds."<sup>1</sup>

The Missionaries asked various other questions as to the manner in which the meetings were conducted, and the money raised, and several speakers supplied the information.

"The meetings begin with prayer. Then we talk about the people who need salvation. At the end we collect offerings to carry on the work. At first we collected in and during the meeting, but found much trouble in doing this; so we requested that the collecting should be completed beforehand, as far as possible. So now we collect on the different stations and pay the money in at the meeting. We considered that

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1. Mason F., loc. cit. The selling of girls concerned the 'lobola' custom.

permission had been given to us to do this. There is no chairman to preside. We waited to be told by the Missionaries how to go on. At the first, when asked permission, we should have been instructed what to do. If we are wrong, it is the fault of our fathers for not telling us at the beginning what was right. A committee of four was elected to manage money matters."<sup>1</sup>

Some of the Unzondelelo money had already been used to maintain a Christian worker at Jonono's Kop.<sup>2</sup> The employment of a full-time agent here was also discussed at great length. The deputation strongly urged that this was a total departure from the ordinary rules of the church, that the position of the agent was anomalous, since he was not subject to any recognised discipline, and had not been appointed by any recognised authority; and that persistence in such a course would inevitably lead to trouble and division. But then the Unzondelelo spokesman explained.

"We applied three times to the District Meeting to have a man sent to Jonono's, but without result; so we said we must try and find one ourselves. We could not, however, find a 'man', but we found a 'boy', and sent him to keep away the birds from the corn for the time being. A small meeting was held at Edendale, and he was sent by that meeting, not by the great meeting of the Unzondelelo. We did not take him to the Superintendent at Ladysmith for approval, because we considered the arrangement temporary, as the right kind of Agent could not yet be found."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Mason F., loc. cit.
  2. cf. Minutes, loc.cit.
  3. Mason F., loc. cit.

The Missionaries then pointed out that there were two requirements for carrying out the work of God - men and money; and that application for help, however pressing, cannot always be met. They said that, "There had been a departure from our usages in having adopted a regular system of raising money without express authorisation. Sending a man to Jonono's without any reference to District or Circuit authority, was quite irregular. The plan of discussing the fitness of Agents and appointing them, in an open meeting, in which anyone could take part, was contrary to all order, and must lead to mischievous results."<sup>1</sup> Such was the typical response of a white hierarchical structure to the evangelical fervour which glowed in the hearts of the local people.

One of the most remarkable of the addresses given at the Unzondelelo Conference was by Nathaniel Matebule, who became a minister in 1880, and died after a brief but successful ministry. He was of mature age, and some of his words were so strong, that they would have conveyed to the minds of those who did not know him, a wrong impression of his spirit. On the contrary he was gentle-hearted, amiable and well loved, full of zeal for God and for the salvation of men. His challenge to the missionaries was not received, without contention.

"Why did you not ordain the old teachers as Ministers? The first Missionaries passed away without making a Native Ministry. You may pass away also, without doing it. The English Missionaries are not enough to occupy Natal, and my heart is sad because of the condition of this land. In Fiji the missionaries ordained converts, and the

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1. Mason F., loc. cit.

work prospered greatly. When we hear that you want to stop this movement, we think it is because you fear that we desire to form another Church. This is not our aim. You do not wish the work here to be great! We have now been six years at Driefontein, and have 100 members. Who did that work? The Natives themselves. The Missionary lived at Ladysmith."<sup>1</sup>

In answering these criticisms, the missionaries fumbled and instead fired a series of questions to the local people.

"If these things were in Nathaniel's mind, it is well he has expressed them. But why did he not say these things years ago? He says 'the old Missionaries are dead'. True, but their works live. Who first preached the gospel to you? Who translated the Bible? Who made the hymns? Who built most of the Churches and Schools? The old Missionaries. And yet you talk as if they did nothing. You refer to the Missionaries in Fiji. Did they not come from the same house as the Missionaries in this country. One of them, Mr. Calvert, is now with us. He compares you with the Fijians, and the comparison is not to your advantage. You ask why have we not such a Native Ministry as the Fijians have? Well, they are like soft stones, soon got out of the quarry, soon built into a house. You are like hard stones, which are difficult to cut, shape and build in, but they will last longer, Fijians are diminishing in number, you are increasing. Our desire and hope is,

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1. Mason F., op.cit., p.4.

that you should be built into a house that will last for ever. Perhaps the old Missionaries did wrong in not making a Native Ministry sooner, but they acted, as they believed, for the best. Do not let us say a word against them. We see today that we must have more Ministers and Preachers. But all Preachers cannot be Ministers. In England we have 14,000 local Preachers and only 2,000 Ministers. The latter are selected out of the former, and only the most suitable are chosen."<sup>1</sup>

Nathaniel still had the last word of caution, if not fear.

"Do not be grieved at my words. I see we must not blame the old Missionaries. But we fear that you will leave the land before even the foundations are laid of the house of which you have spoken. I thank the old Missionaries and the Fathers in England; but I weep because I fear that the great work may not go on. The white missionaries live in the towns, and do not know the needs of the country."<sup>2</sup>

There were numerous other general observations and complaints that were made by the local people. In reply, the missionaries called for patience and understanding, honesty and confidence in their actions. They accused Unzondelelo of failing to give credit to the Missionary Society for what it had done, of scarcely giving anything to the Missionary Fund and for failing to have any Missionary Meetings. It was further pointed out that the church had certain laws and discipline which had to be

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1. Mason F., loc.cit.

2. Loc. cit.

adhered to if the work was to prosper.

"This Unzondelelo has sprung from a right motive-love for souls. But there are dangers connected with it, in its present form, some of which already appear. It must be under proper control. You thought that the Missionaries did not move fast enough; you now find by experience that there are difficulties to be overcome. To talk is an easy thing. But it is hard to find the right kind of man. They must be trained as teachers and preachers, and this is what we want the college for. It is also essential that the Agents of the Unzondelelo should be under the usual Methodist discipline."<sup>1</sup>

The deputation expressed the fruitfulness of their presence at the conference and felt the discussions to have been most enlightening.

"We understand each other better than we ever did before. In the Old Testament we read of two men who were on the road, and one said to the other: 'Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart! If it be, give me thy hand.' So say we. Our skin - colour is different, but the hearts of all God's people are of the same colour. We are called Methodists, that is people who walk by a well-defined road. You do not wish the Unzondelelo to be incorporated with our ordinary work, but to exist as a district thing. This we shall report to the District Meeting, and to our Fathers in England."<sup>2</sup>

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1. .Mason F., loc.cit.

2. .Loc. cit.

The closing words of the conference was uttered by a certain Matthew, who in eloquent and yet simple style, expressed the wishes of the people.

"Our only desire is to do good. We are not anxious about the money that is being collected, we are only anxious about the souls of our nation. The fire burns in our hearts."<sup>1</sup>

The memorable conference had ended. The missionaries decided that the whole question of the Unzondelelo should be referred to the District Meeting, where their hardest task remained - the drawing up of a scheme which would satisfy those who had founded the Unzondelelo, and yet, bring the movement in full accord with the rules and regulations of the Methodist Church.

#### 6. The Natal District Meeting and Unzondelelo

The District Meeting was held in Durban during January 1878. In its report to this meeting, the white deputation from the Unzondelelo Conference shared the deep concern of the local people for the spread of the gospel amongst their 'heathen' brethren. It was also reported that the Unzondelelo agents desired a greater share in the management of their own Church affairs, "that they do not sufficiently value the work which the missionaries have done for them in the past; specially they called our attention to the non-formation of a Native Ministry by the early Missionaries, which they declared a grave defect, - and they expressed their profound convictions that the great work of bringing the Native people to Christ must for the most part be done by Native Agents."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Mason F., loc. cit.

2. cf. Minutes, loc. cit.

The Meeting decided that, "if rightly guided the Unzondelelo will prove of great value, not only in assisting us in reaching heathen natives, but also in developing a spirit of consecrated service among native Christians", and also, "that there is nothing in the spirit of the movement contrary to the spirit of Methodism and that with patient effort all its working details can be made to harmonize with the system of Methodism".<sup>1</sup> It was recommended that,

- I. the Unzondelelo be authorised to continue under the name of "The Natal Wesleyan Native Mission" with the following rules and regulations to be observed;<sup>2</sup>
- II. that it be managed by a joint committee consisting of three Ministers appointed by the District Meeting, including the Chairman and Secretary; together with six Natives, also appointed for the present by the District Meeting;
- III. the Chairman of the District Meeting shall be (ex-officio) Treasurer of the Unzondelelo funds, and the Committee shall appoint its Secretary at the first meeting after each Conference;
- IV. the Committee shall meet at suitable times and places as may be arranged by the Chairman; it shall decide upon suitable localities for evangelistic work; and shall select the agents to be employed, and be responsible for their payment;
- V. in any case in which it may be thought desirable that a native minister should be appointed to any Station

1. Minutes, loc.cit.

2. Ibid. See SAM, 15 January 1892, p. 17 for full text of constitution.

or Circuit under the care of the Unzondelelo, application for such appointment shall be made through the Committee of the Unzondelelo to the District Meeting;

- VI. any native minister appointed to any Unzondelelo Station, though supported in whole or in part by the funds of the Unzondelelo, shall be altogether under the control and direction of the District Meeting, and be subject to all the rules and usages of the Methodist Connexion;
- VII. all monies raised locally for the support of the cause of God on Unzondelelo stations or circuits, and grants in aid made by the Committee of the Unzondelelo, shall be administered by the Superintendent appointed by the Conference to take charge and direction of such station and circuit;
- VIII. each Annual Meeting of the Unzondelelo shall appoint the place of the meeting of the following year;
- IX. the District Meeting may send a deputation to attend the Annual Meeting, as it may think fit;
- X. all collections for the Unzondelelo shall be reported to the Annual Meeting, and the amount forwarded to the Treasurer without delay and
- XI. all resolutions of the Committee shall be reported annually to the District Meeting, and be subject to its final decision.

Since the settlement of the Unzondelelo question in the way described, no serious difficulty arose. The white missionaries had succeeded in bringing the whole movement under the strict control of their district meeting. Whether

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the promoters and supporters of the Unzondelelo were perfectly satisfied with the arrangements or not, little is known. But it remains quite obvious that the final compromise reached did not measure up to the initial aspirations of the Unzondelelo people. They sought a certain degree of freedom and independence in the management of their affairs and this was denied them. The restrictions and control may have been largely responsible for confining Unzondelelo to Natal.<sup>1</sup>

### 7. The Later Years

Since the movement was now brought into control with the general work of the District, it was, in effect, the same in principle and operation as a District Mission in England. There were no great difficulties with any Circuit authorities and its agents were loyal. The Committee had been easy to work with, as with other committees, and easier than with some.<sup>2</sup> The first agent who was sent to Jonono's Kop, as "a boy sent to keep away the birds"<sup>3</sup>, turned out to be a man of God, intelligent, zealous, prudent and successful. He was Eliam Msimang, a younger brother of Daniel, and though less able, was equally devoted. He was received into the ministry in 1881, and though he had been working for five years at Jonono's Kop, was appointed to the same place two years longer; going from there to Telapi. In both these localities his labours were abundant and remarkably effective.

