

The Methodist Church in Africa
1933-2001

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Preface

This book is a further attempt to bring to the attention of the reading public and in particular students of Church history, more information about the history of the Methodist Church in Africa, earlier known as the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa est. 1933.

Areas about the growth and development of the Methodist Church in Africa which were not covered, or were dealt with briefly in the earlier edition by Taunyane (2001 – *Lux Verbi*), hopefully now receive the desired attention:

- Political causes for the establishment of the Church;
- Discontent and splits in the church ;
- Further elucidation of some of the historical events;
- Challenges that faced the church in its growth path;
- And the presence, if any, of seeds of self-destruction, which were invariably present in the great world empires of the past in their management and administration.

Foreword

It is truly an honour for me to contribute to this publication in this manner.

Firstly, a word of congratulations to the authors for bringing this project to this point. Books are born all the time and they fill their spaces on shelves and in the minds and hearts of their readers. Only those who have at some time in their lives brought a book to fruition will know what it takes to be involved in the process that starts at conceptualisation and ends in publication.

Now that it has been published, it is out of your hands and into those of its readers. I have full confidence that it will go from hand to hand to heart. When reading it for the first time I was impressed by the fact that

- the text is well-nurtured in terms of its technicalities (reference technique and the like)
- the narrative reads well with interesting anecdotes (like the story about the missing Methodist donkey) woven into the harder historical facts
- introductions and conclusions to chapters serve as umbilical cords that keep the lesser themes connected to the heart of the matter or the main theme
- like mature parents, the authors' style is non-judgemental and non-emotional, treating facts objectively, yet not in a boring way
- like wise parents, the authors succeeded in designing a narrative that is sympathetic to the cause of those who have struggled and suffered for justice.

It is my honest opinion that this book will contribute to 'balancing' the history of our country and the story of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven within it.

Chris le Roux
Pretoria

Acknowledgements

The authors take a great pleasure in acknowledging the effort of putting together information to produce this book on the history of the Methodist Church in Africa. In many instances the people tended to assume that this denomination did not really have a history which pride itself of. We hope that the contents thereof will give some insight to the readers and understand where this denomination came from to be where it is today.

We would at the same time like to acknowledge everyone who played a role and participated in this effort. Our greatest and deepest acknowledgement goes to Chris le Roux contributed in the writing of the foreword to this book. Though this book came out after his passing away it is important for us to say your spirit and sense of humour will be kept forever in our memories. Other people we like to acknowledge are the great minds in the field of Church History in South Africa and they are Prof Graham Duncan from the University of Pretoria and Lizo Jafta Professor Emeritus (formerly with the University of South Africa). They both felt that though there may not have been enough written sources to refer to in the writing of this book, it warranted to be documented as an authentic history of the church in South Africa. It is with great pleasure to acknowledge the contribution from Jane Meenehan from the University of the Witwatersrand for the good job she did on language editorial.

Introduction

The history of the Methodist Church in South Africa has always been viewed to be the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The purpose of this book is to bring to the picture that there is more than one denomination of the Methodist Church with the Methodist tradition which is found in South Africa. In other circles the same is understood as the Wesleyan Church simply because it is associated with John Wesley and Charles Wesley. The tradition that is spoken about here comes mainly from the style and method of worshipping, preaching and music. It is important for people to understand that the history of the Methodist Church in South Africa originated from England and was planted through the missionaries. However, that history did not just end there, as it further led to more churches being born out of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

One of the most important things to be remembered about the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is that it is one of the largest with a huge following in South Africa. This church experienced a series of splits and schisms after its planting in South Africa in the 19th and 20th century respectively. These splits and schisms gave rise to some churches which assumed different names while some kept the name Methodist. One of those churches which kept the name is the Methodist Church in Africa and it is the church that is referred to in this book. Above all this, it is also important to note that the history before the schisms is always claimed by all these churches including the mother church (The Methodist Church of Southern Africa) which is what makes many people tend to think that it is one and the same church.

Five chapters of this book highlight the history of the Methodist Church in Africa. The first chapter in essence looks at the beginning of the Methodist Church within the continent of Africa but tracing the actual origin under the Wesley brothers (John and Charles). This origin was brought to Africa through the missionaries most of whom belonged to the Wesleyan Missionary Society. A closer look will eventually bring the reader to South Africa and even to the context and the dynamics of this church. However, these dynamics involved the early schisms or splits which took place under the following: Nehemiah Tile (founded the Thembu National Church), Mangena Mokone and James Dwane (Ethiopian Church) and the latter left the Ethiopian Church and founded the Order of Ethiopia in the Anglican Church. The splits that took place in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa also gave or opened opportunities of leadership particularly among the

black people. Many of those who took leadership of the newly founded African Independent Churches were ministers in the Methodist Church while some leaders of these churches were people with qualifications in other disciplines such as education, law and in some cases others were just lay preachers and simple members of the church.

Chapter two covers the events which took place between 1930 and 1932 in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Some of these events were the unity of the Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Church; this was one and the same church in England but had two streams in South Africa. In the districts within the Transvaal it was known as the Wesleyan Church while the districts of the Orange Free State and the Cape Colony were the Methodist Church. The unity of this church did not only come as a matter of determining one church but was also another way of finding the possibilities of Africans' potential to lead and administer the affairs of the church. At the same time the Wesleyan Church was also celebrating its 50th anniversary in the District of the Transvaal. The intention by the mother church from England was to cease its ties with the Wesleyan Church in the Transvaal district and leave it in the hands of the Africans to lead and administer its affairs. This intention by the Methodist Church from England to cut the ties with the Wesleyan missionaries, who most of them were white, meant that their contracts and stipends were drying out from overseas. For these missionaries, it meant finding another source to keep their stipends and contracts afloat. The increase on levies on membership seemed to have been the only option and this created tension which led to a long and tedious exercise in the structures of the Methodist Church. This exercise involved the district synods as well as the church conferences.

The third chapter's focus is basically on the radical decisions that were taken in the church some of which included the excommunications of some members who were seen to be 'dissenting' while in some cases there were walk-outs that were staged in the church. Some church services on Sundays were interrupted by dramas demonstrated by some members of the church. There also were rumours which made rounds about the split and the great exodus which finally led to spilt itself. After the split a new church was founded and known as the Bantu Methodist Church.

The newly founded church was faced with challenges which are what chapter 4 is tackling. These were challenges of leadership as the Bantu Methodist Church members came to realise that they were without a leader. The person who was sought for, to lead the church was not to focus only on the church but also the ministerial and administrative side of the affairs of the church. Further challenges were political as they extended to tribalism and

ethnicity. The latter challenge led the church to taking up its problems to the secular court in an attempt to find a solution. This saw leaders of the Bantu Methodist Church exchanging correspondence through the courts and outside the courts. These were not the only challenges as leadership was one other burning issue.

Chapter 5 is about the growth of the newly established church which was now beginning to expand to other areas. Like the mother church, the Bantu Methodist Church followed a similar administration as well as the structure of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The geographic structure which the Bantu Methodist Church adopted was that of the districts and the connexion. The leadership structures which this church followed was the same as that of the mother church with the Presiding Bishop for the connexion and the bishops in the districts, while there are circuits and societies within the districts. The administration of the circuits also follows the same patterns of the leaders meeting at the societies and circuit quarterly meetings which lead to the district synods and finally the Connexional conference. Finally the Bantu Methodist Church decided to adopt a new name which is the Methodist Church in Africa

Chapter 1

The Beginning

Introduction

This chapter will give an overview of the background of the origins of the Methodist Church from where it started in England to its movement in South Africa. Missionary endeavours will give a slight insight of how the Methodist Church entered the shores of South Africa and its expansion into the interior of the country. It will also give a picture of the political context of both church and state during the colonial period. Highlights of the series of the different splits that took place in the Methodist Church will feature in this chapter as well.

The origin

The origin of the Methodist Church in the continent of Africa can be traced back to England through the efforts of the Wesley brothers (John and Charles) together with their friend George Whitfield. In the beginning, this movement was not meant to be a church. Its purpose was to revive the Christian Spirituality which was at its lowest ebb. This movement began in the 18th century when Anglicans viewed radicalism with suspicion. As a result, John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley together with George Whitefield took it upon themselves to revive England. At that time, England was a troubled society with industrialisation emerging. Under the leadership of John Wesley, this movement embraced the people who worked in the mines and other labourers. John Wesley became a preacher who rode on horseback preaching the gospel around England. Some of the innovations he introduced were lay preachers (both men and women) who were itinerants, preaching in different places. When John Wesley died, he was still an Anglican. The Methodist movement became a church a few years after John Wesley's death. The formation of the church came because of the movement having a larger following, which warranted the establishment of the church. The Methodist Church came to South Africa through the missionaries.

The missionaries

As early as 1799, the London Missionary Society had sent its missionaries to Southern Africa. The Methodists did not form part of this mission society. It was between 1813 and 1818 that the Methodist Missionary Society was born in England, and with the same missionary vigour, also decided to send its missionaries to Southern Africa. This happened in 1816 when Barnabas Shaw landed on the shores of the Cape. Barnabas Shaw did not find it easy to continue with his mission as he was not permitted to do so by the colonial authorities of that time. In Southern Africa, the Methodist Church made great stride and established a chain of mission stations, many of which were through the efforts of William Shaw (no relation to Barnabas Shaw).

The same church managed to evangelise the indigenous people and even won some of them over. This ultimately meant that some of the indigenous people joined the ministry and became clergy in the Methodist Church. In some of the situations, many of the black clergy interpreted the sermons of the white clergy as they attempted to convert the indigenous people. However, the establishment of the Methodist Church by the Wesleyan missionaries among the indigenous people did not take into consideration their interests, politics, social, economic and cultural background. As a result, this saw the first split in the Methodist Church. Nehemiah Tile (1884) who, at that time, felt the church was alienating the indigenous people started this split. Due to Nehemiah Tile's position with regard to Thembu Politics, the White missionaries accused him of 'stirring up some hostility' against the magistrates in Thembuland (Balia 1991:55). Not only did this situation end with political conflict in the church, it also involved a cultural context. Finally, Tile was summoned to appear before a minor synod, where he was offered an option to either be moved or resign from the church. Based on the choice given to him, Tile chose to resign and form a Thembu National Church.

Political causes

According to Xozwa (1985:5), the social politics of South Africa played a major role in church politics. This state/church relationship was seen as a problem, especially as it was discussed by politicians, academics, missionaries and other interested parties. At that time this was seen as an 'Ethiopian Problem', especially after the Boer War and the Zulu rebellion (1985: 5). The Ethiopian movement was an African movement which was feared to be aimed at ousting the white man from South Africa, or possibly

establishing a Pan African Church which would cause harm to the evangelisation of the Africans.

