

**The Norwegian Missionary Society under Apartheid in Durban:
attitudes towards the Nationalist Government,
the loss of educational endeavours, and
the emergence of an autonomous
Zulu Lutheran Church**

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Abstract

Active in rural Natal and the Kingdom of Zululand since the middle of the nineteenth century, the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) undertook evangelisation and other forms of ministry to urbanised Zulus in and around Durban in 1890. This sub-field became one centre of its work in the Union of South Africa, and by the time of the accession of the National Party to power in 1948, it encompassed numerous congregations and a large number of schools. The Norwegian Lutheran missionaries lagged behind many of their Swedish counterparts in responding critically to the implementation of apartheid during the late 1940s and early 1950s, but the forced surrender of its educational endeavours stimulated a modest increase in its prophetic voice against the social engineering of apartheid. At the same time, the Zulu Lutheran churches which the NMS had spawned were becoming autonomous bodies without missionary supervision. Although shifts in residential patterns caused by legislation compelled the redeployment of personnel from time to time, most aspects of Norwegian missionary work among the Zulus in and near Durban was not severely disrupted by apartheid in the years under review.

Introduction

The historiography of churches and missionary organisations in South Africa in relation to that country's troubled history of race relations has advanced on an uneven front. Since the publication in 1979 of John de Gruchy's seminal *The church struggle in South Africa*, which cast the white Dutch Reformed Churches as the principal villains in the tragedy of apartheid, and the denominations affiliated with the South African Council of Churches as generally weak and ineffectual opponents of racism, a handful of other South African and foreign scholars have also explored the parallel reactions of various Christian bodies to the racial quandary in which South African society long found itself. Prime examples of efforts to redress decades of neglect are Garth Abraham's study of the Roman Catholic Church's mixed record in confronting the implementation of apartheid,² Michael E Worsnip's corresponding analysis of the Anglican response,³ and Frederick Hale's detailed historical and theological investigation of South African Baptist social ethics with particular attention to racial and military issues.⁴ One significant historiographical trend during both the disillusioning decade of the 1980s and the watershed 1990s was the insistence that not merely the Afrikaans denominations but also the so-called "English-speaking churches", which hitherto had been widely regarded as prophetic voices calling for social and political justice, had contributed to the maintenance of racial segregation and white hegemony. Most notable were detailed studies by James R Cochrane⁵ and Charles Villa-Vicencio,⁶ who cogently challenged this long-accepted axiom.

Almost entirely overlooked in these assessments have been the various Lutheran denominations and missionary societies that have ministered to a broad spectrum of peoples in South Africa since the

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² Garth Abraham, *The Catholic Church and Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989).

³ Michael E. Worsnip, *Between the Two Fires: The Anglican Church and Apartheid, 1948-1957* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1991).

⁴ Frederick Hale, *South African Baptist Social Ethics: The Captivity of the Church in a Multiracial Society* (Cape Town: Baptist Historical Society of South Africa, 2000).

⁵ James R. Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of English-speaking Churches in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987).

⁶ Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, and Cape Town: David Philip, 1988).

first half of the nineteenth century and collectively grew to considerable proportions in the twentieth. On the surface, this neglect is anomalous, because for decades the Lutheran World Federation and many of its member churches condemned apartheid and participated in campaigns hoping to bring about its demise.

For that matter, apartheid has been neglected in published works about the history of the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) in South Africa. Since the 1980s, there have been numerous publications about aspects of its work in the region, but a disproportionate number of them by such scholars as Olav Guttorm Myklebust,⁷ Jarle Simonsen⁸ and Frederick Hale⁹ have dealt with nineteenth-century topics, particularly in rural areas. Berit Hagen Agøy's unpublished thesis about certain aspects of the history of Norwegian missionaries' reactions to apartheid can also be mentioned.¹⁰ Significantly less well explored has been the story of the NMS in the twentieth century, especially its extensive work in and around Durban.¹¹