He died on 5 March 1887, at forty-eight. In his obituary notice, it was said amongst other things that, "His laborious and self-denying toils in the execution of his

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1. Magatha P.V., op. cit., p. 81.

2. Mason F., SAM, 15 January 1892, p. 17.

3. cf. p.60.

ministerial duties were owned of God in a wonderful development of His work amongst the Native people. Throughout the whole of his course Eliam Msimang maintained a character which was without reproach, ever proving himself to be a faithful follower of Christ, and loyalty attached to the Church in whose Ministry he served. He commanded the universal love of those who were placed under his spiritual oversight, while he firmly opposed everything savouring of heathen impurity."<sup>1</sup>

When the Mission to Swaziland had begun, in connection with the newly-formed Transvaal District, a grant of 500 pounds was cheerfully voted from the Unzondelelo fund, and this amount was paid over in September 1880. It was natural that some of the leaders of the movement should feel an interest in Swaziland, for some of them had originally come from here. Daniel Msimang was to leave with his wife Ruth, and one of his sons, Obed to commence missionary work in the land from where he had been driven away. In 1885 the Rev. Owen Watkins revisited Mahamba and was greatly gratified by the progress that had been made. Msimang had built a fine, stone church and had baptised 29 adults and 19 children. Mahamba's indebtedness to Unzondelelo was remembered and honoured forty years later when Unzondelelo was invited to hold her 1937 sessions at Mahamba.<sup>2</sup>

For the first ten years of Unzondelelo, the movement was patronised solely by laymen. In 1885, African ministers and evangelists of the District of Natal were constitutionally admitted as bona fide members. By 1888 Unzondelelo had a credit balance of 1,777 pounds. In 1891 there were already six agents employed under the Unzondelelo banner, in different parts of the district. Up to 1907, there

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1. Mason F., op.cit., p.17.

2. Magatha P.V., op.cit., p. 82.

was hardly any debate as to whether Unzondelelo should concentrate on the social needs of the people, or should be an exclusively spiritual movement. Should Unzondelelo funds be used for the erection of church buildings and schools or buying land for refugee farm-tenants? Should teachers be paid from her fund? These were difficult questions, since the initial impulse was for the "salvation of souls."<sup>1</sup>

Unzondelelo nevertheless maintained a deep interest and concern for the social problem of her people. Cultural strides were attained when the famous Zulu Choir was sent to England in 1891. The residents of Edendale conceived the idea of building a college for boys and girls and they began construction on their own initiative. Unzondelelo blessed the project with an initial grant of 600 pounds, and Rev. Ezra Nuttall became the first Principal. As a result of Bambata's Rebellion in 1906, it became fashionable for European educationists and white public opinion to condemn academic education for Africans and to extol practical instruction, meaning the implementation of the policy in manual labour. Colonial grants were frozen, and the Nuttall Institution had to close down.<sup>2</sup>

Unzondelelo immediately became alarmed and sent the Rev. W.G. Mtembu to tour the Province and collect funds and prospective students in order to 'dig again the well of our fathers which the Philistines have filled with earth.' The people taxed themselves and the 'fountain of education flowed again' under the Rev. B. Elderkin, with Unzondelelo continuing its annual grants. To meet the challenge of the times, the principle of employing a full-time Secretary for African Youth work was accepted in 1955. There were also, later, ambitions to establish

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1. Magatha P.V., loc. cit.

2. Loc. cit.

an African orphanage and the launching of an appeal to its members for contributions to the Treason Trial Fund, and more than 100 pounds was collected.<sup>1</sup>

The birth of Unzondelelo marked a watershed in the evolution of "independent" communities. There was nothing in Methodist doctrine that favoured the launching of an "independent" missionary movement. Methodist missionaries were therefore profoundly bewildered when black Christian leaders announced meetings to form such a movement. They hardly knew how to receive the 'fait accompli'. An "independent" missionary operation, accompanied by an aggressive spirit had been established. This independence was, however, purely organisational. If anything, the founders leaned towards puritanism in morals and fundamentalism in theology.<sup>2</sup>

Some particular spark may have been required to push would-be separatists over the edge into independent action. Was this spark still to be provided via the birth of the Tembu Church, but when the Unzondelelo flame had already been quenched?

It must further not be overlooked that the origins of Unzondelelo were partly in the realisation that there was no room for tribalism and racialism in Christianity. The African evangelists who shared this belief were thereafter concerned to devise ways and means of coming together to re-affirm their faith and make their missionary campaign more effective. This togetherness was visibly experienced at the second conference where all people were allowed to participate. The third conference brought people from

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1. Magatha, P.V., loc.cit.

2. Etherington N., op. cit., p. 154.

Griqualand while in the later years Unzondelelo took an interest in the Swaziland mission. Though initially concerned with the salvation of souls, Unzondelelo nevertheless served to initiate a new solidarity among Africans nationally who were experiencing the ill-effects of colonial Christianity. That Unzondelelo did not succeed in "cementing" this solidarity could be explained in terms of the restrictions placed on it.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Nehemiah Tile and the Tembu Church

#### 1. Nehemiah Tile: The Early Years

Nehemiah Tile was born in Tembuland. His origins remain obscure, since there are conflicting statements from those who knew him.<sup>1</sup> He seems to have had his schooling at Boloto and worked in Queenstown.<sup>2</sup> On becoming a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, he was baptised by Rev. H. Dugmore and then went on to become a lay preacher. He was gifted as a powerful speaker, and he devotedly served the Wesleyan Church, first as evangelist and then as minister. Lea believed Tile to be of good decent character, eloquent as a preacher, and a most vigorous and earnest worker.<sup>3</sup>

While Tile proved to be a dominant figure in the history of Wesleyan missions in Tembuland around the 1880's, he also simultaneously led a significant movement for greater political freedom and for Tembu emancipation. Together the religious and political activities with which he was connected constitute probably the most interesting of all the varied responses of Africans living east of the Kei to the process of the extension of white rule in that area.<sup>4</sup>

1. A. Stanford to Chief Magistrate, Tembuland (hereafter CMT) 23 July 1884, Cape Archives, Native Affairs Series (N.A.) 96, 210.
2. cf. The African Yearly Register. Ed. T.D. Mwelì Skota (1930) p. 95.
3. Lea A., The Native Separatist Church Movement in S.A. (1926) p. 24.
4. Saunders C.C., Tile and the Tembu Church: Politics and Independency on the Cape Eastern Frontier in the late

## 2. Tile and the Wesleyan Methodist Church

Early in 1870, Tile was proposed as an evangelist for the ministry, together with his colleague Paul Shaw, who was already a sub-ordinate paid agent for the Church. The following year Tile was stationed at Shawbury with Edward Gedy, earning a salary of 24 pounds.<sup>1</sup> He succeeded in building up congregations and soon also became a personal friend of Paramount Chief Mhlontlo and Chief Lehane of the Basutos.<sup>2</sup> In 1872 he was moved to the Clarkebury circuit where the Rev. Peter Hargreaves was Superintendent Minister.

Hargreaves had previously reported the need for an evangelist to pioneer the work at Cwecweni.<sup>3</sup> There was a growing need here, as accessions had been made from the ranks of the "heathen". Exactly a year after Tile's appointment here, Hargreaves reported great progress at Cwecweni. He said that, "the Society has increased and been revived. Efforts have been made for the erection of the new chapel mentioned in last year's report."<sup>4</sup> So characteristic of Tile's pattern of ministry, the great head of the Chumah was befriended, and this proved a blessing to Tile's labours.

During 1873, under Tile's direction, the society at Cwecweni increased in number and importance. Hargreaves described this outstation as a "fine centre surrounded by a large heathen population, consisting of people who had to endure much persecution from parties wishful to get possession of their garden lands."<sup>5</sup> Tile seems also to

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Nineteenth Century in Journal of African Studies, XI, 4 (1970) p. 554.

1. Minutes, Queenstown District Meeting, 1870 (MACL)
2. Skota M.T.D., loc. cit.
3. Minutes, Queenstown District Meeting, January 1872 (MACL)
4. Minutes, op.cit., 1873.
5. Minutes, op.cit., 1874.

have been partly responsible for establishing the Umgwali school which became an important educational institution in the Cape.<sup>1</sup> By 1874, the work at Cwecweni was still prospering. Tile, the evangelist had been incessant in self-denying labours. Membership was on the increase and a new church was built.<sup>2</sup>

The Queenstown District wisely recognised Tile's ability to be more than an evangelist and subsequently approved a recommendation from the Native District Meeting for Tile to be received on trial as a candidate for the full-time ministry. It was also decided that he be sent to Healdtown for further training.<sup>3</sup> Tile spent the next three years studying at Healdtown. Little or nothing is known about his progress or activities during this time.

When Tile returned to circuit work in 1878 after successfully completing the theological course, he was employed under the direction of Rev. Theo Chubb for the whole year.<sup>4</sup> He was then recommended to be received as a "Native" Minister on Trial at the following conference.<sup>5</sup> While stationed at Tqualara in 1879, Tile was advanced in his probation after being urged to give himself more earnestly to study.<sup>6</sup> In 1881, Tile was moved to Qokolweni and then to Xora the following year. While he was here, he came into open conflict with Rev. Chubb, as a result of which he was to leave the Wesleyan Church.

1. Skota M.T.D., loc. cit.

2. Minutes, op.cit., 1875. See also Hargreaves Papers (SA Library, Cape Town) 4 July 1874, diary.

3. Ibid.

4. Chubb was appointed as Superintendent of the newly formed Clarkebury District.

5. Minutes, Native District Meeting, January 1879.

6. Minutes, Native District Meeting, December 1879.

Tile's resignation from the Church has been incorrectly dated as early as 1882 or in 1885.<sup>1</sup> It was most probably in the second half of 1883.<sup>2</sup> The main reason for the breach was undoubtedly because of Tile's involvement in Tembu politics, which proved unacceptable to his Wesleyan brothers. Rev. Chubb, Superintendent at Clarkebury, is said to have taken Tile to task for his political activity. Tile is reported to have kept him in the dark about his activities and refused to divulge some state secrets.<sup>3</sup> He was accused of stirring up a feeling of hostility against the magistrates in Tembuland, of addressing a public meeting on the sabbath, and of donating an ox at the circumcision of Dalinyebo, then heir to the Tembu chieftaincy. Furthermore, there was the complaint of political interference against Tile, and this probably pressured the church authorities to action.<sup>4</sup>

The Wesleyan ministers decided that, in terms of Methodist Church Laws and Discipline, Tile should be summoned to appear before a minor synod, since this would afford a convenient and suitable method of investigating charges preferred against ministers or probationers.<sup>5</sup> This meeting was held and Tile had to answer allegations made against him. Letters were produced but the name or names

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1. cf. Lea., op.cit., p.27 and W.D. Cingo, Iballi Laba Tembu (SA Lib. Cape Town) p. 134.
  2. The first South African Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church was held in Cape Town during April, 1883. The delegates decided that Tile be continued on trial as a probationer minister, having travelled four years. (see Minutes.)
  3. Stanford Papers (Univ. of Cape Town) 31 July 1883, diary
  4. Skota T.D.M., op.cit., p. 96 and Lea A, op.cit., p.26.
  5. cf. Laws and Disciplines, Methodist of SA, p. 42.