The 1913 Land Act was another political factor which created tension between the Church and State. The saying 'At first we had the land, and you had the Bible, now we have the Bible and you have the land', came as a result of this tension. The segregation policy, which was stated in the Urban Areas Act of 1923 (amended in 1930), further emphasised the segregation policy of 1913. This act was aimed at segregating the natives in the towns, Xozwa (1985:5). The reasons for this was very clear - to secure farm labour. Due to these events blacks asked themselves the question, "Where are we going now?" (Xozwa 1985:5). In 1926, the Mine and Works Amendment Act was put in place and resulted in many black people losing opportunities, such as:

1. Loss of income
2. Growth of anti-white prejudice
3. Growth of Unemployment growth among the natives which led to job reservations for whites.
4. No co-existence between the whites and blacks in Matters of Church and State.
5. Due to the 1911 legislature it was illegal for blacks to stage a strike because this weapon was for whites only.
6. Black trade unions were declared illegal (Xozwa 1985: 6).

Xozwa (1985: 6) carries on to say that the attitude of 'Ja Baas' became applicable to the church as well.

Because of the inequalities in both the church and state, segregation entrenched itself and there were separate facilities and fields. Brotherhood in the church was a thing of the past as it was no longer an act but a spoken word (1985: 6).

Discontent in the church

The segregation in the church led to the separate use of facilities wherein Africans were not allowed the opportunities to show their potential in running matters of the church. It became apparent that the law in the church made by the white people and their word was final, irrespective of whether it was right or wrong. According to Xozwa (1985:6), 'contact with a population of white Christians had raised the quantity and lowered the quality of black Christians'. This situation created a religious indifference among the black

people, which disenfranchised them of political, economic and social involvement, even in the church. Due to what happened in the political circles, black people had hoped to find refuge in the church, but the stumbling block seemed to have expanded itself there as well. The slogan 'Net Blankes' (whites only) managed to find its way into the ecclesiastical boundaries.

In many of the Mission Churches freedom of worship was stifled towards black people, as they could not worship with other population groups. As a result, many Africans resorted to forming their own churches as a way to accommodate their religious freedom and freedom of worship.

A series of splits in the Methodist Church

The Thembu National Church, under the leadership of Nehemiah Tile, was able to function freely in the Thembu political protests and religious terms. This was not the first and final split which took place in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The second split, which also followed a similar pattern, followed when Mangena Mokone had a radical awakening that, in spite of the fact that all Christians were brothers and sisters in Christ, there were inequalities between black and whites in the church (Balila 1991:70). Mokone's awakening showed him that African missionaries were forced or obliged to submit to the European missionaries. White missionaries enjoyed more benefits compared to the African missionaries. Wesleyan missionaries (White missionaries) were credited for showing a 'genuine spirit of brotherhood' towards their 'African colleagues'. There were separate conferences and synods in which the Africans were able to convene and report to the white Chairman of Synod or President of Conference. Some of the complaints that Mokone listed in his letter to his superintendent Rev George Weavind were, lack of leadership positions for Black ministers, unequal stipends, separate synods with white chairmen presiding over black synods, unfair conditions of employment for black minister and many others (Balila 1991:71). The response from George Weavind to Mokone was not satisfactory. In the end Mangena Mokone also resigned from the Methodist Church to form an Ethiopian Church which was non-tribalistic. This split, like the one by Nehemiah Tile, did not mean the end of events in the Methodist Church. Another split came later through James Dwane.

James Dwane, like his predecessors, also opted out of the Methodist Church due to a number of reasons. However, the main reason for his departure centred on the money he had raised in England (Dwane 1999:24). James Dwane's story is marred with controversies. However, it is important to note that Dwane's visit to England to raise funds was not organised by the

Methodist Church but by himself (Dwane 1999:24). The funds were to establish academic and training institutions where boys and girls could learn industrial skills. The Methodist Church knew about Dwayne's visit to England and its purpose and they approved his venture with letters of commendation from both South African and British Methodists (Dwane 1999:24).

A number of splits which took place in the Methodist Church centred around the politics of the church, its rejection of local cultural practices by indigenous people, living conditions of black people and the economic standard of the indigenous people. The latter was an issue, but was not taken seriously until 1932 when some members from the Methodist Church in the Rand protested against the increase in the church levies.

The focus of this book will be on the split which took place in the Rand which saw the formation of the Bantu Methodist Church (now the Methodist Church in Africa) as it was called in the past.

Black Methodism

Credit must be given to the original Methodist Church in that it gave rise to the leaders of the Independent Churches in South Africa. The evangelical spirit of the Methodist Church complied with its class structures or cells which were a seed-bed for grooming the leaders. The point here is simply that many of the black leaders who left the Methodist Church inherited its pietistic tradition. It is also interesting to note that many of these people were not from the clergy as some of them were only lay people (Madise 2000: 10). The spirit of Black Methodism was largely with the lay preachers and class leaders when the defections took place (something similar to what John Wesley started with the Methodist movement in England when he used lay people as preachers and leaders). It is from this tradition of the Methodist Church that both the class leaders (cells) and preachers were prepared for their responsibilities. Through this training, many of these lay people automatically became the leaders and sometimes the clergy of the African Initiated Churches. Lots of splits in the Methodist Church happened in the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and were associated with the Methodist Missionary institutions (Madise 2000:10). Some of them were previous students or teachers from those institutions because of the quality of education they received. It was this education that opened their eyes to basic human rights. This education was also a weapon they used to revolt against the same institutions and churches.

It was not an accident that political overture became part and parcel of the Black Methodist evangelicalism. 'The reading of the Bible, the power of

persuasion (as expected from the Methodist preachers) and the political situation in the country produced preachers who were not only evangelically inspired but also politically oriented' (Madise 2000: 10). Secessions of the last quarter of the 19th century and part of the 20th century were political and economic rather than religious.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a series of splits or schisms which took place in the Methodist Church since its arrival in South Africa. These schisms did not only show some form of disrespect from the people who broke away from the church but highlighted the deep problems which leaders of the Methodist Church did not want to address repeatedly. Nehemiah Tile, Mangena Mokone, James Dwane and others who followed had to deal with the same problems. Racism, lack of recognition of the potential of the indigenous people, lack of ordination for indigenous clergy, disrespect of the culture of indigenous people and bad working conditions were phenomenal and synonymous with the church's series of splits and schism. As a result, the indigenous people had no alternative but to form their own churches which addressed their needs and freedom of expression. The following chapter will address the events which led to the unity of the Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Church.

Chapter 2

The events

Introduction

The events that took place in the Methodist Church between 1930 and 1932 were supposed to see the church moving forward in the right direction. However, this did not happen in the way many people expected. This chapter will look into the events such as the unity between the Wesleyan Church in the Transvaal and the Methodist Church in the Cape, the Free State and Natal. It will also look into decisions taken by various Quarterly Meetings and the Transvaal Synod of 1932 that led to a Conference in Johannesburg the same year.

Unity between the Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Church

It is important for one to take note of the fact that before 1930 the Methodist Church had two streams in South Africa. One stream was in the Transvaal District known as the Wesleyan Church while the other, which involved the District of the Cape Colony and the District of the Orange Free State at that time, and was known as the Methodist Church. The Wesleyan Church in the District of Transvaal was still under overseas conferences (under the Methodist Church in England) while the Districts of the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State was independent with their conferences hosted in South Africa. However, in 1926, the overseas conference from England delegated Rev Noble, who was then secretary of conference to South Africa, on a mission to inspect the work of the white missionaries among the blacks (Xozwa 1989:9). His mission was not only to inspect the white missionaries' progress but to find out if Black Ministers were able to lead the church and run the administrative affairs of the Methodist Church. This was not just a coincidence as this marked the 50th anniversary of the Wesleyan Church in the District of Transvaal. The Overseas Conference had instructed Rev Noble to inform and notify the white Missionaries about the intentions of the Methodist Church from England to cease its ties with the Transvaal District. This could only mean one thing to the white missionaries and white ministers that their contracts and stipends were drying up from overseas (Xozwa 1989:9). The overseas conference had resolved that stipends were to be terminated through deduction of 25% every third year. This meant that the

white missionaries were now forced to make provision to reorganise their stipends so that they could lead a normal life like any other person in South Africa. In a situation where they could not find a solution to the problem, they were obliged to pack their bags and go back to England. White ministers who were ministering to whites were not affected by this condition, only those who were ministering to the blacks. This was not good news at all to the white ministers as it meant separating them. It was at this particular trying time for the white ministers that a thought came to mind that class contribution be raised to a sixpence (2/6) quarterly. This created a means where a black minister could live with a white minister (Xozwa 1989: 9).

A resolution from the Overseas Conference was accepted by the Wesleyan Church in the Transvaal District in 1928. They were to unite with the Methodist Church from other districts to form The Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This resolution was accepted at the Transvaal conference. By 1930, Rev Enoch Carter, who was then the Superintendent of the Witwatersrand Circuit, was delegated together with Mr D Macumela to attend the conference in Cape Town and represent their district. On their return from the Cape Town Conference, they reported to the quarterly meeting of June 1930 that the Transvaal District was accepted and admitted as part of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The two delegates further reported that members from other districts were contributing a sum of 5 shillings (50 cents) towards their quarterly contributions (Xozwa 1989: 9). As a result, the delegates suggested that the Witwatersrand contribute an extra two shillings (20 cents or 2/6, sixpence) per full member. Members of the quarterly meeting did not accept this suggestion and they proposed that it be referred to the different societies at the quarterly meeting of June 1930. The information on the increase of the fees in the church also seems to have been leaked to the members in a very blurred manner before it was referred to the societies for discussion. This matter was later taken to the Synod of 1931 to be brought back to the circuits in a formal way. From the new developments and report of the conference there were a series of quarterly meetings which followed.

The quarterly meetings (increase on levies)

At the quarterly meeting of September 18 1929, which was held at Albert Street in Johannesburg, the chairman of Rev Enoch Carter (who was a Superintendent of the circuit) announced that from the beginning of 1930 pledges and levies were going to increase and that members were to pay six pence more on a quarterly basis. This increase was to be added to the existing ten shillings that was being paid. There were subsequent meetings which

discussed this issue. However, in the quarterly meeting of 23 March 1930, the minutes of the previous quarterly meeting were read, in which it was stated that the increase (a payment of 2/6) on quarterly levies be accepted. The Superintendent (Rev Carter) insisted that the motion on increasing the levies was accepted. Carter went on to say that, since the Eastern Circuit quarterly meeting had accepted the increase, the Witwatersrand circuit in Albert Street may just as well accept it too (Taunyane 2001:30). Carter also went on to emphasise that, should the latter fail to pay this levy, he was going to make them pay. This problem lasted a year (March 1931) where members of the congregation maintained that they had never agreed to the increase noted in the minutes of the quarterly meeting of 18 September 1929. This led to the Superintendent instructing Mr Khumalo, Mr Z Mokhele and Mr Monotza to appear at the meeting of 19th June 1931. Rev Carter made it clear to the three that 'his door was open' and those who did not agree to the 2/6 payments were free to leave the church. In response to the superintendent, Mr Khumalo asked that the President of Conference, Rev JA Allcock, be present at the next quarterly meeting. Within two months, the three men (Messrs Khumalo, Mokhele and Montoza) were asked to present themselves at a meeting at Wesley Central Hall. At that meeting they were warned not to say anything about the sixpence increase because this would negatively affect the congregation. All three gentlemen were not happy with the extra money they were asked to pay.