The present article concentrates on the crucial period spanning the late 1940s and the 1950s, a watershed era in the history of South African race relations when the apartheid system was developed and missionary agencies which ministered to indigenous Africans were compelled to adapt to the social engineering policies of the National Party government by adjusting their strategies markedly. A comprehensive consideration of the adaptation of the work of the NMS in and near Durban would necessitate a book-length study including a broad spectrum of topics, such as land tenure, the impact of pass laws and other restrictions on personal mobility, and various personnel policies, among them the inequalities in salaries paid to European and African clergymen. As crucial steps towards such an inclusive treatment, our present attention will focus on the attitudes of the NMS personnel towards the accession of the National Party to power and to apartheid, the highly consequential takeover of the NMS schools by the government, the increasing responsibility placed on Zulu pastors for the work of the mission in Durban, and the creation of an autonomous Zulu Lutheran church.

The development of the NMS's endeavours in Natal

Under the supervision of HPS Schreuder, the NMS began its endeavours among the Zulus in Natal during the 1840s and in the Kingdom of Zululand north of the Tugela River during the following decade. The number of conversions effected remained small until after the British conquest of Zululand in 1879. During the remainder of the nineteenth century considerably more people converted to Christianity and rural congregations multiplied. In 1890 the NMS initiated its ministry to Zulus who had migrated to Durban.¹² In the words of veteran missionary, Ole Stavem, these morally fragile migratory converts were "plunged into the maelstrom of civilisation" and needed the guidance of the church to keep them on the straight and narrow path.¹³ The NMS had begun to minister to Norwegian and other Scandinavian Lutherans in Durban several years earlier, and this dual function characterised its work there until the 1920s.

During the 1890s Zulu and Scandinavian congregations shared a church building in Winder Street in central Durban. After the turn of the century, a separate Zulu chapel was erected and eventually attracted approximately 200 people to its services. A particularly noteworthy development in the history of the NMS work in Durban was the commissioning of a Zulu pastor, Petros Lamula, in 1915.¹⁴ In addition to formal worship, the programme encompassed extensive evangelisation in workers' hostels, evening schools for adults, and eventually schools for children.

In general the endeavours of the NMS continued to bear fruit as urbanisation continued apace. Basic statistics illustrate the status of the NMS's work in Durban immediately after the war. At the end of 1947 it had two ordained missionaries there, as well as one Zulu pastor and three Zulu evangelists.

⁷ Olav Guttorm Myklebust, *En var den første. Studier og tekster til forståelse av H.P.S. Schreuder* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1986) and *H.P.S. Schreuder. Kirke og misjon* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1980).

⁸ Jarle Simonsen (ed.), *Norsk misjon og afrikanske samfunn: Sør-Afrika ca. 1850–1900* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1984).

⁹ Frederick Hale (ed.), *Norwegian Missionaries in Natal and Zululand* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1997).

¹⁰ Berit Hagen Agøy, "Den tvetydige protesten. Norske misjonærer, kirker og apartheid i Sør-Afrika, 1948–ca. 1970" (unpublished *candidatus philologiae* thesis, University of Oslo, 1987). Some of Agøy's conclusions were conveyed in her article "Norske misjonærer, lutherske kirker og apartheid i Sør-Afrika, 1948–63" (*Historisk Tidsskrift*, LXXII [1993]), pp. 145–180.

¹¹ One exception is Frederick Hale, "The Norwegian Missionary Society's Early Endeavours among Indians in the Greater Durban Area," *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon*, LV, no. 3 (2001), pp. 165–184.

¹² Frederick Hale, "The Development of Norwegian Lutheran Missionary Endeavours in Durban, 1890–1914", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, XXVI, no. 1 (June 2000), pp. 56–79.

¹³ [Ole] Stavem, "Korte Oversigter fra de forskjellige Stationer. a. Natal. Durban", *Det norske Missionselskabs 55de Aarsberetning* (Stavanger: L.C. Kielland, 1897), p. 11.

¹⁴ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, box 47, folder 8, "Referat av Zulumisjonærernes konferens i Durban 11te–19de Mai 1914", p. 73.