of the writers were concealed, despite Tile's insistence. After the enquiry, it was finally suggested that Tile be removed into the Cape Colony away from his people, where it was thought he might be weaned from his course of conduct.<sup>1</sup> Tile was offered the alternative of resigning his position after he refused to be removed. This alternative he accepted.<sup>2</sup>

Tile's next step was to form the Tembu Church. But this did not follow immediately as by October, 1884, Tile was still endeavouring to found what he later called the Tembu National Church.<sup>3</sup> Now he was able to continue the Tembu protest in more organised political and religious terms. If the cause of Tile's secession was not only opposition to European control and domination, then there was certainly "a positive desire to adapt the message of the Church to the heritage of the Tembu tribe. As the Queen of England was the head of the English Church, so the Paramount Chief of the Tembu should be the 'summus episcopus' of the new religious organisation."<sup>4</sup>

Tile composed a prayer and set it to a simple chant which by command of the Chief was sung in all the Tembu Churches in Tembuland. The prayer is entitled "Umtandazo waba - Tembu" (Prayer of the Tembus), and begins by asking God to bless "our king" (ukumkani wetu), "his child" (nomtwana wake), and the "Tembu tribe" (isizwe saba - tembu). After

1. Lea A., loc. cit.
2. Ibid. Ministers are not usually "sacked" but asked to resign.
3. cf. The Reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford, ed. Macquarrie, Vol.11 (1962) p. 10.
4. Sundkler, B.G.M. Bantu Prophets in S.A. (1961) O.U.P., p. 38.

other sundry requests, all referring to the tribe, there is a petition for "property" (intlalo entle), not under (pantisi), as is the usual expression among Natives when speaking of the ruling power, but "together with Queen Victoria" (konye neNkosazana U - Vitoriya) - a term which suggests more equality than subjection.<sup>1</sup> The prayer closes with a three-fold petition for God to save Ngangelizwe, his child and the Tembu tribe.

The political significance of the Tembu Church movement was never in doubt, and expressions of disapproval had not been wanting from the colonial authorities. In 1882 and 1883, the influx of trekboers from the Cape Colony into Tembuland brought home to the Tembu with renewed force the reality of white pressure experienced in the chiefdom in increasing measure since the extention of colonial protection in 1875. The Cape-Xhosa war of 1877 - 8 and the Transkeian rebellion of 1880 - 1, in both of which the Tembu paramount after some hesitation had aided the colonial side, had shown the futility of the attempt to use military resistance to stop white encroachment. Tile now spearheaded another, more subtle, form of opposition through ecclesiastical channels.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Tembu Political Protests

Walter Stanford, a magistrate of Tembuland reports in his diary of a meeting held on 18 August 1883, at Ngangelizwe's kraal.<sup>3</sup> Ngangelizwe, the Tembu chief and 'certain other natives' who were present drew up a petition calling for a

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1. Lea A., loc.cit.

2. cf. Saunders C.C., op.cit., p. 557.

3. cf. Stanford Papers, 18 August 1883.

reduction of magistrates in the Tembuland territory.<sup>1</sup> Tile was said to have been actively favouring this movement for greater political freedom. The colonial authorities believed that his conduct should therefore be watched, although he had not rendered himself liable for punishment.<sup>2</sup>

The above petition was presented to the authorities who in turn directed the Chief Magistrate of Transkei to inform Ngangelizwe that "the future relations of the natives in the Transkeian territories is engaging the attention of the government, and that their representations will be considered when the question is decided."<sup>3</sup> The Tembus held a short meeting at Encobo on 19 February 1884, where the government's response was acknowledged, with an addition that ever since the petition was sent, the writers, who had been speaking on behalf of the Tembus generally, had suffered more wrongs and injuries from the magistrates and their policemen. Having received an unsatisfactory reply from the Chief Magistrate, another petition was sent by the Tembus in December 1884, in which they rejected criticism that the first petition was unrepresentative and they re-affirmed their demand for a reduction of magistrates in the district.<sup>4</sup>

The Tembu petitions themselves could have been prompted for many reasons: the creation of magistracies under a chief magistrate in the one territory would have encouraged

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1. cf. Under Secretary for Native Affairs (hereafter USNA) to CMT, 28 November 1883. Cape Archives, Transkei and Tembuland Series (CMT) 1/7.
  2. USNA to CMT, 3 September 1883. (CMT) 1/7.
  3. USNA to CMT, 28 November 1883. (CMT) 1/7.
  4. USNA to CMT, 25 January 1884. (SMT) 1/8.

"separatism" within the Tembu chiefdom and Ngangelizwe would naturally have resisted this. Each sub-chief would have his own magistrate and the paramount chief would gradually lose his status as head of all his people. In effect, a return to the old days was sought where one British magistrate was resident in Tembuland. Thus the petitions implied a rejection of white Cape minority rule and a desire for the informal government of Queen Victoria.<sup>1</sup> But by March 1884, the Cape government had decided that for financial reasons, the number of magistrates in Tembuland will have to be reduced to four. Stanford, however, expressed the fear that this would be regarded by the Tembu 'clique' as a preliminary move to comply with their demands.<sup>2</sup>

Nehemiah Tile now became Ngangelizwe's chief spokesman, since the chief had for a considerable time been deserted by the old councillors of the Tembu tribe.<sup>3</sup> The chief had clearly fallen from his former glory with the advent of white rule and the only way of restoring him to his former influence with his people was to be through the agency of the witch-doctor.<sup>4</sup> Changes in colonial leadership at the Cape in May 1884, served only to frustrate Tembu protests, since the new rulers were determined to subjugate all peoples across the Kei.<sup>5</sup> Pressure on the administration for the removal of magistrates remained, and now, the Tembus demanded the abolition of the hut tax. Some believed that this hut tax was collected by the magistrates for their own use. Married men paid ten shilling tax annually for each of their wives, who were considered to have separate

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1. Saunders C.C., loc.cit.

2. Stanford Papers, 26 March 1884, Diary.

3. CMT to USNA, 16 April 1884, N.A. 94, 141.

4. Loc.cit.

5. Saunders C.C., op.cit., p. 558.

huts. This system of taxation was designed to minimise the powers of the chiefs.<sup>1</sup> The white authorities became alarmed at the general disquiet among the Tembus and anticipated difficulty in collecting their tax money that year.<sup>2</sup>

In his determination to secure the unity of the Tembu people and their political rights, and to subdue his 'press' opposition, Tile sent letters to the Cape Argus and the Cape Mercury, in which he sets forth the aspirations of the Tembu.<sup>3</sup>

Here in Tembuland, there are only two men - Gangelizwe, the lord of all, and Matanzima, the hand, speaker and eye for his brother Gangelizwe. But nothing he can do in the land, unless he has received permission from his brother Gangelizwe. Our antagonists say to remove Magistrates is to remove civilisation, justice, traders and to bring the smelling out, murdering and war begun by petty disturbances. We do not say anything about traders, we think some of them can be too glad to see them removed. About justice and civilization; no justice and civilization could be made by blood-shedding. To make justice and civilization we want help from the government and from missionaries to fill up our country with education and we want missionaries to send us preachers, to preach the gospel to us. We think that these two

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1. Beinard W., The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860 - 1930 African Studies Series (1982) p. 36.

2. A. Stanford to CMT, 23 July 1884, N.A. 96, 207.

3. Cape Argus, 23 June 1884.

can make civilization and justice in our land, not the ill-treatment. About the smelling out; the heathens in the colony believe that. In one word, we say God only can root out the beliefs of nations. About murdering, that is done by wicked people. There are such people even in the colony, and for them we have laws.

1. We are speaking in this way because we want to rule our own country as the above.
2. We want the unity of the Tembu tribes.
3. We want to be under the Government of the Queen Victoria, ruled by one Magistrate as the above, but not in sections.
4. We do not want our lands to be in farms.
5. We want our country to be filled up with education and Christianity.
6. We do not want to rule our subjects as before. We think that the unpleasantness now existing in Tembuland can be rooted out by the above. It is well known in the colony that some of the Government Officials in Tembuland last year asked the Government armies to destroy us, because it was said that we were forming a war with other tribes; but, thank God, that didn't put it in the minds of the headquarters to proclaim for a war to fight us. We want to be ruled by one Chief Magistrate, under the Government of the Queen Victoria, but not in sections.

The unity of Tembuland could only be possible if all tribes in the territory were under one paramount Chief. Imperial and not colonial over-rule was therefore preferred, but this imperial rule should not lead to white interference in the internal affairs of Tembuland.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Saunders C.C., op.cit., p. 559.

The Tembus called up another meeting at Umtata on 15 September 1884, where the new Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. de Wet addressed them.<sup>1</sup> Nehemiah Tile was put forward to speak on behalf of the Tembus, and set forth from a lengthy document the grievances of the people. He boldly brought forward propositions for the abolition of magistrates and the restoration of the judicial power of the chiefs, with the right of appeal only to the Chief Magistrate.<sup>2</sup>

Tile's actions were considered an insult to the government who claimed that the right to speak belongs only to chiefs and councillors. Tile and his colleague Paul Shaw tried to convince Mr. de Wet that the Tembus were being deprived of certain rights, but de Wet interpreted their appeals as "agitation most injurious to the Tembus".<sup>3</sup> De Wet later wrote to Ngangelizwe telling him how grieved he was that the chief had allowed "that man Tile" to speak at the meeting. "He did not speak the words of the Tembu people ... Now friend Ngangelizwe listen to me, have nothing to do with Tile, he will do harm to your people."<sup>4</sup>

Thus Tile had aroused the wrath of the Secretary for Native Affairs who then urged that Tile be expelled from Tembuland and, if necessary, be arrested for the purposes of removing him from the territory, or otherwise dealt with the law.<sup>5</sup> But since by December, Tile had become relatively quiet, it was considered injudicious to take action against him so long as he remained so.<sup>6</sup> However, early in January

1. Stanford Papers, 15 September 1884, Diary.

2. Cape Mercury, 16 March 1893.

3. N.A. 433. Minutes of Umtata Meeting, 3 December 1885.

4. USNA to CMT, 25 April 1885 (CMT 1/9) See de Wet's letter to Ngangelizwe, 28 November 1884.

5. USNA to CMT, 30 September 1884 (CMT 1/8).

6. USNA to CMT, 4 December 1884 (CMT 1/8).

1885, Tile was imprisoned. The resident magistrate of Mquanduli had him arrested on a charge of inciting certain chiefs to resist lawful authority and in advising them to refuse paying the hut tax to the resident magistrate but to the chief magistrate. The matter was referred to the Attorney-General who advised that the arrest was illegal, and that Tile should at once be released.<sup>1</sup>

But the magistrate's honour was not to be so easily disgraced. De Wet considered that the best course for the resident magistrate to adopt, with a view to counteracting the mischief done by Nehemiah Tile, would be to call a meeting of the principal chiefs and headmen and to release Tile in their presence, while severely reprimanding him and pointing out to those assembled the danger of listening to an 'agitator'.<sup>2</sup> Since Tile was out on bail and away from home, this could not be done, but an interpreter was nevertheless used to convey to the Tembus the feelings of the white authorities.<sup>3</sup> This "attempt at intimidation would seem to have been in part a successful move to dissuade him (Tile) from bringing an action for unlawful arrest, which, with the territory's anomalous legal position, could have caused the government grave embarrassment."<sup>4</sup>

Such government interference and intimidation served only to unite the Tembus in their political struggle. Even Ngangelizwe's death around December 1884 did not hinder the people in the quest for their rights. Ngangelizwe was succeeded by his young son Dalinyebo, who accepted Tile as his confidential adviser in the exaction of court

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1. USNA to Resident Magistrate, 30 January 1885 (CMT 1/9)

2. Loc. cit.

3. Resident Magistrate to USNA, 5 February 1885, NA 102, 123.

4. Saunders C.C., op.cit., p. 560.

finances, boundaries between districts and several other civil grievances.<sup>1</sup> But by the end of 1885, young Dalinyebo seems to have succumbed to the wishes of the colonial authorities by having Tile "sent off" and reverting to the system of having councillors.<sup>2</sup> There is little evidence of Tile's political activities in the four years which followed. However, by the end of 1890 Tile had again found favour with Dalinyebo and was described as being the "moving spirit in all agitations at the chief's kraal."<sup>3</sup> While the focus of Tembu political protest may have shifted to the question of the boundaries of Tembuland in the later years, as the meagre evidence suggests, the reuniting of all Tembuland under one paramount was still the goal of their struggle.