At the quarterly meeting of 17 September 1931, the President of Conference, Rev JW Allcock, was present as requested, by the congregation through Rev Enoch Carter. Rev Allcock was given the chance to present a speech in which he appealed to the members to contribute the additional sixpence. There were two versions related to this sixpence. The one version (Xozwa 1989:9) was propaganda preached by some white ministers that this increase was meant to help the orphans and refugees of the 1st World War. The other version was that the money was a fund to help the poor in Britain who were unemployed. Many black people asked questions such as 'What about the orphans, the poor and unemployed South Africans?' (Taunyane 2001:17). In response to the president's speech, Mr Mojatau stood up and pointed out that Africans were being taxed in many different ways. In some cases their property was confiscated or they were imprisoned if they failed to pay their dues (Taunyane 2001:17). This was not only applicable to the church, as the government was also forcing them to pay the poll tax while their jobs were being taken over and given to the whites. From that meeting of 17 September 1931 nothing was achieved and there was total disagreement

amongst members of the church and the authorities of that time. As a result of the disagreement, some people were excommunicated.

The Transvaal District Synod (1932)

Mr JP Mngoma, who before his excommunication, was elected as delegate to the ensuing Synod represented the preachers, while Mr D Macumela was a Circuit Steward. This Synod was held in Benoni in January 1932. At that synod Rev Allcock presented the controversial matter of the class quarterly contribution, which was against the views of the previous Quarterly Meetings. On the other hand Mr Mngoma was steadfast on the views of the Witwatersrand Circuit Quarterly Meeting, which was not in favour of the white superintendents who ruled over the black ministers (a matter which both Rev Carter and Allcock knew about). At the synod, Rev Allcock, who was the District Chairman of Transvaal at the same time, stated that class contribution was something which the entire district had accepted since the last synod of 1931 (Xozwa 1989:14). It was at this point that Mr Mngoma disputed what the Chairman of District had said. He reminded him that this matter was not accepted by the Circuit of Witwatersrand Quarterly Meeting. Mr Mngoma went on to state that it was the same matter which led to the unceremonious closure of the June Quarterly Meeting of 1931 as this was brought through to the circuit in a proper manner. While debating this matter, Mr Mngoma was holding the Rand Daily Mail newspaper in his hand in which the Job Reservation Act had been passed by Parliament under Dr H Verwoerd (Xozwa 1989:14). It transpired in that meeting that Mr Mngoma remembered well the words of Rev Noble from England. This was about foreseeing the intentions of the white ministers raising the quarterly contributions so that they could live off better stipends derived from the poor Blacks. Mr Mngoma reminded the black ministers not to be party to that decision as it was going to exploit the black brethrens who were being deprived of various professions and different, better jobs, and this was only of benefit to the white ministers (Xozwa 1989:14).

After Mr Mngoma had voiced his views, the chairman of the synod moved that a vote be taken on the matter. However, before the vote, the chairman also voiced his view that 'black ministers should bear in mind the fact that they had two dangerous options waiting for them if they unfortunately voted against the proposed motion as follows:

(1) He was to deduct a fair amount of their stipends

or

(2) Suspend some of them from the Ministry.

This meant that the chairman was using one of his powers to ensure that black ministers did not vote in favour of Mr Mngoma's motion. As a result, they were left with only one option and that was to vote for the increase in quarterly tickets. This resulted in the whole house voting in favour of the motion.

In reporting to the quarterly meeting of March 1932, Mr Mngoma mentioned that the motion had been passed at the synod but cried out bitterly at the way the Chairman of the District had issued a warning to the black ministers which resulted in the motion being passed. At that quarterly meeting there was a strong debate which resulted in the decision to make an appeal to the conference. This led to Rev Carter, who was the circuit superintendent, vehemently opposing the decision and the chairman of the quarterly meeting unceremoniously closing the meeting and leaving the members alone at the meeting.

At that same meeting, members of the quarterly meeting decided that they were going to write a petition and sign it. This petition was going to be sent to the secretary of Conference, Rev Thomas Stanton. The same petition was to be counter-signed by the secretary of the quarterly meeting, Rev EW Grant, but he refused to sign it (Xozwa 1989:15). The meeting decided to appoint Mr Ntshalintshali as the secretary. In the petition, members of the quarterly meeting stated that the real secretary refused to counter-sign because he was also the secretary of the District Synod. In the end, the petition was written and signed at that quarterly meeting, chaired by Mr NN Ramailane after the unceremonious departure of the superintendent. This led to Mr JP Mngoma being charged with 'perverting' the truth. This petition was to be presented at the conference which was held in Johannesburg in 1932.

The 1932 Conference in Johannesburg

The petition from the quarterly meeting of March 1932 had reached the Johannesburg Conference and it was to be read during the open house of the representatives' session. This petition had apparently brought some embarrassment to the combined laity and ministerial session. However, the con-

ference took the matter seriously and discussed it. At that conference the ex-President of Conference had to preside over conference session. The reason for this was simply that the President of Conference at that time was also involved in the controversy and could therefore not preside over what involved him as well. After a long discussion on the controversial Witwatersrand matter, the conference ruled on the following decisions:

- (a) It was unlawful and unconstitutional to raise the quarterly contributions in the Witwatersrand just because it had been raised in the Cape. This went along with the views of the Witwatersrand Quarterly Meeting.
- (b) The Conference directed the District Chairman to meet those men who had signed the petition and settle the matter amicably (Xozwa 1989: 16).

At the end of the conference, the District Chairman was to report back to the Witwatersrand Quarterly meeting. Instead, what the District Chairman reported was different from the resolution taken by the conference. He reported that the decision taken by the Synod was agreed upon by the conference as well to raise the quarterly contributions to 2/6 or six-pennies. This annoyed some members who strongly opposed the report by the District Chairman. Mr Mokhele vehemently opposed the District Chairman's report as he was holding the Rand Daily newspaper in his hand and was reading from it the statement from the conference (Xozwa 1989:16). The Chairman marched out of the meeting without further discussion on the matter.

Conclusion

It is very interesting to notice that there were two churches of the same doctrine from the same origin functioning in South African under the same policy and Laws and Discipline. 1926 saw a delegation from England sent by the Methodist Church with a mission to hand over the leadership of the church to the indigenous people. This move by the Methodist Church in England meant that all the white ministers and missionaries were to prepare themselves to go back home. However, these missionaries and ministers were not ready to do so. Apparently the announcement from England was not expected and at the same time these missionaries and ministers were now accustomed to the South African way of life. This created another problem for the leaders of the Methodist Church in South Africa because these white ministers and missionaries enjoyed better working conditions, leadership and

racial dominance in the church. The problem which the church encountered was based on cutting off ties with England which, in essence, was about their payments as ministers and missionaries in the church. Money became a serious issue and how to raise it was a nightmare. The next chapter is about the excommunication of the members of the Methodist Church who did not agree with the leaders of the church on a number of issues.

Chapter 3

The excommunication

Introduction

This chapter is intended to focus primarily on matters of the excommunication of key figures in the Methodist Church who were very influential around the Witwatersrand Circuit and the drama which took place in the church with disruptions during the church quarterly meetings and leaders' meetings. There were also rumours about the split of the church which was followed by the great exodus from the Methodist Church. This exodus led to the formation of the church known as the Methodist Church in Africa.

The excommunication

The preachers' meeting on 12 September 1932 was convened by Rev Robert Mashaba, in which he raised a complaint about the failure of some people not paying the 2/6 levy. He asked why this was happening. There was silence for a moment as no one stood up to respond to the question. However, Mr Gabriel J Leeuw finally stood up and said: 'The reason was that on 17 September 1931 the President of Conference made us believe that the additional sixpence, which we were asked to pay, was to be sent overseas to assist the 18 million people there, many of whom were unemployed and starving' (Leeuw quoted from Taunyane 2001:19). Before Mr Leeuw could even finish Rev Mashaba jumped from where he was sitting and said: 'that he had at last got me, and that he was going to summon me before the Superintendent (Rev Enoch Carter) for telling a lie about the President' (Leeuw quoted from Taunyane 2001:19). Indeed this happened and Mr Leeuw was summoned to appear before the Superintendent at a Leaders' meeting on 19 November 1932. Mr Leeuw was found not guilty of any wrong doing. However, it turned out that the Superintendent was annoyed by the decision taken. He felt that there was no way he could have travelled from his residence in order to effect Mr Leeuw's excommunication, and the Leaders' Meeting did not agree to it. He was now going to recommend that Mr Gabriel Leeuw be expelled from the Methodist Church at the Minister's Council meeting which was to be held early in 1933.

The Ministers' Council met on 31 January 1933 at the Wesley Hall in Johannesburg, where eleven ministers were white and only one was Black. The only black minister at this meeting was Rev Robert Mashaba and Mr Leeuw was also present on the instruction of the Superintendent (Rev E Carter). Mr Leeuw's presence was on the basis that he was the leader of the protesting group of people who were not paying the extra sixpence on the quarterly levy. Mr Leeuw was asked to speak for himself and he repeated what he had said at the September 12, 1932 Preachers' Meeting. At that council, the person who was presiding (the magistrate) over the case asked the President if he had any questions. The latter's response was rather a personal one in which he said:

This old man is as old as my father, and I am not going to cross-examine or argue with him. I had thought that he would shield me under his wings, but he has not done so. He speaks the truth. Nevertheless, I asked him to keep all I had as to himself and not to divulge it (Leeuw quoted from Taunyane 2001:19).

In his response to the President, Mr Leeuw stood up again and maintained that: 'God knows that what I said about the President is true' (Leeuw quoted from Taunyane 2001:19). After this statement no one said anything and Mr Leeuw asked if he had contravened any of the Ten Commandments, and if he had, that he should be fined. The response he received from the Ministers' Council was that the wrong he had committed was to encourage people to protest against the payment of 2/6 for quarterly tickets (Taunyane 2001:20).

One of the ministers present in that council meeting stood up and asked Rev Mashaba about the status of Mr Leeuw in the church, and the latter's response was 'none whatever'. An emotional Mr Gabriel Leeuw expressed his views that since Rev Mashaba had come to Pimville as a minister he had done nothing for the congregation. There had been no baptism of children or adults, nor had he administered Holy Communion. This opened up a discussion in which the magistrate presiding over the case called for order and said that the issue of Rev Mashaba was irrelevant as the issue was about the trouble regarding the quarterly levies to be paid. A member of the council stood up to maintain that Mr Leeuw was guilty of telling people not to pay full quarterly subscriptions. Mr Leeuw refuted the claims and explained that he only spoke on two occasions about this matter to the people and that it was in meetings in the presence of both Rev Robert Mashaba and the Rev Enoch Carter (the Superintendent).