These men served a total of six congregations with an official aggregate membership of 937 people. In terms of formal membership, in any case, the Durban sub-field thus lagged behind most of the well-established NMS rural stations, although it should be stressed that after the Second World War, as had been the case before it, the NMS ministered to large numbers of migratory labourers whose recorded church membership, if they had any, was still in rural congregations. The aggregate average attendance at Sunday worship was listed as 455. Two evening schools continued to function, but their enrolment was lower than in the past, with their two teachers instructing a total of only 79 pupils in 1947. The congregations themselves had gained some measure of stability and maturity, despite the continuing mobility of much of the Zulu population in and around Durban. No longer was the urban ministry almost exclusively to migratory labourers; during 1946 and 1947 a total of 103 people, 87 of whom were children, were baptised in them. Thirty-seven youths, moreover, were confirmed.¹⁵

The geographical emphasis of the NMS Zulu field remained decidedly rural. In 1947, 18 of its missionaries (90%) were at rural stations and only two in Durban. There were then 127 rural congregations with an aggregate membership of more than 23 000.¹⁶ By 1950, the NMS had increased its staff in South Africa from 20 to 25 missionaries, and all the growth was at rural stations. In Durban, meanwhile, the retirement of Johan Kjelvei left only one ordained NMS missionary. The total membership of the NMS stations in Natal grew by about 8% between 1947 and 1950, and the number of congregations increased from 133 to 138 during the same period. In Durban, however, it remained at six. Membership grew from 937 to 1 054, but the number of both adults and children baptised, as well as the number of confirmants, dropped.¹⁷ The NMS, in other words, was apparently not even beginning to keep pace with the rapid growth of that city's indigenous African population.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the apartheid era, though quite unrelated to it, it was obvious to at least some of the Norwegian Lutheran missionaries that their work had entered a new phase in which they might soon become redundant. This attitude was intimately related to the dramatic change which took place in the polity of the NMS Zulu churches at mid-century. In 1949 it was decided that their constitution of 1930 be amended so that, as of 1950, the indigenous pastors would no longer minister under Norwegian supervision. The consequences of this move for the general role of the missionaries were profound. As one NMS veteran, Ole Fløttum, expressed it in an article in the NMS periodical *Norsk misjonstidende* in 1949: "The missionary is no longer an obvious given fact ... Now he shall merely go around giving advice and assistance where they are needed. The age of missions is over. We are entering the era of the Zulu church."¹⁸ Kjelvei, then described as the "grand old man" of the NMS South African field, agreed that as far as the NMS itself was concerned "the missionary age is over", but added that for the Zulu church it would endure, that is, Zulu Lutherans would have to continue to evangelise and conduct other forms of missionary work among their ethnic fellows.¹⁹

The Norwegian Lutherans were not on the verge of folding their tent and leaving Natal, however. They would remain in both Durban and at some of the rural stations in the province for another generation. But the indigenisation of ecclesiastical leadership in effect militated against the expansion of the missionary presence, while looking ahead to the constituting of a fully autonomous Zulu church. This fundamental development is crucial to an understanding of how the NMS functioned in Durban during the first decade or so of the apartheid era.

Reserving judgement on the National Party and apartheid

Scandinavian Lutheran missionaries did not speak with one voice when responding to the accession of the National Party to power in 1948. On the one hand, some in the Church of Sweden Mission (CSM) expressed grave misgivings about apartheid from the outset.²⁰ By partial contrast, their counterparts in the NMS evinced relatively little concern at that stage. In 1949, the NMS superintendent in South Africa, Nils Follesøe, who had occupied that post since 1944 and whose career was exclusively at rural stations, dismissed the promises which the National Party had made of developing apartheid as "merely political bait" and insisted that "genuine segregation is impossible to implement".²¹

¹⁵ "Statistikk over N.M.S.s arbeid i Sør-Afrika 1946-47", *Gå ut - Det norske misjonsselskaps årbok 1946-1947*, p. 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ "Statistikk over Det norske misjonsselskaps arbeid i Sør-Afrika 1950", *Misjonsskipet går videre. Det norske misjonsselskap 1948-1951* (Stavanger: Det norske misjonsselskap, 1951), p. 191.