The Tembu political protest movement can therefore now be viewed as a concerted attempt to escape the reality of colonial rule in order to restore independent chiefly rule. But "only in the church, where all men were equal could black control as well as white, was a total withdrawal possible. So the Tembu church should be seen in the context of the long history of African reaction to white penetration. In the past, increasing white pressure had led Africans on the Eastern Frontier to offer resistance by appealing to the shades or ancestral spirits. The founding of the Tembu Church marked the trial of a new method, the use of a Christian framework within which to express African equality in an age of white control."<sup>4</sup> Christianity thus

1. Stanford Papers, 24 March 1885, Diary.

2. NA 102, 123 loc.cit.

3. CMT to USNA, 17 December 1890, N.A. 115, 143. Tile died in 1892 and was succeeded by Jonas Goduka, also a Wesleyan. (cf. Sundkler B.G.M., Bantu Prophets in SA (1961) p. 47, for details.

4. Saunders C.C., op. cit., p. 569. See also Imvo Zaban sundu, 9 August 1893 for "nationalistic" implications of the Tembu movement.

provided a channel for its followers to articulate their aspirations as an oppressed people, both in religious and political terms.

But this Christianity was also the religion of a white race that threatened the African way of life in many ways, and claimed land which the African regarded as his own. In the light of this paradox, the Tembu people tried to come to terms with Christianity by the formation of their own church. That Nehemiah Tile played some important role in creating a milieu conducive to later participation by black Christian ministers in African nationalist politics is without question. The element of African assertion in early religious independency, which first expressed itself in the Tembu Church, was to form a major ideological component of African nationalism.<sup>1</sup> If Tembu political protests subsided after Tile's death in 1892, the flame of "independency" which he had ignited did not.

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1. For detailed discussion see William D., African Nationalism in South Africa: Origins and Problems. Journal of African History XI, 3 (1970) pp. 371-383.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Birth of the Ethiopian Church

#### 1. Mangena Mokone: The Early Years

While Nehemiah Tile was responsible for the founding of the first "African Independent Church", and thus initiating a whole new movement of African emancipation from white missionary and colonial subjugation, another Methodist minister, Mangena Mokone is distinguished as the founder of the first "Ethiopian" Church, which organised the aspirants of the new movement for emancipation under one umbrella body. If Tile had originally conceived of the idea of one large "black church", Mokone not only cherished it, but brought the idea to fruition.

Mangena Mokone was born at Bokgaga, Transvaal in 1851. His father, a local chief, was killed in the Swazi war of 1863. Before he was twenty years of age, he went to Pietermaritzburg, where he found employment on the sugar plantation of a certain Mr. Acutt, earning a salary of 10 shillings a month. After six months he moved to Durban and found employment as a domestic servant with a certain Mrs. J. S. Steel. Here he attended night school in the Aliwal Street Methodist Church. He was encouraged to attend Sunday services and the class meetings, and was soon converted.<sup>1</sup>

In 1874, Mokone was baptised by the Rev. Damon Hlongwana. He returned to Pietermaritzburg in 1875 where he attended classes in elementary theology. Mokone then became a teacher at a Methodist school, and shortly thereafter, was promoted to the position of principal. He soon became a

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1. Skota M.T.D., The African Who's Who (3rd edition)  
CNA, Johannesburg. p. 14.

regular preacher on plan and was especially endowed with spiritual power in preaching. Once, during an evening service, Mokone is reported to have "had all the congregation on their knees in tears shouting and groaning." The neighbouring Europeans, who were drawn to the scene of the meeting were greatly alarmed. One of them shouted, "Vuka boys, Vuka boys" (Get up boys, get up boys!). They summoned the Rev. Rowe, the superintendent, and reported that "the poor niggers were lying on their bellies!" He was then requested to replace the 'boy' Mokone with a better person "who would not frighten the poor creatures with hell fire." The request was not heeded.<sup>1</sup>

After six years of teaching and four years of lay preaching, Mokone offered himself as a candidate for the ministry, together with Daniel Msimang. He was recommended as a "superior preacher, very useful and acceptable. As a school teacher, he has been attentive to his duties and diligent in his study and successful in his work. He is a man considerably in advance, intellectually to the majority of the natives; his piety is very real and genuine and he is very anxious to preach the gospel to his own countrymen."<sup>2</sup> With such glowing testimony, Mokone was accepted and subsequently appointed to the new Swaziland mission. However, because of the English and Dutch war of 1880, he was not able to fulfill his appointment. He was instead sent to Newstead in Natal, where he remained until 1882.

From Natal to Pretoria in the Transvaal, he continued his splendid work. His small congregation grew until mission churches and buildings were erected. Mokone was often concerned about the educational life of his people and he advised that Kilnerton be bought. A school was started

1. Skota M.T.P., loc.cit.

2. Minutes, Kilner Deputation Meeting, Natal 1880 (MACL)

here and Mokone himself was one of the pioneer teachers. In 1888 he and Daniel Msimang were accepted into the ordained ministry of the church. Rev. George Weavind, Mokone's superintendent minister, was particularly impressed and remarked, "I cannot refrain from referring specially to the service at which Mangena and Daniel were ordained. It was a memorable service, distinguished by the special unction that attended it all through. The charge was beautiful in its appropriateness, and the power that accompanied its delivery was remarkable and most blessed."<sup>1</sup> In November of the same year, Mokone was transferred to Makapanstad. His wife, whom he had married five years earlier, died of tuberculosis. He returned to Kilnerton in 1891 as principal of the Kilnerton school.

## 2. Mokone's resignation

Wherever he went Mokone's efforts were crowned with much success and he was thus a great asset to the Wesleyan Church. It was not long, however, that Mokone had a rude awakening to the fact that though all Christians were brothers in Christ, there was a clear distinction between white and black in the Wesleyan Church. It was "at this time that he found that the African missionary was obliged to submit to the European missionary, on all points at issue. He found that the privileges enjoyed by white ministers were denied to his black brother ministers."<sup>2</sup>

If the first Wesleyan missionaries could be credited for showing a genuine spirit of brotherhood toward their African brothers, their successors were exhibiting a changed attitude. The African preacher now "could no longer sit with his white

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1. Wesleyan Missionary Notices (1888) London, p. 191.

2. Skota, M.T.D., op. cit., p. 15.

brethren in the same gathering. The native preacher was to have his own black conference where he and his kind could convene and always to report proceedings for approval or rejection. On calling on his white brother, the native preacher could no longer enter by the front door as the back entrance was good enough for him, no matter what the nature of his business. Many among the native ministers began to question the attitude adopted by their white brethren."<sup>1</sup> Thus, there soon grew a spirit of discontentment which broke out into open confrontation when Mokone raised his case.

Mangena Mokone was now determined to break away from the European controlled Wesleyan Church. His letter of resignation, dated 24 October 1892, which was addressed to the Rev. George Weavind, superintendent of the Wesleyan Mission, read:<sup>2</sup>

I hereby give you notice that at the end of this month I will leave the Wesleyan Church ministry and serve God in my own way. It is no use to stop me for I won't change. If you like, I can pack up all I've got and leave tomorrow morning before breakfast.

Your grumbling servant  
Mangena Maake Mokone

Mokone had actually intended to resign at the beginning of 1892, but he did not want to upset his white colleague, Owen Watkins who was then ill.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Coan J.R., Expansion of Missions of the AME church in SA 1896 - 1908 (Hartford, Conn., USA) p.86.
  2. Ibid., p. 163.
  3. Veysie D.C., Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Transvaal 1823-1902 (Rhodes) p. 136.

Mokone left Kilnerton on the 1st of November and went to the Marabastad Location in Pretoria, where he wrote his second letter to Weavind.<sup>1</sup>

As you are aware of my intention to begin an independent mission and school work among the natives, I beg to ask your kindness to grant me a certificate stating that I was a duly ordained minister of the Wesleyan Church and that I am leaving on my own accord, and that there is no censure of the Church against me. I thank you and those associated with you for your kindness in the past. I value your opinion very highly and hope even in the future to show by my work that I have profited by your teachings, and am not worthy of your friendship, seeing we work under the same Master, even Christ.

It is highly probable that Mokone included with one of these letters what came to be called as the "Founder's Declaration of Independence."<sup>2</sup> The document reads as follows :-

1. Our district meetings have been separated from the Europeans since 1886. And yet we were compelled to have a white chairman and secretary.
2. Our district meetings were held in a more or less barbaric manner. We were just like a lot of Kaffirs before the landrost for passes. What the white man says is infallible, and no black can prove it wrong.
3. This separation shows that we can't be brothers.

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1. Moeti M.T., op. cit., p. 163.