A lengthy discussion followed after which the meeting was adjourned and Mr Leeuw was told to wait for the decision about his future in the church. (Taunyane 2001:20). Seven days later Mr Leeuw received an official letter which was signed by both the presiding magistrate and the President informing him that the Methodist Church had completely severed him. As a result Mr Leeuw's status as a preacher and member of the church were ceased by the Church Council. It is important to note that Mr Leeuw was not the only person who was excommunicated as there were many others who were equally as vocal as him (Mr Leeuw). These were people such as Mr JP Mngoma and Mr NN Ramailane, among others.

Mr JP Mngoma's excommunication came as a result of a decision which the Johannesburg conference of 1932 made that the District Chairman must meet with the men who wrote the petition and resolve their differences amicably. It was from that meeting, which failed to resolve the differences between the two parties that the superintendent of Witwatersrand Circuit Rev Enoch Carter decided to suspend Mr Mngoma. The superintendent's statement was that Mr Mngoma was suspended from all church activities until he had showed signs of penitence. Mr Mngoma responded to the letter from the superintendent as well as appealed to the conference. However, Rev Carter decided to hold his decision as he (Carter) believed that Mr Mngoma was perpetrating dissension and strife in the church (Xozwa 1989:17). Mr JP Mngoma did not accept the decision of the superintendent and continued to maintain his status as a full member of the church.

Mr NN Ramailane was also charged with holding an unlawful meeting in the church and writing an unlawful petition. The Quarterly Meeting which was to listen to the hearing of Mr Ramailane was convened by Rev JB Mabona, who was fairly new in the Circuit and was stationed at Sophiatown Society. The hearing did not find Mr Ramailane guilty of any wrong doing and discharged him.

However, the hearing which listened to the case of Mr Mngoma did not end in a proper way. His case was in actual fact tried at a Quarterly Meeting. The complainant in this case was the superintendent. The superintendent attempted to stop Mr Mngoma from being part of the Quarterly Meeting but this was opposed by the members of the meeting. The Chairman of the meeting, who was also the superintendent, became angry and left without officially closing it.

Later the superintendent decided to charge more people, some of whom were well informed about the constitution of the church, these were people like Mr TD Zulu, Mr H Khumalo, Mr J Zitha, Mr E Maponyane (Xozwa 1989:17). The superintendent invited them to the Leaders' Meeting

of June 1932 which under strange circumstances, was to be held at the Spes Bona Society. All of these people refused to attend that Quarterly Meeting as they did not worship there. The superintendent, Rev E Carter was angry and he sent each one of them a judgement concerning their status in the church. His judgement was that they were all excommunicated from the church, a judgement which they all refused to accept.

Drama in the church

Following the refusal to accept their excommunications, all those affected people, including Mr Mngoma, were present at the September Quarterly which the superintendent (Rev E Carter) refused to open. He left at once but the members opted to remain behind and opened their own meeting. In this meeting they discussed their status in the church and decided to adopt the name 'Refuge' for themselves. Seeing that their effort to get the attention of the church authorities has failed, they felt that the church had betrayed them. These people thought that Rev Carter, whom they thought was going to help solve their problem, also left them in the cold after seeing Mr Mngoma present. They decided to try and reform the church from within. The adopted name of 'Refuge' was to be used as their identity as reformers of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This name was proposed by Mr Timothy Zulu, who at that time was well educated (Xozwa 1989:18). The reasoning behind this adopted name was that congregants were now dependent upon their own wits. Any meeting which they were to call would be seen by others as unconstitutional because no minister was involved in its arrangement. As a result, the name reflected that there was no refuge for them except Jesus and the Holy Spirit to guide them in their struggles. All the meetings that would be held would have Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as the Chairman of their meetings.

The Quarterly Meeting of March 1933 in the Witwatersrand had requested that Rev John Alcock, through the secretary of the 'Refuge' group, be present to preside over their meeting. In his response Rev Alcock made it clear that he would not be part of the meeting if Mr Mngoma and Mr Ramailane were to attend. The meeting decided to appoint Mr BB Ngculu as the presiding officer of that meeting. The same Quarterly Meeting (March 1933) chose people who were to be the delegates of the conference later that year in Durban. Mr NN Ramailane, Mr TD Zulu and Mr J Jama were chosen as delegates to present their ('Refuge') complaints to the conference. Their main complaint was: 'unlawful manner in which their complaints were handled in the Transvaal District' (Xozwa 1989:18).

Rev John Alcock decided, that instead of presiding over the Quarterly Meeting, which was called by the 'Refuge' group in Witwatersrand, it was necessary to call all the preachers and the Young Men's' Guild to the Men's Institute at Eloff Street on 14 April 1933 (possibly this was on a Good Friday). The theme of Rev Alcock's sermon was 'The death of Jesus Christ, and the betrayal by Judas Iscariot' (Taunyane 2001:21). He then asked one of the lay preachers to bear him out in what he had said. It came out that Mr TD Zulu was the man to narrate the story of John Wesley and his works. In narrating the history of John Wesley, Mr Zulu said, that John Wesley was travelling on horse-back preaching the gospel while Rev Carter was travelling by car excommunicating people wherever he goes. The statement by Mr Zulu was clearly referring to Rev Carter as Judas Iscariot, and it was through this statement that Rev Alcock and others (probably all white) could not hold their feelings and not even tolerate the 'abuse' from the former against the latter. As a result of the drama that was taking place in the church, the Holy Communion which was supposed to be administered did not take place.

On 16 April 1933 (Easter Sunday), which was a Sunday, the President of Conference Rev J Alcock was supposed to conduct a Holy Communion Service at Albert Street, in Johannesburg. This service did not continue as women stood up and declaring that they were not to partake in the Holy Communion until the President had restored peace in the church. They also wanted answers to their questions about why their husbands were excommunicated. This caused a lot of confusion and pandemonium broke loose (Taunyane 2001: 21). The same women turn the communion table upside-down with the communion elements on it. This was probably the worst history of the Methodist Church as Black people started to fight the White ministers instead of receiving communion. White ministers also called the police, but on arrival they found people singing and praying in the church as nothing that was reported was taking place (Xozwa 1989: 19). This led to the White minister finally leaving the Black people alone.

Rumours of the split

The situation in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa did not allow black people to express themselves. This became clear at the conference which was held in Durban at Claremont (in 1933). It was at this conference that black people realised just how much racism was prevalent in the church. The decision taken by the conference to turn down the pleas of the 'Refuge' group, was seen as a big blunder in the history of the Methodist Church of

Southern Africa. That decision opened the eyes of many black people, to the extent that they realised how much the church was serving the 'interests of the white ministers and their God, who was only pleased by the exploitation of the poor and the destitute' (Xozwa 1989:20).

There were rumours at that time that the people who worshiped in the Sophiatown society, which was under the ministry of Rev JB Mabona, were being constantly harassed by the white police who were called to the church by its minister (Rev Mabona). It appears that Mabona was trying to ward off all the people who protested against the payment of 2/6, from attending the religious services. The reasons given were that those involved would sow a bad spirit among the loyal members who were willing to pay the 2/6 (Taunyane 2001:22). As a result of the harassment, these people were no longer worshipping in the church buildings but at Mr Kitse's house in Sophiatown.

The outcomes of the Durban conference led to the 'Refuge' group deciding to stop their eight years' long struggle and follow the route of the Sophiatown people. These people decided to start what they called '*Our own Church*' (Xozwa 1989:20). On discovering that this was the situation Mr Jema was fuming and he called a meeting at a public hall on 24 May 1933 in an attempt to stop people from leaving the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. He could not understand why they could not wait for him to come with the report from the Durban conference. He said that, 'at the conference he was pleading their case while it was all in vain' (Taunyane 2001:22). He was supported by Mr Ramailane who said that he too was shocked to find that over 300 people had walked out of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Under those circumstances all three delegates from the conference including Mr Zulu, could do nothing but join their people and be with them (Taunyane 2001:23). Mr Kopo stood up to announce that they had (after trying for a long time to find a name to suit their movement) finally agreed upon a name 'The Bantu Methodist Church'.

Mr Khumalo, who was a Steward in Albert Street society, expressed that they were not aware that their counterparts from Sophiatown broke away from the church. Mr Khumalo further went on to ask Mr J Cholo to announce the news at Albert Street society every Sunday so that those who wanted to follow must be prepared to do so from 25 June 1933. This day was accepted as a time when all ties were to be severed with the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (Taunyane 2001:23). On the Sunday of 28 May 1933, all those who led the movement of the 'Refuge' agreed to meet for a revival and to prepare the streets for a parade as an indication of their separation from the

Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This saw the beginning of a new church called 'The Bantu Methodist Church'.

The Great Exodus

The day that was chosen for the protest against the 2/6 pence was the 25 June 1933. Most of the people who gathered on that day were from places such as Germiston, Alexander, Boksburg and all the neighbouring towns around the Witwatersrand. The revival service was going to start at Mr BB Ngculu's house as arranged and go around the streets of Sophiatown. The interesting thing was that some men had organised a donkey or an ass which they were going to use to carry their flag which had been designed by some women. This flag had these words written on it: 'Inkosi yethu bayithengisa gamacwecwe esilvere angamashumi amathathu. Thina sigxothwe ecaweni ngamashumi amathathu eepeni'¹. There were reasons why a donkey or an ass was chosen to carry the flag of a new church. These reasons were:

- Rev Enoch Carter had driven these people out of the church as if they were flies and told them to go to Sophiatown to devour the donkey carcass without any disturbance from anybody. After they had finished doing so he predicted that they would come back and re-enter the church hall by the windows and doors.
- The ass was a tame animal, and was not disturbed by the noise of the people; it would not run when people started to sing.
- For this great occasion, it was felt the ass was the only animal which had been chosen by our Lord when he entered a new phase of his royalty in this world, before he was finally crucified on the cross.
- In those days, it was believed that when the Israelites, led by Moses, were departing from Egypt the land of bondage, an ass was made to bear the bones of the late Joseph.

In spite all of the efforts taken by these people to borrow the ass, it ended up disappearing in the evening. The attempts to recover it ended in vain and the decision was that Mr Jotham Zitha would carry the banner. Mr Zitha was chosen simply because he was the tallest man in the protesting group of congregants. The banner was written on a white embroidered sheet. On the streets the protesters were singing, preaching, clapping hands and beating a ploughshare as a bell. They continued until they arrived before the church

¹ This is a Xhosa expression from the scripture that Our Lord was sold with 30 pieces of silver and that they were expelled from the church for just 30 pennies.

Hall of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, which was situated in Gold Street in Sophiatown. In front of the church hall the protesters knelt and prayed hysterically. While praying, they were awakened by the braying of a grey ass in their midst. When they woke up they knew that it was a sign to show them that they were finally called upon by God to start a new church. They saddled an ass with a banner written on a white sheet. This resulted in others nicknaming the new church 'Donkey Church'. This signified the beginning of a new era in the Methodist Church.