¹⁸ Ole Fløttum, "Når Gud vil gjøre underverk", *Norsk misjonstidende*, CIV, no. 20 (18 June 1949), p. 3.

¹⁹ Ole S. Fløttum, "Saklighet, selvstendinghet og god ånd på kirkemøtet i Sør-Afrika", *Norsk misjonstidende*, CIV, no. 20 (18 June 1949), pp. 4-5; Ole S. Fløttum, "Er misjonstiden i Sør-Afrika slutt?", *Norsk misjonstidende*, CIV, no. 25 (20 August 1949), p. 4.

²⁰ Frederick Hale, "The Church of Sweden Mission and Apartheid, 1948-1960," *Missionalia*, XXIX, no. 1 (2001), pp. 21-42.

²¹ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, uncatalogued materials, *Referat fra Konferensen paa Eshowe 2 mai - 8 mai 1949*, Nils Follesøe, "Tilsynsmannens årsberetning", p. 4.

Moreover, that year the NMS, unlike the CSM, declined to participate in an interdenominational deputation which took concerns over racial matters to Prime Minister DF Malan. Follesøe informed his colleagues at their annual conference in 1949 that “the written protests which various denominations have made are politically slanted” and stated that he would speak with Malan only if the ostensibly political motivation for the protests did not form the basis for the discussions.

His colleagues were not all of one mind on the matter, but they passed a resolution which anticipated the prophetic voice they would later raise. They stated that in principle neither the NMS nor its missionaries became involved in political controversies but added that if Christian principles were clearly involved, such as the misuse of Scripture to support political actions and ideologies, they were entitled to speak out. With regard to apartheid, the NMS missionaries stated at that time that the concept was not yet sufficiently developed for them to comment on it, but they reserved the right to protest if its implementation restricted freedom of religion or conscience, or if it violated human rights or fundamental principles of justice.²²

During the first few years of National Party rule, Follesøe did nothing to challenge its promises to segregate society even further or its enactment of the Group Areas Act and other enabling statutes. On the contrary, in 1951 he praised publicly the government’s willingness to grant more autonomy to and commercial rights in “native reserves” and declared that “that kind of apartheid with more autonomy and rights can be beneficial for the natives”. The real threat to South Africa in his view, and in that of many other whites in South Africa, was not racism but communism.²³

The government’s takeover of the mission schools

It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of the nationalisation of most mission schools to the general history of missions in South Africa or the course of the NMS’s work in and around Durban. In 1955, an already legendary advocate of black civil rights, Anglican missionary Trevor Huddleston, declared categorically that “there can be no question that, of all apartheid legislation during the past eight years of Nationalist rule, the Bantu Education Act is by far the most important and by far the most deadly in its effect”.²⁴ It was the first law that directly assaulted a central prerogative of the missionary societies and churches. By the middle of the twentieth century missions generally furnished the physical facilities and part of the funds for and administration of the schools, while the state defrayed the greatest expense, namely the salaries of the teachers, although for many decades missions had covered much of that cost as well. From the viewpoint of the National Party, however, the mission schools were a stumbling block to the implementation of full-scale apartheid under the coordination of the Department of Native Affairs. Small wonder, then, that virtually from its inception in 1948, the government of DF Malan placed a restructuring of the country’s African education near the top of its list of priorities. A key catalysing event was the appointment of the Native Education Commission, headed by Werner Eiselen, in 1949. That move in itself caused anxiety in many missionary societies.