2. Coan J.R., op. cit., p. 440.

4. The wives and children of Native ministers have no allowance from the Society whatever. Only the whites have it. This is no doubt one of the reasons for the separation of the district meetings.
  5. The Native ordained minister is of no use to his people. He cannot exercise his rights as a minister or be placed in a position of trust as one who is a fellow labourer in the Lord. But the candidate of the whites will be placed over the black man as superintendents.
  6. Native ministers get from 24 pounds to 50 pounds per annum, while the white ministers get 300 pounds per annum.
  7. In the Transvaal, no Native minister has the right to use the Mission property, movable or immovable. All the whites are supplied with ox wagons and furniture from the Society.
  8. It is a great shame to see the homes of Native ministers and teachers. A stable is preferable. At Waterburg I was obliged to build my own house, and at Makapanstad I spent 3 pounds and twelve shillings on the house for reeds and skins, etc.
  9. The Native minister holds class meetings and prayer meetings, visits the sick, prays for them, preach, bury and teach school, while the white minister's work is to marry, baptize and administer communion. They will never go to visit the sick or pray for them, and when they die, your Native minister must go to bury your own people. This is not Christianity, nor brotherly love, nor friendship. If this is true, then white ministers are unnecessary among the black people.
  10. The white ministers don't even know the members of their circuits. They always build their homes one or two miles away from the congregation.
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11. No Native minister is honoured among the white brethren. The more the Native humbles himself, the more they make a fool of him.
12. We have been in the Wesleyan Ministry for 12 years, and not one of us has received the Minutes or the Annual Report. We are simply ignorant of our own work. We are called "Revs" but we are worse than the boy working for the missionary, for he will now and then see the missionary notices. What advantage is to be obtained by remaining in this Society?
13. As Principal of Kilnerton Institute, I was not esteemed as one who belongs to and has any say in the school. A student may be discharged, or may leave school, and no one would tell me anything about it until I hear it from someone else not in any way connected with the Institution.
14. When a student is sick, the poor nigger will be sent for to come at once to the classroom, shivering under his blanket. He is then asked in the classroom what is the matter, and is then told that he is lazy, not sick, and to hurry and get better. The boy who speaks rather straight will be considered a bad one. If all this is so, where is justice? Where is brotherly love? Where is Christian sympathy? God in heaven is the witness to all these things.

Mangena Maake Mokone  
Kilnerton, October 23, 1892.

This document is essentially a list of complaints. The fundamental grievance seems to centre around the segregation of the African ministers in a separate District Synod, while, at the same time, permitting Europeans to hold leadership positions on the African synod.<sup>1</sup> A more correct reading for

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1. cf. Veysie D.C., op. cit., for list of complaints.

the document would have been the 'Founder's List of Grievances' while the thought of independence is not implicitly stated, it is implied.

George Weavind's response to Mokone's letters and complaints was contained in a letter, dated 7 February 1893. The sympathetic tone of his letter expressed his deep regret that Mokone had chosen to pursue so grave a course of action. He indicated that the matter had been brought before the synods of both the Africans and the Europeans. The African Synod, according to Weavind, "disclaimed any sympathy with, or responsibility for the statements contained in the document." On the other hand, it was pointed out that Mokone had been in correspondence with some of the members of the African Synod prior to his resignation. Both Synods expressed the wish that Mokone should have brought his stated grievances to them for discussion before he so hastily resigned. The certificate or recommendation which Mokone had requested, was sent. The letter closed with the hope that Mokone may have "Divine Guidance and Blessing in any work" that he may do for Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The District Meeting also replied to Mokone's objections. Separate meetings, it claimed, were a matter of expediency rather than of discrimination. It pointed out that the Methodist Church Conference had discussed the matter at length in 1887 without reaching unanimity. Nevertheless, the District Meeting appointed a sub-committee to consider the matter and its report was received in 1894, but it was decided to continue with separate meetings. With regard to the support of the ministry, the District Meeting pointed out that, although the African men had no claim on the special funds, each case of genuine need would be considered on its merits.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Coan J.R., op. cit., p. 90.

2. Veysie D.C., loc. cit.

Mokone remained thoroughly unsatisfied. His quarrels with the Church stemmed from plain racial discrimination on their part, and for this, they could offer him no justification. He saw a fitting occasion for his great breakaway when the white Wesleyans were holding a Missionary Congress in Pretoria during November, 1892. The African ministers were, as usual, excluded from the board of the congress. Perhaps, they made some attempt to correct the situation at the congress, but without success. Mokone and his indignant fellow ministers withdrew to hold their own protest meeting outside. How could they preach the gospel to the brotherhood of all men when their own colleagues refused to practice it?<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Ethiopian Church is Born

The spirit of discontent spread rapidly and on 20 November 1892 Mokone and about fifty others started the Ethiopian Church. The first meeting was held at an old tin shanty which belonged to William Makanda, a Wesleyan who was in sympathy with the new church.<sup>2</sup> The church was hardly a week old when Mokone had a banner made on which were emblazoned the words "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. (Ps. 68:31)."<sup>3</sup>

They called themselves Ethiopians because they interpreted this prophecy to refer to the African races.<sup>4</sup> This was the first time "Ethiopia" was taken to refer mystically to all black Africa.

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1. Roux E., Time longer than Rope (1948) p. 80.

2. Coan J.R., op.cit., p. 91.

3. Verryn T., History of the Order of Ethiopia (1962) p.65.

4. Roux E., loc. cit. Ethiopia or Ityopya is Greek for "the land of the burnt face". The term was used by the Greeks and medieval Europeans to refer to all the lands south of

The Ethiopian Church, whose seed was planted by Mokone in Pretoria, began to germinate and spread into other areas. Enthusiasm among its members was high. It proselytized freely from existing denominations, and tried to win over smaller sects. It made rapid strides in converting the unevangelized.<sup>1</sup> The three local "Ethiopian" preachers in Pretoria were Rauben Dhlamini, Jantye Thompson and Joshua Mphela. In January 1893, Jantye Zachariah Tantse and Abraham Mngqibisa, local preachers from the Wesleyan Church in Johannesburg, joined the growing Ethiopian movement, after meeting with Mokone.

Mokone was advised by these preachers to contact the Tembu Church in Transkei and forge a unity with them. Heeding this, Mokone travelled to Queenstown, from where he went on foot to Macibini. Here he met the Rev. Jonas Goduka, head of the Tembu Church. A special meeting was summoned and a favourable understanding was reached. Soon after Rev. Mokone's return to Pretoria, a certain Mr. P. Kuze arrived from Macibini to assist him.<sup>2</sup> Rev. Jacobus G. Xaba, an ordained

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Egypt - Nubia, Meroe and even to Southern Arabia and India. When the sub-Saharan kingdom of Meroe and Nubia were conquered by the emperor Ezana in the fourth century A.D., in his advance from the south, he took the name "Ethiopia" for all the territory under his sway. The name itself, however, is very old and is found in many ancient documents including the Bible. It is not surprising that the Ethiopians prefer to be called "Ethiopian" than "Abyssinian", a name of Arabic origin that refers to racial mixing. The Italians, during the bitter Fascist occupation of the country, called it Abyssinia. (See Shutte S., The Ethiopian Church: Study in African Christian Symbolism 1974; UCT).

1. Verryn T., op. cit., p. 66.

2. Skota M.T.D., op. cit., p. 15.

minister of the Wesleyan Church from Heilbron, in the Orange River Colony, also joined after having resigned from the Wesleyan ministry to start his own independent church.

On 2 November 1893, the first Ethiopian church building was opened. Rev. George Weavind was invited to preach the dedicatory sermon, but could not attend. He sent the Rev. J.W. Underwood to deliver the sermon. For his text, Underwood choose the words from Genesis 18:19, "And he called the name of that place Bethel." Mokone believed that establishment of the Ethiopian Church was firmly grounded in the tradition of Wesleyan Methodism, even calling it "John Wesley's legitimate child."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. James Dwane and the AME Church

The most influential leader in the Ethiopian movement was not Tile, its founder nor Mokone, its first organiser but another African Wesleyan minister, James Mata Dwane. He belonged to the Amatinder clan of the Amaxhosa tribe and was born in 1848 near Queenstown. His conversion came after many years of inner struggle between his traditional religious ideas and the Christian teachings he had received. The call to preach followed shortly afterwards. The Quarterly Meeting of the Healdtown Circuit was unanimous in their approval of Dwane's candidature, including his superintendent minister, and after having passed a satisfactory church examination, was unanimously and cordially recommended to be received as a student for the ministry. He was ordained in 1881.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Kamphausen E., Anfänge der kirchlichen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung in Südafrika. Geschichte und Theologie der Äthiopischen Bewegung (1872-1912), p. 122.
  2. Minutes, Native District Meeting, Grahamstown, 15-16 January 1872. See also Moeti M.T., op. cit., p. 166. AME indicates African Methodist Episcopal.

Dwane struck at the very heart of African priorities, believing that higher education was absolutely essential for African development. He believed that colleges were the great keystone of the future mission work in Africa and was determined to go to England to raise funds for the building of such a college or university for blacks in South Africa. Rev. Smith Spencer expressed pleasure and confidence in commending Dwane to the sympathy and generosity of English Methodists. He wrote that "he is one of the best known of the seventy four Native ministers in the South African connexion, and has several times been elected by his brethren to represent them at the Annual Conference. Though his language is Kaffir, yet he is competent to address any English audience. He has already delivered two or three addresses in my own Circuit and been heartily received, and voluntary promises of help have been readily given."<sup>1</sup>

Europeans were increasingly opposed to the idea of Africans making trips to Europe. They firmly believed that "a voyage to England is very apt to give the Kaffir a swollen head, and to make him unsuited to South African life. It is therefore not well to send a few natives home, for such a voyage raises aspirations that cannot be satisfied in South Africa."<sup>2</sup> But Dwane did go to England in 1887. He did not meet with much success, but on his second trip in 1892, he returned with considerable funding for the college. His vision of a place where academic and industrial knowledge would be imparted, caught the imagination of his audiences and, with their contributions, he was a step closer to his goal.

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1. Minutes, op.cit., p.168. Smith Spencer was Secretary of the Methodist Church Conference for 1887.
  2. Kidd D., Kafir Socialism and the Dawn of Individualism (1908) p. 181.

The South African Methodist Church, however, had other plans for the money. Rev. Lamplough, under whom Dwane had been trained, and for three years worked as a teacher, before becoming a minister, requested him to pay the money into the general funds of the church. Dwane maintained that the money should be applied for the purposes of the institution for which it had been collected. He was apparently plagued with a million questions and innuendoes, as to his trustworthiness. This "was done by white missionaries who were evidently unwilling to place on him an equal share of trust and free action. Whereas there were many of them who either bring or were the means of bringing the money and other valuable articles to the mission fields of Africa. They have had to answer no questions or give any unnecessary explanations. They were free to use as they thought best. On the contrary, they received praise and honour from both white and black."<sup>1</sup> Contrary to his wishes, Dwane paid the money to his colleagues and resigned from the Church.

In March 1896, a conference was held in Pretoria for all the Independent Church leaders.<sup>2</sup> Because of his ability and forceful personality, Dwane immediately became a prominent leader in the Ethiopian movement. The Conference was informed by Mokone about the AME Church in America.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Moeti M.T., op. cit., p. 170.
  2. This was the first serious attempt to unite the various Independent Churches under a common leadership. cf. Sundkler B.G.M., op. cit., p.40 and Verryn T., op. cit., p. 71.
  3. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded by a former slave, Richard Allen. He was accepted as a Methodist preacher at Baltimore, U.S. in 1784. His preaching in Philadelphia attracted many Afro-Americans, resulting in white protests. The former complained of racial prejudice in the church and withdrew to form the "Free African Society" (1787). From this body the AME church

It was then decided that three delegates, Dwane, Mokone and Xaba should go to America to consolidate a union of the Ethiopian Church with the AME Church. Each delegate had to raise his own passage and eventually only Dwane left in April, 1896.