A date for officially separating from the mother church was already set and it was to be the 25 June 1933. That day there was supposed to be a communion service in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The service was to be conducted by the Rev Enoch Carter at Albert Street. All the protesters had notified the societies around the Witwatersrand area about the 'greatest occasion' and the whole circuit was present to witness the occasion. The church hall was filled to the rafters and Rev Carter was not aware that the day was marking the beginning of a split. As usual he came to the church but was amazed to see a huge congregation of more than 3 000 people outside and even more people inside the building. It was filled to capacity. In opening the communion service, Rev Carter announced that hymn 138 would be sung from the Sesotho hymns, *Haufi le Morena Haufinyana*². Instead the congregation chose to sing from the Xhosa hymns, hymn number 262, *Sikuyo indlela yelizwe lobomi*³. This song simply meant that they were refugees leaving their home for the unknown but God was with them everywhere. The congregation stood up to sing this hymn and some members of the congregation started clapping hands and beating a plough-share for a bell. The Rev Carter shouted in his loudest voice that windows be opened to allow the flies out (referring to the protesters) and leave the church and go to Sophiatown to feast on a donkey carcass. He said that the same "flies" would come back to church using the same windows and fill the church. This led to the whole congregation leaving the church hall and joining the multitudes that were waiting outside. The people who remained in the church building at that moment were Mr Macumela, Rev TM Ramushu, who was sympathetic to the protestors, and Rev Carter.

The protesting congregants marched from Albert Street through Eloff Street into Commissioner Street to the Good Hope Hall, which they hired for the first Sunday services. At the Good Hope Hall there were other multitudes waiting patiently for the protesters to arrive and welcome them. Due to the

² The English translation of this song is: Nearer my God to Thee. This is a Methodist Church Hymn.

³ Translated: We are on this earthly path. This is a Methodist Church Hymn.

multitudes the hall could not hold them all and, as a result, three services were organised on that day of 23 June 1933. The first service was at 11:00 am, the second at 3:00 pm and the third at 7:00 pm. This was the official beginning of the new church which at that time was called the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa. Many people from other mission churches flocked to this new church.

The Bantu Methodist Church

There is no clear evidence pointing out as to who was the individual behind the founding of the 'Bantu Methodist Church' between 1932-1933. However, the move to form the 'Bantu Methodist Church' at that time was imminent. It appears that there were indications before the crisis which ultimately led to the formation of the 'Bantu Methodist Church' at that time. Sundkler (1961:172) seem to think that there was one African leading figure in the Methodist Church working secretly on the formation of an Independent Church. There seems to have been a deep crisis which was overlooked by both the ecclesial world and the secular world around the Witwatersrand. The situation on the Rand was marred by mass unemployment and economic crisis while at the same time fees were rising in the mission church (Methodist Church). This became a stimulus which set a hitherto unwelded mass of discontented people moving (Sundkler 1961:172).

Conclusion

It was clear that there was not going to be an agreement or solution from black and white members of the Methodist Church at that time towards resolving the problems affecting the church. This could be seen from how the ministers handled the matters as well as the responses from the members in the church. The only way that the two groups could live in harmony was through the split, which eventually happened with the formation of the Bantu Methodist Church. In the end it looked like the split finally laid to rest the conflict and disagreement between the ministers (mainly the District authority who were white and few black ministers who supported the increase in the church levy) and members in the church.

Chapter 4

Challenges

Introduction

The founding of the new church was a move actively facilitated mainly by the disgruntled members of the Methodist Church of South Africa. However, there were challenges which they had to face in a new church. One of the challenges they faced was a church without a leader. This propelled some influential people in the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa to look for someone suitable to lead the church. Not only was this person wanted to lead the ministry of the church but they would have administration duties as well. Further challenges which crept into the echelons of the church were tribalism, maladministration, leadership crisis and some people being summoned to appear before the secular justice courts to solve the ecclesial problems. In spite of, all these challenges there were success which the church enjoyed. It became a joyous moment for the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa to get recognition from the government of the Union of South Africa at that time.

New challenges

After the founding of the new church, (The Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa) one thing proved to be a challenge, which those who were at the forefront of the formation of the church might not have anticipated. The challenge was related to the leadership of the church. The ship had no one to steer it in the right direction. That was not the only challenge which the Bantu Methodist Church was faced with as they had not celebrated the Holy Communion and children were not baptised. This was the result of no minister present and no formal leadership structure being instituted. The challenge forced members of the church to think of inviting some ministers to take up leadership and pastoral ministry. One prominent minister they could think of was Rev Malakia Ramushu, who at that time, was stationed at Klerksdorp from the Witwatersrand after the Great Exodus. From the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Rev M Ramushu's movements were suspected as he was sympathetic to the Refuge movement. His stationing to Klerksdorp by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa was an attempt to keep him away from the latter. However, Ramushu did not enjoy his stay in Klerksdorp as he was

confronted by opposition from the white ministers. In the Witwatersrand, members of the Bantu Methodist Church organised a group of people who were delegated to meet Rev Malakia Ramushu with the intention of inviting him to join them as a leader, minister and administrator of the church (Xozwa 1989:24).

On 9 August 1933, Messrs Direko and Lepitse were delegated to approach Rev TM Ramushu, who at that time was still a minister of the Methodist Church, to approach him with an invitation to accept leadership of a newly founded church. At that time Rev Ramushu was fairly new to the Klerksdorp circuit. (Taunyane 2001:30). On meeting with Rev Ramushu, both Messrs Direko and Lepitse explained, that since the departure from the mother church, there had been no baptism of children, no administration of the Holy Communion or sacraments in the church. It was coincidental that when this delegation to Ramushu arrived, they discovered that he had already planted a seed of his ideology which he had got from the Witwatersrand. Ramushu did this as a result of the treatment he had received from the white ministers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in the Klerksdorp circuit. The delegation to Ramushu was welcomed and given an opportunity to address the congregation there. This opportunity from the Bantu Methodist Church led to a further exodus of members from the mother church to the new church around Klerksdorp. In his response to the invitation from the two delegates, Rev Ramushu expressed in a sympathetic manner that he must first resign from his Mother Church (Sundkler 1961:172).

Ramushu responded positively to the request from the delegation and resigned on 17 September 1933. He assumed his new role as a leader and administrator of a newly found 'Bantu Methodist Church' (Taunyane 2001:30). In the same month of September 1933, Rev Ramushu was followed by Rev E Mthimkhulu from the African Methodist Episcopal Church from Germiston. Ramushu first preached in Sophiatown and administered his first Holy Communion and baptism there. Coincidentally, it was in the same Good Hope hall where it all happened again. On 11 October 1933 he went to Pimville to preach there and this was the society which he had had pastoral oversight when he was with the mother church. After preaching he felt it necessary to explain to the congregation that he had been invited to lead the people of God. This was irrespective of the fact that his wife had passed on and his health was also not good. The main reason he took up the task was simply that he knew that the people he pastored were like lost sheep without a shepherd.

Later in the year the Evangelist JV Sabe decided to join the ministry in the Bantu Methodist Church as did people like Mr SM Ntshalintshali and

Mr JB Mdlalose. The latter two were sent to the Natal District six years later to start a church there. Their mission was not an easy one as they both had to travel the length and breadth of Natal riding on bicycles. Rev Sabe was to minister the Cape Colony travelling between De Aar and Upington (presently the Northern Cape Province). He later moved to Cape Town and then Port Elizabeth where he was invited by people who had read about the new church in the newspapers and had shown interest in it. All these ministers were the pioneers of the new church as they tirelessly laboured in their ministry to see it grow.

The highs and lows of the new church

The Bantu Methodist Church continued to grow throughout the country as other people were leaving both the Methodist Church of South Africa and other mission churches to join the new Christian venture. Many of those who came to join the new church later were not excommunicated from their original churches, but felt that there was a need to be in the struggle with the poor. Some people travelled by train from far and wide to attend the services. The church even arranged with the South African Rail Systems for special trains and buses in places where the terminuses were far to ferry people to the right destinations for church and revival services. In 1947 the Bantu Methodist Church converged in Durban, which was the headquarters of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Many people came from almost all the corners of South Africa in buses, trains and cars for this big occasion, which was held in Chesterville. This looked as if the mother church was going to lose many of its members as many people were continuing to join the Bantu Methodist Church. Some ministers were leaving the mother church for the new church while, at the same time, the laity was also joining the ministry of this church. In spite of its success in attracting large numbers of people to become members, not everything went well. The church experienced conflicts of leadership, tribalism, maladministration and lack of discipline.

Tribalism

There was a claim in the church by some individuals from the Zulu speaking people, that the first president was not elected. In this case, the point in dispute was the role played by the Rev Malakia Ramushu. He was being challenged by Rev Mdelwa Hlongwane. The latter claimed that he was related to the royal family of King Cetywayo of the Zulus. (Xozwa 1989:29). However, this led to the first conference of the Bantu Methodist Church. In

this conference, it was Rev Hlongwane who opposed the election of Rev Ramushu to be the first elected-President of Conference on the basis that it was not right for both ama-Xhosa and Basotho to elect Ramushu as they had invited him from Klerksdorp to come and join the church. His (Hlogwane) argument was that Ramushu was invited not to lead but to join the struggles in the church. Interestingly, Hlongwane was supported by the Zulu people. Before the end of the conference they (the Zulu people) had their own caucus and they had already started their own church under the leadership of Rev Mdelwa Hlongwane. The ethnic church was called 'The Bantu Methodist Church' or 'Imbongolo Church' (Donkey Church).

In entrenching his authority, Rev Hlongwane was inducted by his followers in Pimville and, without any waste of time, he showed his pomp and royalty when he was declared the Founder-President and General Overseer of the Bantu Methodist Church (Xozwa 1989:29). During the induction Rev Hlongwane was offered the following as an Overseer of the church or Arch-Bishop: rings, bibles, a copy of the constitution, pulpit robes for certain occasions, key, hammer, the Great Seal of the Church, the necklace of the cross, Biretta or Mitre, Rod or Staff (Sundkler 1948:104 and also see Xozwa 1989:29). There is no evidence indicating how long Rev Hlongwane's term of office was as the Archbishop of the church. His was another denomination with tribal links.

However, in the authentic Bantu Methodist Church, the term of office of the President of Conference was one year, and Rev Malakia Ramushu successfully served his own term. In 1944 Rev Peter Sedibana Ramushu (who was Rev Malakia Ramushu's son) was the President of Conference and his term of office was nearing its end. The President designate for 1945 was Rev Levi Mbenyana Vabaza. The succession period was also marred with conflict as Rev PS Ramushu wanted to extend his term of office so he charged Rev Vabaza with frivolous offences which were unfounded. Contrary to the constitution of the church, Rev PS Ramushu chaired the District Minor Synod (as he was both the player and the referee). The outcome of the case was that Rev Vabaza was suspended from exercising his ministerial duties. This outcome meant that Rev Ramushu was still in office as the President of Conference for 1946. This created a lot of confusion because it divided the church in two. This division lasted for almost three years and each group had its own leader. These two groups were also tribally influenced as ama-Xhosa had Rev Vabaza as their President overseeing the whole of the Cape Province and Natal Districts, while all the Basotho were led by Rev PS Ramushu who claimed the church was his father's.