The Norwegian Lutherans continued to express considerable optimism about the future of their relatively well-developed school system in Natal during the 1950s. In 1951, the NMS had 119 schools there with 224 teachers and an aggregate enrolment of ca. 8 000. Ingolf Edward Hodne had recently been named administrator of this sprawling educational venture. When interviewed at his office in Durban that year, he stated that he had the impression that the government of South Africa still wanted missionaries to play a role in African education. Hodne acknowledged that shortly after the accession of the National Party to power in 1948 there had been a temporary reduction in government subsidies for school lunches and educational materials, as well as a refusal to support new teaching positions. By 1951, however, the government had shown much more willingness to cooperate with the expansion of the schools.²⁵ A year later, one of Hodne’s colleagues, Ole S Fløttum, declared that the NMS’s educational programme in Natal was “absolutely” making progress, that its schools were full, and that they could serve twice as many eager pupils if there were sufficient physical capacity.²⁶

In the meantime, however, the lengthy report of the Eiselen Commission had been published early in 1952. In July of that year, the South African Institute of Race Relations sponsored a conference in Johannesburg to discuss its findings. Hodne represented the NMS and described the Commission’s report to his colleagues at their annual conference in January 1953. As he informed them, participants in Johannesburg had been very critical of the segregationist ideology on which the Eiselen Commission

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

²³ Nils M. Follesøe, “Overraskelsen land - Sør-Afrika”, *Misjonsskipet går videre. Det norske misjonsselskap 1948-1951*, p. 60-61.

²⁴ Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort*, p. 160.

²⁵ Ole S. Fløttum, “Borna i dag er folket i morgon”, *Norsk Misjonstidende*, CVI, no. 21 (30 June 1951), pp. 5, 8.

²⁶ “Det er i Sør-Afrika det hender”, *Norsk Misjonstidende*, CVII, no. 31 (27 September 1952), p. 1.

had based its investigation and its proposals for a wholesale reform of African education. The assembled Norwegian missionaries did not, however, act on the matter at that time.²⁷

A year later they awaited with trepidation the course of events which the expected enactment of the Bantu Education Act would bring. One expressed his fear – which subsequent events more than justified – that “missions and other private organisations will not be allowed to open new schools, but for the time being will [be permitted to] do their work as before and with the good-will and understanding of people who represent the state”. This glimmer of optimism seemed all the more important, because by the end of 1953 the NMS had 253 teachers and 9 266 pupils in its schools in Natal.²⁸

Hope dwindled during 1954. A few months after the NMS field conference in January, superintendent Follesøe informed the leaders of the organisation in Norway that according to rumours the government intended to take over the entire apparatus for black education within two years. He feared that “the missions will lose most of their control over the schools, if not all of it” and lamented that “unfortunately, there is nothing we can do to prevent this”.²⁹

The Bantu Education Act as such was not a particularly detailed statute. It did, however, give the Department of Native Affairs vast power to restructure education for the indigenous population. Many hopes that it would not act drastically were dashed in June 1954 when the Minister of Native Affairs, HF Verwoerd, in a published speech to the Parliament of the Union of South Africa, commented on the “defects” of the existing system and spelt out his aims for transforming it. The imperious minister made no secret of his intention to subordinate education to his grand design of racial separation. One shortcoming of mission-dominated education, he lamented, was that “the curriculum (to a certain extent) and educational practice, by ignoring the segregation or ‘apartheid’ policy, was unable to prepare for service within the Bantu community”. Moreover, it had challenged racial barriers, in that “the vain hope was created among Natives that they could occupy posts within the European community despite the country’s policy of ‘apartheid’”. This “unhealthy” hope, Verwoerd asserted, was “disrupting the community life of the Bantu and endangering the community life of the European”. Under the new system, however, “the school must equip him to meet the demands which the economic life of South Africa will impose upon him”, and this would be primarily in “reserves”, where, he believed, “both feet” of African education should be planted. There was little point in expending considerable resources on preparing “the Bantu” for life outside specifically designated black areas, because “there is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour”. These policies would be implemented, Verwoerd announced, by the Department of Native Affairs, taking from the four provincial administrations control of the black schools, and “where possible the various types of schools now in existence must be controlled by us in co-operation with bodies composed of Bantu members”.³⁰