Mokone had in the meantime established communication with the Afro-Americans. On 11 April 1896, he wrote to H.W. Councill, President of the AME Church in Alabama, and expressed his gratitude to the Afro-Americans for their fraternal solidarity with the Africans in South Africa, stating that "we are always so strengthened when we receive letters from America, and feel as if we have been visited by an extra-ordinary being ... you ministers of the AME Church have stolen our hearts indeed."<sup>1</sup> It was against this background of solidarity that the Ethiopian leadership resolved during their 1896 Conference to affiliate with the AME Church.

The preamble to the resolution for unity emphasized the Ethiopian leadership's concern about their ambition to evangelize Africa, a sentiment they proclaimed earlier in 1893 and which they reiterated in 1896, that their Conference was strongly "of the opinion that a union with the African Methodist Episcopal Church will not only be hailed by our people, but would be the means of evangelizing numerous tribes of this vast continent of Africa."<sup>2</sup> Thus even in

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was formed. Fifteen other Afro-American Churches joined. Allen was ordained in 1799 and became the first bishop in 1816. Before his death, he won national standing for the denomination.

1. Moeti M.T., op. cit., p. 177.

2. Ibid., p. 178.

seeking a union, the Ethiopian's primary concern was not political propaganda or "sheep-stealing" (as they were later accused of) but "a simple and clear one : to preach to our people the gospel."<sup>1</sup>


The proposition for the amalgamation of the two churches was accepted by the House of Bishops and the Missionary Board of the AME Church, and Rev. Dwane was appointed General Superintendent of South Africa. He had pressed home the advantage he had gained over the other two absent leaders and excelled himself in drawing vast crowds and working them up into a state of enthusiastic generosity.<sup>2</sup> He assured the Afro-Americans that "the Africans would never allow the white man to ride roughshod over their country. Africans were rapidly imbibing civilized governments. Then they would say to the European nations, Hands off!"<sup>3</sup>

The government of the Transvaal was approached for formal recognition of the Church, and this was granted. Dwane's ambitions took him even further. He asked Cecil Rhodes for the right to extend his Church to Rhodesia and the Zambezi, and he planned to collect funds to be sent to King Menelik of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in order to extend mission to areas as far as the horn of Africa. This expansion caused much upheaval in the work of the other mission societies. Congregationalists, Presbyterians and others felt the repercussions of Dwane's broad advance. Thus, to the unrest caused by the war and rumours of war in South Africa, was added the Ethiopian tension within the mission Churches.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Rev. J.Z. Tantsi in Minutes of Evidence, SANAC Vol.IV, p. 474.
  2. Moeti M.T., op. cit., p. 177.
  3. Roux E., op. cit., p. 81.
  4. Sundkler B.G.M., op. cit., p. 41.

Dwane's appointment was resented by some of his colleagues in South Africa, who contended that he went to America on an important mission and not to receive office without sanction of his brother ministers. Moreover, as Mokone was the founder and supervisor of the Church that was now united with the AME Church, many expected that if any offices were to be created, he should be the first considered for the position of leader. But as Skota maintained, "The appointment was an unfortunate cause of the subsequent difficulties in the progress of the AME Church in South Africa."<sup>1</sup>

The first joint conference of the newly-formed Transvaal and Cape Colony District of the AME Church was held at Lesseyton on the 7th April 1897, and was convened by the Rev. Dwane. During March of the following year, the American Church sent Bishop H.M. Turner to visit South Africa.<sup>2</sup> He organised two conferences at which a number of ministers were ordained. He also ordained Rev. Dwane to the office of Vicar-Bishop. Dwane, however, was not content with being only an assistant bishop, a position which emphasized the inferior status of the African Church as compared with the Afro-American Church. The fact that Turner's action in consecrating Dwane as assistant bishop did not receive the full recognition of the other Afro-American bishops made Dwane finally realize that he should break with the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>3</sup>

1. Skota M.T.D., op.cit., p. 16.
  2. Sundkler B.G.M., loc. cit. Through Turner's visit, membership figures doubled to about 10,000, mainly through affiliating malcontent groups and congregations from Mission Churches.
  3. Ibid. cf. also Moeti M.T., p. 192 for financial disagreement.
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This Dwane eventually did. He established contact with the Anglicans who informed him that the AME Church could not hand out Episcopal orders because they had never received them. The result of Dwane's deliberations with the Anglican Church was the formation in 1900 of the "Order of Ethiopia" within the Church. About 3000 Ethiopian followers joined the new order. The Anglican archbishop believed that a black order in the Church was necessary where black priests and bishops would have freedom to adapt Christianity to the black ethos. Hence Dwane and his followers were gladly received. Sundkler concluded that "On the part of the bishops of the Province this step was an act of real statesmanship and of great promise."<sup>1</sup>

That the establishment of the Ethiopian Church was intended to provide a field where Africans could develop their own ideas and express their own personalities without having to suffer the constant interference of white missionaries who claimed superiority is without question. But in the background, moreover, was the growing feeling of national consciousness and revolt against the colonialists which was not only in religious matters. The industrialisation of South Africa was beginning and this was moving the country and its peoples towards a capitalist economy based on exploitation and racist class rule. With the discovery of gold by the colonialists, Witwatersrand became the new industrial centre.

It was also to be that part of the country which would witness rapid secessions from mission Churches. Living

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1. Sundkler B.G.M., loc. cit.

in the squalor of "native reserves", in an underworld of misery like dark phantoms ceaselessly reminded of their sub-humanity, it was not unnatural for the African labourers to experience extinction of their character and culture. It was not strange that some of them, coming from different tribes, began to think of national unity. The conception of a common Church where they could rediscover their humanity together would have had a wide appeal.

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## CONCLUSIONS

### 1. Reaction to European Missions

It is now obvious that in Ethiopianism we are dealing with an aspect of the total transformation of the African society. This process has been examined dialectically. Its contradictory features must now be grasped, and no absolute and definitive judgements can be made about any one phase. We shall not attempt to consider African responses in isolation from the white missionaries. Since their incorporation into the new settler state and a new religious framework, black and white exist as two "classes" living inextricably together, even though their fundamental interests are not always the same.

This seems to be the only way we can hope to understand the development of Ethiopianism as part of the behaviour of Africans as an oppressed people. Black and White should not be viewed schematically; they are both elements of a concrete historical process, in which action by either party is strictly conditioned by and related to the actions of the other. We turn now to locate Ethiopianism as an African response to European missions.

Much of the evidence already presented in this study points at a reaction of Africans to European Missions as one of the more important factors in the formation of new Ethiopian movements. The reactionary element features far too prominently for it to be relegated to the background. It is with similar conviction that Neill concludes that "at the heart of this whole movement (of independency), directly or indirectly, will be found the sin of the white man against the black.✓ It is because of the failure of the white man to make the Church a home for the black man that the latter has been fain to have a Church of his own."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Neill S., History of Christian Missions (1964), p.498.

In his extensive study of the phenomenon of independency on the continent of Africa, Barrett has postulated a representative theory for the rise of independent churches, which gives expression to Neill's observation and to the findings of this study. He discovered the one theme that was commonly important for many tribes to be the major Christian attribute of God and man, namely the complex biblical concept of love.<sup>1</sup> Barrett maintains that missions had exemplary records in regard to most of the components of love - service, sacrifice, forgiveness, caring, compassion, charity and peace. But on the point of love as listening, sharing, sympathizing and sensitive understanding in depth between equals, missions seem to have failed. There was no close contact, no dialogue, no comprehension and no sympathy extended to traditional society and religion.<sup>2</sup>

Barrett is then led to conclude that the root cause common to the entire movement of independency as being in this "single failure in sensitivity, the failure at one small point of the version of Christianity brought in by the missions to demonstrate the fullness of the biblical concept of love. ....This unconscious failure in love thereupon led to a threefold failure to understand the realities of the situation expressed in the themes of 'philadelphia', africanism and biblicalism. Brotherly love towards either African converts or other mission bodies proved difficult to implement; failure to differentiate the good in traditional society from the bad led to a rejection of africanism (the whole traditional complex); and these in turn obscured the existence of any links between traditional society and biblical religion, and led to the widespread refusal to christianize traditional customs. This failure took numerous forms including colour

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1. Barrett D.B., Schism and Renewal in Africa (1968), p.269.

2. Loc. cit.

prejudice and denominational rigidity, was widely perceived, and in time became the major issue."<sup>1</sup>

Barrett has also observed that the demand for spiritual independence in an African community increases as soon as the Scriptures are published in the local language, thus leading to a certain 'discrepancy'.<sup>2</sup> The Ethiopian leaders were, however, also capable of reading the English Bible, and their hopes would have been naturally raised by the biblical vision of social renewal, power, prosperity, peace, love, justice, non-racialism, equality and restored relationships. With these promises, they would have been able to mobilise and enthuse others.

The people then gradually began to discern a serious discrepancy between mission and biblical religion. The missions were assaulting their institutions, but biblical religion emphatically upheld the family, land, fertility, and the importance of women and also appeared to endorse polygamy and respect for family ancestors.<sup>3</sup> The gospel was therefore being misrepresented by missionaries who had added their own cultural biases to it. The Scriptures then gradually became an independent standard of reference to legitimate grievances of the people.<sup>4</sup> The Ethiopians may have not voiced such sentiments in this manner, but it was nevertheless implicit in their grievances against the missionaries.

John Mbiti points to another important factor in determining the process of independent church formation. Since, as we have seen, traditional concepts of time emphasize the Zamani and the Sasa, with little concern for the distant future, Mbiti believes that "the hope of an immediate paradise must

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1. Barret D.B., loc. cit.

2. Ibid., p.268.

3. Loc. cit.

4. Ibid., p.269.

loom heavily upon African Christians. They need to see it realised 'immediately' for it to have a real meaning. They wait for this goal to come, but then they see their Christian relatives beginning to die. There is disappointment from the second generation of Christians onwards, and it is precisely at this moment that separatism begins to take place."<sup>1</sup>

The members of the independent churches then see, though unconsciously, a partial realization of their hope of an immediate arrival of heaven or paradise incarnated in the features and principles of their new church or leader. It is then in the independent movement that a future dimension of time is most concretely realized and meaningful.<sup>2</sup> One cannot fail to see the link here with the attempt of Ethiopians to recognize their identity and heritage in the biblical references to Ethiopia. They cherished the promises of liberation which when contrasted with their bondage, showed the black man in a dignified and humane light.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the other theories offered by researchers touch on some important factor or other, involved in the preparation of a fertile soil for the growth of Independent Church movements. It is often, as Daneel has observed, a matter of emphasis, determined to a great extent by the particular interest and disposition of the investigator, without the postulated root cause necessarily excluding the complex of other factors involved.<sup>4</sup> In this study, we have found it necessary to retain the reactionary nature of Ethiopianism as a vital element in the quest for African religious independency. We have also found much sympathy with Barrett's theory of a failure in love, or, as told by one of Sundkler's

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1. Mbiti J.S., op.cit., p.235.