- The conflict seemed to have been further fuelled as there were other denominations that were born from the Bantu Methodist Church. One church was born under the leadership of Rev G Vika and was named The Methodist Church for Bantu People in Africa.
- Another church was known as the Independent Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa under Rev SG Dangazele. This church later rejoined the Bantu Methodist Church.
- The third church was a joint venture between Rev Hlongwane's splinter group and the dissatisfied members from the Bantu Methodist Church, and they called themselves New Free Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa.

In all respects these conflicts have retarded the progress of the Bantu Methodist Church, and some of its key members and ministers were beginning to give up their membership and return to the mother church (The Methodist Church of Southern Africa) (Xozwa 1989:30).

Court rule over the church's problems

The conflict which was taking place in the church could not be resolved from within by the affected or involved people. The only way in which the leaders of the church thought it could be resolved was to settle it in court. On 29 August 1947, the Supreme Court of Johannesburg heard the case in which Plaintiff number 1 was The Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa and Plaintiff number 2 was the Rev Levy Mbenyana Vabaza. While Rev Peter Sidibana Ramushu was the first defendant and the Rev Simon Mashona Ntshalintshali was the second defendant. The terms of the settlement were that the annual conference was to be convened in January 1948 in Johannesburg. This conference was going to elect its delegates based on the terms and conditions which were laid down by the Constitution of the church in 1943. Further on, all the terms of the churches constitution of each organisation and meeting were to be constituted as stipulated by the church's constitution without prejudice. The President of Conference was to be elected by secret ballot and the whole church was to be bound by the decision of the majority of the members present at the conference. Some of the terms and conditions that were made by the court were that:

- Taxed costs of all the parties in the matter of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa and Vabaza versus Ramushu and others heard in the Witwatersrand Local

Division of the Supreme Court of South Africa on the 21st day of August 1947, were to be paid out of the church's funds.

- That Vabaza, Tsekeletsa, Sabie, Tshasibane, Mangoale, Vuso, be paid all stipends which would have been due to them but which had not been paid to them since December 1944. (Court settlement quoted in Xozwa: 1989: 32). After the ruling of the court things started to run smoothly for the Bantu Methodist Church and the next President of Conference to be elected was the Rev Simon Mashona Ntshalintshali in 1947.

Below is a copy of a court settlement:

In the Supreme Court of South Africa
(Witwatersrand Local Division)
29TH August 1947

In the matter between:

The Bantu Methodist Church South Africa
1st Plaintiff

And

The Reverend Levy Mbenya Vabaza

And

The Reverend Peter Sidibana Ramushu
1st Defendant

And

The Reverend Simon Mashona Ntshalintshali
2nd Defendant

The terms of Settlement were:

An annual conference to be convened to sit at Johannesburg in January, 1948. For this purpose the election of delegates is to take place in terms of the procedure laid down in the 1943 Constitution of the church as follows:

- Quarterly Meetings to be held in each circuit for the purpose of electing representatives to the District Synods, after due notice to all members of the church in each circuit, including 2nd plaintiff and members who have supported 2nd plaintiff in this dispute. Such notice is to be given in the form which has been adhered to in the past namely by the stewards during a service held in the various church buildings and all members are expected and entitled to have free access to the churches and services.
- Thereafter each District Synod is to choose delegates to the conference, such District Synods to be presided over by the persons elected by such Synods. The present secretaries of each Synod are jointly to convene each synod by notice to all delegates in the form which has been adhered to in the past and shall put a joint resolution to the meeting for the election of a chairman which shall be the first business of each District Synod after the formal opening by prayers as in the past. Thereafter each Synod is to proceed with its ordinary business such as the election of a secretary and other office bearers.
- The conference is to be convened by the persons who are chosen as Chairman of the District Synods by notice to all delegates to the conference in the form adhered to in the past, or by registered post and the conference shall be opened by one of their number selected by the four of them who shall relinquish the chair after

the election of the President of Conference for the year 1948, and the President elect for the 1949, which shall be the first business of the conference after the formal opening thereof.

- After the newly elected President has taken the chair and at some convenient time the conference shall consider the following two resolutions which shall be regarded as having been properly moved and seconded when they are put without amendment before the conference by the President:
 - (a) That the taxed costs of all the parties in the matter of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa, and Vabaza versus Ramushu and others heard in the Witwatersrand local Division of the Supreme Court of South Africa on the 21st day of August 1947, be paid out of the church funds.
 - (b) That Vabaza, Tsekeletsa, Sabie, Tshazibane, Mangoele, Vuso, be paid all stipends which would have been due to them but which have not been paid out to them since December 1944:
- After discussion of the two motions has closed, the conference shall vote thereon by secret ballot and all of the church shall be bound by the decision of the majority of the members present at the conference.
- The conference shall thereafter continue with its normal business and shall take all such other decisions as it has power to do under the constitution, and all decisions and resolutions of all conference held by both parties since 1944 until date thereof are hereby declared null and void and of no force and effect.

The Bantu Methodist Church gets recognition

The 1948 conference saw Rev MN Ramailana become the President of Conference, and the President designate was the Rev LM Vabaza. His term of office was to begin in 1949 and subsequently he got re-elected for the second term of office as President of Conference in 1950. The Bantu Methodist Church gained recognition during the term of office of the Rev LM Vababza under then government of the Union of South Africa. This recognition came as a result of the correspondence between the Minister of Native Affairs and the leadership of the church itself. In the letter addressed to the Minister of Native Affairs, some of the issues highlighted included the year in which the church was born, its membership statistic (which at that time was 17 263), the duration of its existence of 17 years since its formation and the fact that it was not a political movement and that its doctrine did not differ much from the Mother Church. In the letter written to the Minister of Native Affairs the constitution was attached and all its ministers were required to attend the ministerial training at Lovedale* and Morija*.

- 1 *Lovedale College is a historical and educational institution. At one time it was the only place that offered training for black teachers. Many African leaders such as the late Sir Seretse Khama of Botswana, President Thabo Mbeki, Charles Ngakula, and the South African activist Chris Hani were students there. It was built in the 1820s by Scottish missionaries (John Ross and John Bennie) who settled on the banks of the Tyume River. It was later destroyed during the Sixth Frontier War. The present college is situated 1.6km north of Alice and was opened by the Glasgow Missionary Society in 1841 to train teachers and clergy. The Lovedale Printing Press in Alice, which continues to publish religious and educational material in several languages, was established and has been in operation since 1861.*
- 2 *Morija – Initially a mission station later a training college for the clergy. Established in July 1833 by French missionaries in the Makhoarane District in Lesotho. The place was called Morija – the Lord Provides*

All their properties were listed as being under the care of the President of Conference and the financial statement was attached to disclose its financial status. Furthermore, a submission that the church had complied with all the regulations governing the applications of churches seeking recognition in that:

- It had a separate and continuous existence for more than ten years.
- It had much more than six congregations. It had more than 400 congregations, 17, 000 church members. There are 36 circuits and 52 ministers labouring in the districts.
- Ministers were trained at the Lovedale Bible School and Morija. The ethical standard of ministers and members being strictly adhered to as in the Mother Church.
- The properties of the church were valued at 15 000 pounds vested under a Trust Committee presided over by the President who had to report defects and insecurity of tenure (letter to the Native Affairs Minister: 1 February 1951).

This letter at the end further emphasised the sincerity and belief of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa that it was called by God to offer a hand in the salvation of Africa. And the names of all those in the authority of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa were listed as follows: Rev LM Vabaza, Rev AS Mtimkhulu, Rev GZ Vanda, Rev PS Ramushu, Mr RG Baloyi, Mr HM Butshingi and Mr JD Zondi (letter to the Native Affairs Minister: 1 February 1951).

A letter to the Minister of Native Affairs copied from Xozwa 1989:37.

1st March 1951

The Honourable
The Minister for Native Affairs
House of Assembly
Cape Town

May it please your honour,

The Petition of the undersigned

Humbly sheweth:

1. That we are the duly elected deputation from the Bantu Methodist Church Conference appointed to wait on the Honourable the Minister for Native Affairs re recognition of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa by the Government.
2. That the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa was founded and gazetted in 1933. It has continuously carried on for seventeen (17) years and has Circuits throughout the Union with a total membership of 17,261. It is not a political organisation but a desire of the Bantu people for self expression on matters of religion, and does not differ on doctrinal grounds from the Parent Church.
3. That the Bantu Methodist Church is self supporting. Its relation to other denominations is that of friendly co-operation and it is not in antagonism to European controlled churches.
4. That the Bantu Methodist Church works under a constitution, all the activities of the church are being carried out according to the provisions of the constitution.
5. For the efficient control of the work, the supervision is divided into four Districts according to the Provinces of the Union-Transvaal, Orange Free State, Cape and Natal, all under the direction of the yearly conference.
6. For each District a Chairman is voted by a majority vote of conference representatives and for the proper care of members the District is divided into circuits. A minister

is appointed who is charged with the spiritual and moral care of members.

7. All Districts are required to hold their Synods once a year two months before conference. All ministers submit their reports there at both numerical and financial and where breaches of discipline and conduct are being investigated. Complete District Synods reports are passed to the conference for review.
8. The yearly conference is composed of four elected representatives from each District together with the Chairman of District, treasurers, and secretaries and presided over by the President elect by majority vote of the representatives.
9. Training and qualifications of ministers: Arrangement on the training of minister was made with the Bible Schools at Lovedale and Morija. Some of our ministers are students of the Fort Hare College and Lesseyton Theological College.
10. Size: Transvaal has 16 Circuits, total membership 10, 175.
Orange Free State has 6 circuits, total membership 2, 297.
Cape has 10 circuits, total membership 3, 034.
Natal has 5 circuits, total membership 1, 755.
Four Districts, 36 circuits, 52 ministers and 17, 261 members.
11. Ethical standing of ministers and members: Conduct as obtained in the Mother Church, most of our ministers are suitable for the exercise of the civil functions of their office. Relapse both on ministers and members are promptly dealt with and these are excommunicated without delay.
12. The funds of the church are centralised under two General Treasurers to whom all District treasurers submit their reports. They prepare the budget and frame estimates for the year.
13. The properties of the church are vested with the President together with three Trustees who must report to the yearly conference.

The church properties to date are valued as follows:

<i>Provinces</i>	<i>Freehold</i>	<i>Leasehold</i>
Transvaal	6 171 pounds	2 272 pounds
Orange Free State	—	1 064 pounds
Cape	1 360 pounds	3 280 pounds
Natal	1 118 pounds	—

In almost all these substantial churches have been erected.

Our submission is that the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa has complied with all the regulations governing applications of churches seeking recognition in that:

- (a) It has had separate and continuous existence for more than ten years.
- (b) It has much more than six congregations. It has more than 400 congregations, 17,000 church members. There are 36 circuits and 52 ministers labouring in the Districts.
- (c) [Ministers are trained at the Lovedale Bible] School and Morija. The ethical standard of ministers and members is being strictly adhered to as in the Mother Church.
- (d) The properties of the church are valued at 15,000 pounds vested under a Trust Committee presided over by the President who must report defects and insecurity of tenure.

We feel convinced and sincerely believe that the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa is called of God to give a hand in the salvation of Africa.

The Following are the Members of the Deputation:

—	Rev. LM Vabaza	Mr RG Baloyi
	Rev AS Mtimkhulu	Mr HM Butshingi
	Rev GZ Vanda	Mr JD Zondi
	Rev PS Ramushu	

We have the honour, to be Sir,
Your most humble Applicants,

____ President
____ Secretary
____ Ex-President

For and on behalf of the Methodist Church of South Africa.

The Minister of Native Affairs did not take long to respond to the request for recognition from the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa. On 3 March 1951 a short letter was sent to Mr AS Mtimkhulu. The contents of that letter were that, on behalf of the Minister of Native Affairs, the Native Commission had approved the application for Government recognition of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa. The Minister of Native Affairs at that time took time to listen to the deputation and view the documents of the petition brought to him by the latter. The deputation which had gone to see the minister over the matter of official recognition of the church was led by Rev Levi Mbenyana Vabaza who was regarded by both his church and the Methodist Church of South Africa (Mother Church) as bright and leading like Moses. This letter was written and signed by the Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr GJ Cronje (Xozwa 1989:38). Despite, the recognition of the church by the government, there still were conflicts in the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa. This time the conflicts involved the maladministration and this caused the split.

The letter from the Minister of Native Affairs looked like this (copied from Xozwa 1989:39).

Department of Native Affairs
P.O. Box 384
Pretoria
3rd March 1951

No. 921/214
A.S Mtinkhulu
299V Avenue Location
Klerksdorp

Greeting,

Application for Government
Recognition: Bantu Methodist Church of S.A.

With reference to your letter of the 1st February, 1951, I have to inform you that the Honourable the Minister of Native Affairs acting on the recommendation of the Native Affairs Commission has

approved of the application for Government recognition of the above named church.

Greetings
G.J Cronje
For Secretary for Native Affairs

Maladministration

By 1958 the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa had gained the status of recognition by the South African government (then Union of South Africa). However, this did not brush aside the problems and conflicts that were encountered by the church. At this stage the church had decided to divide the Sophiatown Circuit into four circuits. The ministers who were appointed by conference for pastoral oversight to those circuits were Rev AA Tsekeletsa (Sophiatown), Rev IC Luthayi (Orlando), Rev OT Vuso (Pimville) and Rev MR Tawana (Moroka). However, the appointment of Rev MR Tawana was changed by the 1958 conference, wherein he was transferred to Sharpeville. The reason for his transfer was on the grounds that he was also engaged in a non-pastoral job. It was discovered by the church that Rev Tawana was doing some clerical part-time work for a law firm (attorneys) belonging to Henry Helman and Associates. In reacting to this, Rev Tawana consulted a medical practitioner who recommended that he not be transferred to Sharpeville on account of poor health. In a strange twist of things, the doctor's recommendations were that Rev Tawana be appointed to Moroka (the circuit where he was initially appointed). The church ignored Tawana's plea and the latter took the matter to court as a way to defend his cause. The hearing took place in the Johannesburg Supreme Court and the church lost the case. This led to the signing and drawing of a settlement deed which was agreed to by both parties. After the two parties had agreed to meet the deed of settlement, Rev Tawana quickly sent a telegram to the President of Conference who tabled it at a conference held in Port Elizabeth. It seems that Rev Tawana did not even understand the outcome of the court case based on the telegram which was tabled. This was evident from other letters which he had written to the President of Conference in which he had claimed expenses for his travelling. He clearly said was a verbal agreement which was reached after the settlement of the court. This letter came through the Chairman of the Transvaal District Rev SB Booie (letter from Rev Tawana dated 8 August 1958). In responding to Rev Tawana, the Rev Booie made it clear to him that the verbal agreement about his travelling costs was not intended to be settled

by either the district or the Chairman. As a result, the conference felt embarrassed by the Rev Tawana's behaviour as the church had not in any way violated the Deed of Agreement.

Below are the two copies of the letters from Rev M.R Tawana and Rev S.B Booi which were copied from Xozwa 1989:45.

Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa

Rev S. S Booi	1712 Fetsha Street,
Chairman of the District	Western N Township
99 Malepa Street	Johannesburg
Madubulaville	8.8.58
Randfontein	

Dear Sir,

In view of the verbal invitation extended to me I hereby ask you to send me the travelling expenses to Synod to be held on the 12th August 1958 at Potchefstroom which amount to 2 pounds. I will be pleased to hear by the return of the post.

I am,
Yours faithfully
(Sgd) Rev. M.R Tawana
Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa

A letter from Rev S.S Booi to Rev M.R Tawana

Western N Township	99 Malepa Street
Johannesburg	Madubulaville
	Randfontein

Dear Sir

Your letter received this morning, but regrets that I am unable to meet your request.

You will remember that during this verbal invitation after the settlement in the Supreme Court, you mentioned this question

of travelling and was not in any way referred to me or the District.

Yours faithfully
(Sgd) Solo Booi
Chairman

Leadership

The conflict in the church was not only about tribalism and maladministration but leadership also became a point of conflict. However, in this case it included the ethnic groups as well. In the 1965 conference a serious tension broke out between the Basotho and the Nguni people and lasted for approximately nine years. This conflict led to the departure of some people who were regarded as assets or valuable to the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa. The conflict was started when Rev AA Tsekeletsa, who was Chairman of the Orangia District, announced that he wanted three points to be discussed in the conference but that he was going to announce them later in a conference session. These points were apparently not on the agenda and, as result, the President of Conference appealed that they be put into the agenda as a way of notice (Xozwa 1989:46). Instead, Rev Tsekeletsa did not accept the idea from the President of Conference about his items being presented as a motion of notice. He wanted his items to be first on the agenda and, failing which, he was going to sit in the conference under protest.

Apparently the point of contention which Rev AA Tsekeletsa wanted to raise was the decision taken by the stationing committee. The issue was about Rev Peter Sidibana Ramushu's new station in Grahamstown. Ramushu was not keen to leave Parys (in the Orange Free State) for Grahamstown (in the Eastern Cape then the Cape Colony). This was seen as move from AmaXhosa to dominate other ethnic groups in the church. As a result, Batswana and Basotho took this matter very seriously. When it was Rev Tsekeletsa's turn to present the report from the Orangia District, he refused and his response was that until his protest was addressed, he was in no position together with all the delegates from Orangia to say a word to the conference. Rev Tsekeletsa was supported by the Rev JZ Thepe who emphasised what the former had said. The President warned the delegates from Orangia that their presence in the conference was at the district's expense and that they were expected to discuss matters affecting it. The Orangia District maintained its position. The President of Conference was

left with no choice but to order Rev Tsekeletsa out of the session. The latter left the session but was not alone as he was followed by the delegates from Orangia District. This act marked the beginning of a nine year leadership conflict.

The conflict became apparent when the matter was taken to court but was not settled in court. The out of court settlement was seen as a Christian way of handling conflicts. However, the unfortunate thing was that both Rev Tsekeletsa and Thepe had passed on before the matter was settled (Xozwa 1989:46). It appeared like this matter involved both the Nguni people and the Basotho and the former were trying to get a peaceful settlement.

There were some letters which were evidence between the two groups in which meetings were organised as a way to settle the matter outside of court. One of these letters was written and signed by the Rev GZ Vanda on 28 April 1971. It was sent to Rev DM Leshoedi (who apparently was also a president of Conference of the same church). The contents of the letter were to address the misunderstandings that were in the church. In that letter Rev Vanda (he too was the president of Conference of the church in the same period as Rev DM Leshoeli) indicated that a committee of ten ministers and lay people was to be established to discuss the issue of misunderstandings in a peaceful and amicable way. In the same letter Rev Vanda had invited Rev Leshozi, together with his group, to attend that meeting.

Letter from Rev Vanda copied from Xozwa 1989:47:

**Bantu Methodist Church South of Africa
(Established 1933 Recognised 1951)**

Rev JM Andrews
Secretary of Conference
Superintendent-Pretoria Circuit

15149 Mamelodi East
P.O. Rethabile
Pretoria

Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Boekenhoutfontein,
Britz, Garankuwa, Sekhukhuniland, Pietersburg,
Polokwane, Nebo and Hammanskraal Circuit.

28th April 1971

Marriage Officer
Rev. D.M Leshoeli
P.O. Box 169
Lichtenburg

Dear Brother,

Re: Misunderstanding obtaining in the Church

The church has appointed a committee of ten Ministers and Laymen, to meet you and any of your followers that you may appoint; to discuss the above mentioned matter, with a view of arriving at a peaceful and amicable settlement.

We on this side believe that you are as keen as we are, to get the church back to its original and normal state.

You are therefore invited to attend a meeting to be held at our Evaton Church Hall on Saturday the 15th of May 1971 at 9 am.

Please make it a point not to fail.

We are Sir,

Your's in Christ Vine-Yard,

(Sgd) GZ Vanda

President of Conference.

(Sgd) JM Andrews

In response to Rev Vanda's letter, the Rev DM Leshoeli in his letter questioned the 'appointment of the church committee' and which church this appointment was made from. Rev Leshoeli highlighted some of the points that were drafted by court for settlement by the two parties. In that letter he (Rev Leshoeli) implied that the Rev Vanda and his group were trying to manipulate the agreement which had been made by the Supreme Court of Johannesburg that both groups must choose ten members, each with an independent chairman who should be the judge, advocate or magistrate. There were also accusations about resignations having taken place and some members being expelled from the church (letter from Leshoeli dated 6 May 1971).

Letter from the Rev Leshoeli copied from Xozwa 1989:48:

**Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa
Connexional Office**

P.O. Box 169
358a More Street
Boikhutso Township
Lichtenburg
6th May 1971

Rev JM Andrews
15149 Mamelodi East
Pretoria
Dear Sir,

Greetings,

I hereby acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 28th April 1971 which reached me yesterday the 5th May 1971. Unfortunately I fail to understand what you mean by saying "The church has appointed a Committee". I do not understand which church has appointed a committee; probably you mean a group of your ministers which unfortunately my group of followers does not recognise as Ministers of Religion at the present moment.

What we are waiting for at present is the case instituted by your President against my followers at Bloemfontein.

I believe my followers did everything to try and reach a settlement but, you never agreed with us, even after the agreement made in the Supreme Court Johannesburg that both groups choose 10 members each side and have an independent chairman who should be a Magistrate, Advocate, or Bantu Affairs Commissioner.

Both Advocates agreed but your President after seeing the case was out of the Court, just changed his mind and the meeting was never held. What he did, he started writing letters to our

followers telling them, we were expelled from the church, and all such false stories which were not the truth.

He even wrote to government officials saying we have resigned the church and formed a separate church, for Sothos and Tswanas. I am surprised that today he thinks of meeting us.

It seems that you people forgot that I have been elected by people to lead them, or probably you underestimated my intelligence that is why you invite me to your meeting, knowing the case is pending in the Supreme Court Orange Free State division.