2. Loc. cit.

3. Shepperson G., Ethiopianism: Past and Present, p.249.

4. Daneel M.L., Old and New in Shona Independent Churches, Vol.II, p.11.

'Bantu Prophets', in an effort to account for his secession, declared, 'Our greatest problem is this: never to be treated as a human being.'<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Church and State Reaction

The rise and development of the Ethiopian movement in Southern Africa received mixed responses from the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church Conferences did not pass any deprecating resolutions against the Ethiopians, though many of her ministers believed that Ethiopianism was to be seen as something 'evil' promoting race prejudice, discontent and distrust of Europeans. The 1903 Conference emphasized the need for relations with Ethiopians to be "governed by prudence, courtesy and Christian charity." If members wanted to transfer their membership to the Ethiopian Churches, membership certificates should not be withheld. Even if former members wanted to come back to the Wesleyan fold, they should be accepted and "placed on trial for such a period as may be considered necessary."<sup>2</sup>

The general attitude of the white mission churches, as it was reflected during the General Missionary Conferences at which the Methodists were well represented, was however, far from being anything but prudent, courteous or charitable. The so-called "proselytising tactics" pursued by the Ethiopian emissaries were not feared as the "spirit of opposition, of distrust towards the white man" that was being infused into the people. The Ethiopian leaders naturally rejected such unfounded claims, but the whites believed that there were "evidences too strong to permit our accepting of this denial".

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1. Setiloane G., op.cit., p.408. Statement made in an address at a Consultation on the Independent Churches at Mindolo, 1962.

2. MS 15, 655 30 June 1903 (MACL)

The white missionaries thought that they had the "welfare of the natives" at heart and that to foster a spirit of opposition to whites was therefore to act directly in "antagonism towards the best interests of the natives." Serious political troubles were predicted, "in which the natives will be the chief sufferers" if Ethiopianism persisted.<sup>1</sup>

The Europeans also believed that the Ethiopians showed a conspicuous lack of a genuine missionary spirit. The Ethiopian aim seemed to be not to take the Gospel to the unevangelised, but to form new churches in European mission occupied fields. They found it difficult to conceive "what good can possibly come from the disorder, division and destruction wrought by these independent movements." Its newborn energies were being misdirected to the discomfort of those institutions to which "its own light and power are due." Strict discipline was thought neglected, resulting in a "compromise with heathenism". The rapid spread of Ethiopianism was attributed to the requirement for membership being profession and not repentance. Ethiopian influence was therefore regarded as divisive, anti-missionary and with its prevailing "low moral and spiritual tone", should be viewed only with grave forebodings.<sup>2</sup>

The Ethiopian leaders, as we have seen, were generally described as earnest and zealous by the white missionaries. But they were accused of being "impatient of training and control, and often woefully ignorant."<sup>3</sup> They find a ready following

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1. Report of the Proceeding of the First General Missionary Conference (1904) Johannesburg, p.40. These Conferences were annually held in the early 1900's.
  2. Ibid., p.172 - 3.
  3. Lea A., op.cit., p.24. See also E. Farmer, The Transvaal as a Mission Field (1900), p.102.

and form numerous so-called Christian congregations because "people listen more readily to men of their own colour than to us (whites) and often ignorant of any irregularity or carelessness in their mission believe themselves to be true Christians, and possessed of the full Faith."<sup>1</sup> White missionaries believed that if they cannot control, organise and govern the Ethiopian movement and its leaders, it will turn out to be "a travesty of the Faith, a mass of heresy and schism, and a parody of the Gospel."<sup>2</sup> Even the First Missionary Conference believed that "for the present, at least it would seem to require not so much repression as careful guidance."<sup>3</sup>

If the whites considered the tribal system of the Africans as a menace to their supremacy, their sense of morality led them to believe that it was wrought with evil, and they sought to destroy it. However, there was regret. For, "in uprooting the Clan-System, we have made a mistake that has given us the pernicious developments of Ethiopianism ... the Kafir cannot as yet advance much if left to himself without European guidance ... The Ethiopian movement shows how utterly superficial, pernicious, and bizarre is the civilization of the natives who break loose from European guidance."<sup>4</sup>

White response was thus by no means sympathetic. The self-assertive and independent spirit of the Ethiopians was offered no encouragement whatsoever. This new-born energy was considered misdirected and had to be severely checked. Lax discipline and schism in the church was to be deplored. Whites were concerned to preserve their social supremacy in South Africa. If Ethiopianism posed a challenge to this, it should therefore be seen as "not only mischievous but

1. Lea A., loc. cit.

2. Ibid., p.103.

3. Report of Conference Proceeding 1904, op.cit., p.177.

4. Kidd D., The Essential Kaffir, (1908) p.60.

dangerous." Whatever their strategies, "the white man must rule in South Africa."<sup>1</sup>

When the Ethiopian Churches began spreading, the Government itself placed no major obstacles in their way, despite allegations that the Ethiopians were anti-European in their sentiment, if not actually political in their activities. Several commissions, after eulogizing the work of the missionaries, urged the government to refrain from repressive action. One major commission concluded that the Ethiopian movement "is the outcome of a desire on the part of the Natives for ecclesiastical self-support and self-control, first taking tangible form in the secession of discontented and restless spirits from religious bodies under the supervision of European Missionaries without any previous external incitation thereto."<sup>2</sup>

The South African Native Affairs Commission therefore did not feel disposed to condemn "such aspiration after religious independence, unassociated with mischievous political propaganda."<sup>3</sup> But it had little sympathy with Ethiopianism, overall, "as there can be no doubt that its leaders have not yet arrived at a stage when dissociation from the control of European missionaries is likely to contribute increased wisdom in Church administration, or more ennobling examples of personal self-sacrifice and piety." 'Non-Repressive' recommendations were formulated with the "hope that in this way what is worthless and unstable in the movement will dwindle into insignificance, while so much of it as is lasting and in harmony with the true principles of religious and social advancement will not be duly impeded, but will grow in the fullness of time to be a power for good."<sup>4</sup> The resulting outcome has nevertheless seen the multiplication of the Ethiopian and other Independent Churches in South Africa.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Cape Times, 19 August 1902.

2. SANAC Report Vol.1, p.63.

3. Loc. cit.

4. Ibid., p.54.

5. Loram C.T., The Separatist Church Movement. International Review of Missions (July 1926) p.476.

### 3. Reflection on influencing factors

If the Ethiopians were not seeking Christ outside the White Methodist Church, they were certainly in search of a 'place to feel at home' where there would be no discriminatory practices and where they would be free to assert their leadership and identity. Church work in the greater part of South Africa has "naturally been, in the first place, with the English and the native work that has arisen from this, has been an appendage to the white parish. The natives, if they have attended the parish church, have had to sit in seats at the back, and at the Holy Communion go up to the altar after the Europeans. They have scarcely been treated as parishioners, neither invited to vestry meetings, nor allowed any voice in the election of church offices. When the congregation has grown large enough for it to become a separate mission, the priest in charge of that has generally had to take the status of curate to the parish priest: as these latter are not always attractive or particularly able men, it must follow that none but inexperienced or inferior men are prepared to become merely mission curates to them. The natives have to learn that in Church matters, as well as in social and political, they must be subservient to whites."<sup>1</sup>

In such a typical pattern of "white" ministry, the Wesleyan Church was not able to offer the African a home where he could act with his own identity or independence. The rules and regulations of the British Church were simply laid down, without due consideration to the African cultural heritage. The synods and conferences were organised, with debating procedures and lists of priorities already established. This was certainly foreign to the African mind and would have required certain skills which had first to be inculcated. The African, not having the opportunity to master the Western

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1. Farmer E., op.cit., p.106.

standards of eloquence, would naturally have been silenced by his more able white brothers. The meetings were simply intended for the "superior race", and even when the Africans were admitted, they were surely overawed, and feeling their "inferiority", could not act or speak effectively.

If the African ministers were treated as equals with the whites, and allowed to take their full share in meetings, the result would be that they would outvote the Europeans. This might have further led to the exclusion of the whites from their Church Offices, even though they provided the greater part of the revenue. Thus also, if the blacks were represented, according to their numbers in synods and conferences, the black vote would decide the election of the Chairman or President, and settle all other business. Such was "the temper of the English that they would have nothing to do with an assembly that made this possible, but hold themselves severely aloof."<sup>1</sup>

Wesleyan missionaries were not ignorant of their slow and cautious development and their failure to quickly see an opportunity for a "native ministry". The Unzondelelo men were concerned to show the missionaries the great need for such a ministry, for the sake of the black congregations, as well as for the conversion of the "heathen". They felt the need most acutely and were prepared to provide for its support. Well trained Africans were, without doubt, the most successful missionaries. Every effort should have been made to train and prepare such men, and every encouragement should have been given for their ordination; but this was not done! Even if the Africans were probationers, their admission into full connexion with the Conference occasioned certain difficulties, "which difficulties arise partly from a misunderstanding of the real effect of such admission; partly from

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1. Farmer E., op. cit., p.108.

political prejudice ..."<sup>1</sup>

An ordained "native ministry" could not be encouraged at all costs since this would have jeopardized the balance of ecclesiastical power. Whatever the intents and purposes of the Kilner deputation, it did not alter the situation besides sending ripples of fear through the country.<sup>2</sup>

The early missionaries were known for advocating a self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating "Native Church". Independence then, was what the missionaries had in view. The Africans, who were now demanding that independence, were being accused of insincerity. Even if a measure of independence was granted, as with Unzondelelo, it was in a disguised form, safeguarding control in the hands of the white clergy.

The gospel that was transplanted on the African soil by the Wesleyans proclaimed brotherhood and love of all. But many failed to live by this proclamation. "You say that we are the same in God's sight, but you will not come to our churches, or let us come to yours." Such was Dwane's accusation. When he was in London, he wished to visit St. Paul's Cathedral. "But I was rather afraid of being turned out." To his surprise, no one objected to his presence, and he went again.<sup>3</sup> The Africans who embraced this gospel of love were in the process swallowing the bitter pill of racial prejudice, with its accompanying insult and degradation. "We held a service for natives only on Wednesday of the second week. This I announced in the European Church. Knowing the objections

1. SAM, 28 August 1891, p.207.

2. This deputation was appointed by the British Methodist Conference in 1879 to estimate the progress of the South African mission.

3. Farmer E., op.cit., p.99.

many Europeans make to the presence of coloured people in their churches ..."<sup>1</sup> Such a casual but yet typical account by an early missionary, tells the story in ironic sincerity.

What created the milieu for the evolution of Ethiopianism? The factors responsible are indeed many, but they may be, on the whole, assessed in the context of the contact between European and African, which produced its labyrinth of cultural differences. The expropriation of land belonging to the local people, incessant demand for their labour, and frequent interference in their traditional organisations proved more of a strain which their socio-political institutions could not withstand. The solidarity of African society was increasingly threatened through these forces which had no regard for their tradition.

No detailed account is available of the role of Wesleyanism in the disintegrating process of "westernising" African life and culture in Southern Africa. The attitude of her missionaries, however, did not differ from the others in any definite way. Tribal laws and customs were becoming more and more neglected and missionaries proclaimed with great force that they are no longer binding. The missionary would set himself the task of demolishing everything, so far as he was able, from the 'dark part of the benighted pagans'. It was only the exceptional missionary who would realise that Christianity and Western civilization were not coterminous, that the credal expressions and liturgical forms which the missionary brought with him were not to be confused with the eternal Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Sacrifices in connection with ancestor worship had been confronted so that the whole tribal and family structures

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1. Cook T., My Missionary Tour in South Africa, p.126.