I am sorry I cannot meet you at this stage.
I am yours faithfully,
DM Leshoeli
President of Conference
Bantu Methodist Church of S.A

In spite of the differences that were in the church, there finally was a settlement between the two groups, which was conducted by the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein. This settlement was presided over by advocate Kumleben December 1974 (Xozwa 1989: 47). The weekend newspaper of Johannesburg, which was known as the Weekend World, dated February 17, 1974 had as its headlines that 'The Priest claims 50 000 strong church is his'. Rev Vanda was the plaintiff while Rev John Mohapi was the defendant. In that case Rev Vanda was claiming that the church building in Bloemfontein, in which Rev Mohapi was residing, was his and so was the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa. However, the settlement between the two parties was made a court order. Justice F Smuts was the presiding officer over the order. The presiding officer of the case was pleased with the progress which the two parties had reached outside the court. In this case the presiding officer stated that, had one of the parties insisted on court settlement, there would be some financial implications involved affecting one of the parties (Weekend World, February 17, 1974).

In the agreement, the two parties were to hold a combined Settlement Conference consisting of the representatives from both groups. The conference was going to be held in Bloemfontein from April 29, to 1 May, 1974. Presidents from both parties were going to abide by the agreement of the Settlement Conference. As a result of this order from the presiding officer,

the costs which were to be incurred by one of the parties were now going to be shared by both Vanda's and Leshozi's groups in which they each were to each pay 50%.

The Settlement Conference was held in Bloemfontein on 29th April 1974 in the premises of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa at Batho Township. After the arrival of the two groups (Basotho and AmaXhosa), they met under the guidance of the judge and his assessors. That conference decided that the group led by their President Rev Vanda (AmaXhosa) should be represented by only 70 people and the one led by its President Rev Leshoeli should be represented by only 50 people. The election was conducted by Judge Kumleben. These elections were for the new President of Conference. The two groups were allowed to nominate their candidates who were: Rev GZ Vanda, Rev SS Tshazibana and Rev DM Leshoeli. The voting method was a secret ballot. The first round of voting saw Rev Tshazibane being out-voted by both Rev Leshoeli and Rev Vanda. The second round of voting was between Rev Leshoeli and Rev Vanda and the latter won the elections with three votes in his pocket. Judge Kumleben declared Rev GZ Vanda the Official President of the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa. Immediately the officials were instructed by the judge to hold an official conference to settle their problems and all the other officials of the church should be elected in the same manner. The second order was that the church conference should be conducted as per the constitution. In the end, the Deed of the Settlement was signed by both parties and the church was reunited. The ensuing conference was scheduled to be held in Cradock in 1974 and all the officials were looking forward to it (Xozwa 1989: 50).

The conference at Cradock was the first after nine years of leadership conflict which involved tribalism. However, everyone was looking forward to a new environment in the church as old friends were meeting one another and burying feuds of the past and healing the scars. This was probably the best attended conference of the church at that time.

The Cradock Conference was basically a situation which saw the church returning to its normal state. However, there were a few people who challenged the official opening of the conference (these would be the die-hards of the previous state of administration in the church). These people would not let go of the previous problem of stationing the ministers in circuits. The consequences led to the walkout of Rev Maraba and his followers to form a new church which was named the Central Methodist Church. In spite, of the conference in Cradock having made good progress after uniting the church, some people were still not satisfied and a good example was Rev OT Xulu who also walked out of the church to form the Evangelical Metho-

dist Church of South Africa in 1975. His walkout saw him taking only a handful of followers. The church did not last long as some of the members decided to go back to their Mother Church (Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa), while others joined other denominations.

Despite the differences at the Cradock Conference, it made good progress as it began to grow and new circuits were being opened.

Conclusion

The founding of a new church (The Bantu Methodist Church) probably had two reasons. The first was based primarily on emotions while the second was about expression for independence. The former seemed to carry more weight as it became clear to the members of the church what the challenges were. These challenges meant that the church needed a leader and people with administrative expertise. At the same time other challenges such as recognition, maladministration and tribalism as well as lack of officiating the Holy Communion and baptism posed a threat to The Bantu Methodist Church. Leadership was another critical area which has for most part of its existence affected the church. However, the church was able to weather the storm and managed to grow.

Chapter 5

The expansion of the church

Introduction

The Bantu Methodist Church was beginning to expand in South Africa as new circuits and districts were now being opened. The growth of this church can only be attributed to the untiring spirit of the earlier pioneers. These were people such as Rev Malakia Ramushu, Ntshalintshali, Rev JB Mdlalose, Rev JB Tshume, Rev, GZ Vanda and many others. Their contribution was not only spiritual but also material. Their love of being Methodists made it possible for the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa to be able to stand on its own and not depend on someone or something. It was the experience of being sidelined from the Mother Church which gave these ministers the zeal to build formal structures like churches and church halls. The church was financially and morally developed as well. The Cape was further divided into two districts which were known as the Western Cape District and the Eastern Cape District respectively.

The Eastern Cape district

The problems that rocked the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in the Witwatersrand seemed to have followed it to the Transkei. Here many people who were Methodists were mainly labourers in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg. As a result, many of these people apparently worked underground in the Mother Church (The Methodist Church of Southern Africa). However, their efforts to win many people from the latter church were foiled by chiefs around the Transkei who suppressed all the people who were not satisfied with the main church. Everyone who showed dissatisfaction with the white missionaries was regarded as a heretic (Xozwa 1989:53). They were at the same time seen as causing political problems in the state.

Irrespective of what these people were going through, they did not give up as the Methodist Church in the Buntingville Circuit. The Circuit Stewards started to oppose the white ministers and some of these stewards were professionals (teachers). Mr Tyopho and Mr Mavithi both teachers and Circuit Stewards organised and influenced people to stand against the white ministers and missionaries.

It turned out that the situation in Buntingville was influenced by Mr E Mathe who was a member of the Refuge group in the Witwatersrand. It seems that Mr Mathe was in a group of people who were suppressed by the chiefs in Buntingville. The reason why Mr Mathe was suppressed by the chiefs was due to his views on the new Methodist Church. Due to this treatment Mr Mathe joined the struggle to form a new church in the Transkei. This struggle to form a new church in the Transkei goes back to 1949 when in December of that year Evangelist MacKay visited Queenstown and was thoroughly informed about the new church. As a result of the information he obtained, Mackay joined the Bantu Methodist Church in 1950 and later candidated for the ministry. People who joined Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa worshipped at Mr Mathe's house and claimed that they were not able to worship in the local church because leaders of the church did not allow them to. Many protesters joined the new church in the district under the leadership of Mr Mathe and Mr Mavithi.

At the same time a rumour was making the round that the Evangelist Mackay had joined this church which was then called the Donkey Church (Xozwa 1989:53). Ministers from the Methodist Church of Southern Africa started to enquire about it and they were told that it was a heathen church where people 'worshipped a donkey'. Many of those who 'worshipped the donkey' came from the Methodist Church as they had been excommunicated. Evangelist Mackay was accepted into the ministry of the Bantu Methodist Church in 1951 at the Synod which was held in Queenstown. In that Synod the new district was born and named the Eastern Cape and Eastern Pondoland District. This led to the expansion of the district in the Eastern Cape and the minor schisms from the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in which some of the ministers and members of the church joined the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa.

The new name is adopted

When the split took place in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa a donkey was used to carry the flag of the new church which was formed as Protesters marched from Albert Street to the Good Hope Bioscope Hall where the Bantu Methodist Church was going to have its first service. As a result of the donkey carrying the flag the church became known as 'The Donkey Church'. For many years many people were accustomed to calling the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa 'The Donkey Church'.

In 1976 South Africa was marred by political instability which sparked the student riots in Soweto outside Johannesburg. The students' riots

were a reaction towards the Bantu Education and the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in all the Bantu Schools. As a result of this the South African government at that time decided to do away with the use of the name Bantu in all of its departments. Based on that decision by the government all institutions bearing the name Bantu were instructed to drop the word. Ironically, there were churches which also bore the name Bantu as well and they too were not spared the ruling. The Bantu Methodist Church was forced to consider this move from the government and they pondered on the name change for three years. After four years a new name was found, and it was in the 1979 conference which was held in Pimville (outside Johannesburg) to adopt the name 'The Methodist Church in Africa'. The new name did not mean change in principle as they continued with their normal way of worship and their uniform remained the same. To this day the name Methodist Church in Africa is still in use.

Conclusion

Like other Christian churches, The Bantu Methodist Church started growing and expanding to other parts of South Africa. Its roots were in Johannesburg but it managed to take the mission to the Eastern Cape and other parts where it had not existed. At the same time, the adoption of a new name was endorsed as they changed it from 'The Bantu Methodist Church' to "The Methodist Church in Africa".

Past Presidents and Secretaries

President	Secretary	Year
Rev. T.M. Ramushu	Rev. J.B. Mvambo	1933 – 1940
Rev. J.V. Mvambo	Rev. P.S. Ramushu	1941
Rev. P.S. Ramushu	Rev. L.M. Vabaza	1942 – 1944
Rev. P.S. Ramushu	Rev. S.M. Ntshalintshali	1945
Rev. L.M. Vabaza	Rev. A.A. Tsekeletsa	1946
Rev. S.M. Ntshalintshali	Rev. D.P. Mocumi	1947
Rev. S.M. Ntshalintshali	Rev. L.M. Vabaza	1948
Rev. M.N. Ramailane	Rev. L.M. Vabaza	1949
Rev. L.M. Vabaza	Rev. A.S. Mthimkhulu	1950
Rev. A.S. Mthimkhulu	Rev. G.Z. Vanda	1951
Rev. A.S. Mthimkhulu	Rev. D.P. Mocumi	1952
Rev. G.Z. Vanda	Rev. S.S. Khambule	1953
Rev. G.Z. Vanda	Rev. D.P. Mocumi	1954 -1955
Rev. G.Z. Vanda	Rev. A.B.J. Mcetywa	1955 – 1957
Rev. G.Z. Vanda	Rev. A.A. Tsekeletsa	1958 – 1961
Rev. G.Z. Vanda	Rev. J.B. Andrews	1962- 1980
Rev. G.Z. Vanda	Rev. G.G.P. Makamane B.D.	1981 – 1983
Rev. A.T. Leshoeli	Rev. T.S. Moyana; B.A.	1984 – 1986
Rev. A.T. Leshoeli	Rev. F.M. Dyantil	1987- 1989
Rev. A.T. Leshoeli	Rev. J.L. April	1990
Rev. A.T. Leshoeli	Rev. J.K. Sibeko	1991 – 1992
Rev. S.S. Gobile	Rev. P.J. Jafta; B.A. B.E.D	1993 – 1995
Rev. Dr. P.J. Jafta	Rev. P.S. Ntsoelengoe	1996 – 1998
Rev. M.M. Khanyile	Rev. T.P. Jantjie	1998 – 2001
Rev. Dr. P.J. Jafta	Rev. T.P. Jantjie	2001 – 2004
Rev. Dr. P.J. Jafta	Rev. M.S.T. Mvambo	2004 – 2007
Rev. F.E. Lenya	Rev. S.B. Phakoane	2007 - 2010
Rev. F.E. Lenya	Rev. T.P. Jantjie	2010 - date

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