2. Tutu D., Whither African Theology, p.364.

were affected; the bride price, together with certain sexual practices had been attacked without a thorough study being made of their significance (especially the bride price). The relationships between man and wife had been judged with preconceived ideas; ritual prohibitions had been confronted without realizing fully their meaning in keeping the community together, the observance of which maintains harmony with the supernatural world. The indigenous religious leadership had been undermined, for example, the role of the paramount chiefs. On the whole, very little systematic confrontation has been made of these issues on the basis of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Rightly or wrongly, the Africans believed that the missionaries classed all their customs as sin, and that when they became Christians they had to give them up, even the wearing of bangles. Thus "To become Christians means adopting European costume, giving up all but one wife, becoming a total abstainer and such a severance from heathen association."<sup>2</sup> James Dwane once spoke of his people's customs and traditions which, he believed, the white people could not understand. "We do not like to lose our customs", he said. "Let our people become Christian; but they need not become English", was his plea.<sup>3</sup>

African ministers enjoyed considerable importance and prestige among their own people. Their important work, comparable to the traditional diviners and herbalists, entitled them to live in a certain way. The church authorities did not seem to know this. Their norms required financial responsibility of a certain type. Black norms also demanded responsibility, but of a different kind. The ultimate and moral imperative in

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1. Oosthuizen, G.C., Causes of Religious Independentism in Africa (Fort Hare Papers) p.7.
  2. Cook T., My Missionary Tour in SA (1893) p.147.
  3. Farmer E., op.cit., p. 99.

African culture is the obligation to help members of the extended family who might be in distress. If some of these factors had been weighed, the church would have perhaps been less magisterial in dealing and disciplining its black clergymen.<sup>1</sup> Strict discipline was thought to be necessary for the Ethiopians who were accused of being prone to 'moral laxity'. But this discipline turned out to be their transgressing of traditional behaviour patterns of Victorian and Edwardian whites. What is perhaps most astonishing is that so few moral lapses took place during the uncertainties of social and religious change in Southern Africa.

Further, European Christianity with its denominational rivalry and dissension would naturally have caused the Ethiopians to feel no deep misgivings over their creation of new churches and new structures. To infer that Tile or Mokone or Msimang were inspired by a lust for power and wealth in creating such structures, must surely be ludicrous. A dominant feature of the Ethiopian Church was that there was rarely any question of doctrinal difference. The strong anti-European feeling that the Ethiopians were accused of spreading, turned out to be an ill-founded suspicion. Their concern was for the spread of the gospel amongst their own people, within ecclesiastical structures that allowed freedom of expression and cultural acceptance than had hitherto been possible.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study has been undertaken as an attempt to examine, within the Wesleyan Church context, black response to late nineteenth century white colonialism and Christianity, as it was manifested in the Ethiopian movement. The formation of Ethiopianism can therefore be seen as the result of a:

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1. Verryn T., op.cit., p.21.

composite set of influences several of them peculiar to each phase of the movement. While the range of conditioning factors was to become more complex as the twentieth century progressed and several strains of thought were to develop, including a radical expectation that Africans would have to develop their own and predominant political power for the reform of society, South Africa experienced the growth of a remarkably moderate Ethiopianism concerned with non-radical ideals.

The struggle of the Ethiopians took place under unique socio-economic and political conditions, which as we have seen, necessitated the formation of a new inter-ethnic solidarity. The old tribal society was weakened, but Africans were experiencing a new single brotherhood. Tile experienced the urgency of this imperative and thus pleaded for the unity of the Tembu people (p.82) Since this new solidarity transcended tribal barriers, it was quite natural for Mokone to make the concerted effort of forging a unity with the Tembu Church (p.96), and for them to agree that the designation "Ethiopia" referred to all non-European people.<sup>1</sup> Even Unzondelelo had a degree of national appeal in attracting people from as far as Griqualand.(p.56)

African self-consciousness and identity was undoubtedly aroused through the "Ethiopian" experience. However, none of the Ethiopian's official programmes reflected strictly political aims, though in practice African nationalist sentiments were frequently expressed openly. As with other separatist groups, they tended to stop short of a concept of African political assertion.<sup>2</sup> Ethiopianism

1. cf. Kamphausen E., op. cit., p. 517.

2. Walsche P., The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, The African National Congress 1912-1952 (1970) London, p. 9.

should thus not be regarded as a purely political movement whose aim was to transfer political power to the Africans.<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, the Ethiopian's precarious position caused them to opt for moral persuasion and for "constitutional" methods of "struggle" in the form of petitions. The formal organisations which they created were more the expression than the mobilizer of national and class conflict; their political functions were largely indirect in that organisers were concerned with leading, raising new issues and educating. Their ideological attack on the evolving system of white supremacy and oppression was diffuse.<sup>2</sup>

For many Ethiopians, Christianity was not only a personal religion but also functioned as a guide for cultural, political and economic judgements. There consequently emerged a critical acceptance of white missionary control which was expected to conform to certain ideals and prepare the way for African participation in leadership. This evolving ideological commitment was however, at variance with the deliberate and indefinite perpetuation of European domination in church structures. Tile's formation of the Tembu Church could be therefore seen partly as an expression of the desire for leadership.<sup>3</sup> Mokone's fundamental grievance in his list of complaints for leaving the Methodist Church was directed at the European insistence for leadership at all times. (p.93) The Unzondelelo men also experienced a disposition to keep them back from leadership. (p.55)

While the reactionary nature of Ethiopianism cannot be denied, it was in a more positive sense a movement of

1. cf. Moeti M.T., op. cit., p. 274.

2. Mugubane B.M., op. cit., p.262.

3. cf. Shepperson G., op. cit., p. 251.

renewal attempting to create a genuinely indigenous Christianity on African soil. Thus Tile's secession could be seen as a positive desire to adapt the Christian message to the Tembu cultural heritage, especially when we examine his prayer (p.77). Do Mokone's grievances (p.91) not reflect the result of an attempt to fit his theology learned from his mother's knee, with his everyday life's experience in his contacts with Methodism, and found that it denied him this humanity? Setiloane would certainly agree!<sup>1</sup>

The Missionaries had stripped the African of his culture and tradition, and this obviously caused them great difficulties in effectively penetrating the indigenous population with the Christian gospel. The Ethiopians were aware of this and they expressed their concern in the formation of Unzondelelo (p.57) and the union of the Ethiopian and AME Churches (p.100): How best to communicate the gospel to the African people? They were thus intent, albeit indirectly, in proclaiming a "pure" Christianity based on an "authentic" gospel, free from Western cultural and social values.

The fact that we have concluded our historical analysis of the roots of Ethiopianism with the establishment of the "Order of Ethiopia" does not necessarily imply that this signalled the end of Ethiopian secessions in the Methodist Church. In 1932 one of the most spectacular secessions took place on the Rand, involving a broad mass of urban people in the formation of the Bantu Methodist Church. This seems to have resulted from "an unmistakable nationalist spirit which fired leaders and followers with enthusiasm for the break, as well as dis-

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1. Setiloane G., op.cit., p.409.

satisfaction with the financial policy of the Mission."<sup>1</sup> Of greater significance was the banning of the Methodist Church in the Transkei in 1978. This resulted in the tragic loss of the Clarkebury District and the creation of yet another independent church. If viewed against the background of Transkei independence and subsequent political developments within the Xhosa homeland, then the reasons for this schism are correctly understood.<sup>2</sup>

The threat of schism remains ever present, since the Methodist Church has not always been able to fulfill black members' expectations of it. In the light of their increasing isolation in a church in which they constitute the majority, blacks recently threatened to secede into a "black confession Church". The occasion was the largest gathering ever of Methodists in the country, called Obedience '81, held in the Transvaal. The threat was, however, only narrowly averted. Still, the existence of the Black Ministers Consultation within her ranks serves as a reminder of the growing sense of solidarity among black Christians and their attempt to discover together a more relevant theology for the Church.

In the course of this study, we have seen that the reasons for black frustration and disenchantment within the church did not depend upon the political realities that confronted blacks, outside the church. It was plain racial discrimination within the church that led blacks to question and

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1. Sundkler, B.G.M., op.cit., p.47. See also West M., *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City* (1975) for proliferation of independent churches in the urban situation.
  2. Attwell A.F.I., *Determinative Factors in the Rise and Development of Methodism* (UCT, 1980), p. 266.

challenge their "white superiors". Because the "House of God" was not in order and because they were powerless to bring about such order and restraint, black ministers withdrew to form their own churches. To explain black expressions of frustration and aspiration in terms of the restrictions placed on them by the government and in terms of the apparent inability of the church to change the course of political events, is surely evasive. Black church leaders do not necessarily use the church as a political platform although it remains one of the few areas open to them to voice their grievances.<sup>1</sup> However, when blacks began to experience the bitterness of segregation, distrust and domination in their ecclesiastical life (as the Ethiopians did), then they were led to express, justifiably, their abhorrence and contempt of a christianity that sows these seeds of bitterness.

The Methodist Church remains today politically opposed to the racist policy of the Nationalist government. Since 1948, the Church continually deplored the policy of racial separation as impracticable and contrary to the best interests of all sections of the South African community. Yet, as late as a hundred years after her independence, the Methodist Church still found it necessary to declare apartheid a heresy and request her synods to recommend measures for its elimination.<sup>2</sup> While most white Methodists have accepted in theory the Church's social doctrines, "they have shared the advantages of privilege in a white dominated society. Consequently they have experienced nothing like the social, economic, racial and political disadvantages of their black fellow Methodists."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 270. Attwell seems to think that they do.
  2. 1983 Conference Minutes, p. 258.
  3. Attwell A.F.I., op. cit., p. 272.

Methodism was born in England amidst a real social concern, and in South Africa, has officially shown a great concern for social justice and the unity of the church, across colour lines. On the congregational level, however, the Methodist Church has rarely proved to be "non-racial". It seems that the multi-racial character of the church is really expressed only at the highest level. The Church has now nevertheless committed itself to the creation of what it calls "geographical circuits", which it believes will transcend racial barriers. But even this is not always acceptable as a meaningful response to racism at the Church's "grass-roots" level, since non-racial circuits do not inevitably lead to non-racial congregations. Neither is it a guarantee that power will be shared democratically in the future.

Has the passage of time erased colonial "crimes" against the African peoples of South Africa? Nobody has helped us answer this question more truthfully than Mugubane when he wrote, "A people that has a future to look toward and a responsibility to its future progeny, and a people that shares a humane and civilized historic experience, is a people quite naturally preoccupied with what would constitute equitable forms of government worthy of the present and future. But a people that is concerned with immediate material gains has little regard for things of the mind."<sup>1</sup> In South Africa then, racism appears, not as an incidental detail but as a substantial part of colonial domination. It is the highest expression of a capitalist system that has not only established a fundamental difference between exploited and exploiter, but has also laid among the exploited the foundation for a belief in the immutability of this life.

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1. Mugubane B.M., op. cit., p.54.

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