In a circular letter sent a few weeks later to all the churches and missions which then operated state-aided schools for Africans, Secretary of Native Affairs Eiselen stated explicitly that “the transfer of control from the missions to Bantu communities is part of a wider scheme of social development, designed to assist in the progress of the Native people in the form of self-sufficient and responsible communities in all directions”. In other words, the creation of a specifically African school system was a pillar of the grand strategy of apartheid. Obviously seeking to assuage missionary and ecclesiastical fears, Eiselen gave his assurance that there was no intention of removing religious influences from “Bantu” life. He also promised “reasonable compensation” for use of school buildings, which in most cases his department would hire rather than purchase. Eiselen warned, however, that the funds for hiring them would have to come chiefly from African taxpayers and that this would be kept in mind when negotiating the contracts for use of the facilities. In effect, the missions were told not to expect much.³¹

In the end, churches and missions were given certain choices for their “aided” schools. They could turn them over to the government, which promised to rent the buildings, continue to administer them with severely reduced subsidies, or sponsor them entirely independent of public revenues as strictly private schools. The Roman Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists chose the last-named

²⁷ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, box 607, folder 3, *Referat fra konferansen paa Eshowe 20-27 januar 1953*, pp. 28-32.

²⁸ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, box 607, folder 10, *Referat fra konferansen paa Eshowe 20-28 januar, 1954*, p. 13.

²⁹ N.M. Follesøe, “Sør-Afrika i fugleperspektiv”, *Misjonsskipet i den fjerde nattevakt? Det norske misjonsselskap 1951-1954* (Stavanger: Det norske misjonsselskap, 1954), p. 46.

³⁰ H.F. Verwoerd, *Bantu Education Policy for the Immediate Future* (Pretoria: The Information Service of the Department of Native Affairs, 1954), pp. 5, 7, 9, 15, 18, 23-24.

³¹ Church of Sweden Mission Archives, A II : 102, *Bilagor till Svenska Kyrkans Missionsstyrelsens Protokoll 1954*, W.W.M. Eiselen (Pretoria), circular letter concerning “The Transfer of control of State-aided schools to Bantu Community organizations, except in the case of teacher training schools”, 2 August 1954.

alternative. In the diocese of Johannesburg, the Anglican Church of the Province adopted a different policy by closing its schools entirely, a controversial move which gained international attention. Most, however, including the Scandinavian missions, heeded the government's prompting and grudgingly relinquished their schools to the Department of Native Affairs. The reaction of the synodical council of the Zulu Lutheran church which the CSM had helped to create was typical. It sent the Secretary for Native Affairs a letter declaring that, while it was "in full agreement with the principle of State-controlled education", it regretted that the missionary role was virtually being ended. The council also registered its disagreement with the Verwoerdian principle that education should not be based on the development of individual aptitudes but rather exist to serve white-dominated society. Having no realistic alternative, however, it informed the secretary that it would relinquish the schools but hoped that it would be allowed to retain control of the hostels for pupils.

In Sweden, the board of the CSM accepted this statement but also found it "regrettable" that circumstances necessitating it existed. The committee expressed hope that the Department of Native Affairs would respect Christian principles in the administration of erstwhile mission schools and not restrict the proclamation of the Gospel. Should that be violated, "the entire school mission will have to be reconsidered and new ways to work amongst young people be found".³² In a published statement, Stig Falck of the CSM emphasised that the Zulu Lutherans had agreed to relinquish control of the schools under protest for the sake of the pupils. The director underscored his personal disagreement, and that of both the Zulu Lutherans and his colleagues in the leadership of the CSM, with Verwoerd's general understanding of the purpose of education, noting that they believed it was to foster the aptitude of the individual.³³

In the NMS, meanwhile, which acted similarly, Follesøe was thus quite right about the impotence of the NMS against the power of the state, as were commentators in other missionary societies who voiced corresponding fears. As his *pro tempore* successor, Andreas Løken noted with dismay in the next triennial report, "the government took over the primary schools, secondary schools, and teachers' colleges with the speed of a *coup d'état*". He conceded that, in principle, it was the duty of the state to provide for public education but declared that "as a mission we have much to complain about regarding the new system, the motives behind it, and the way it was implemented". Løken thought Verwoerd's accusation that the mission schools had blindly followed European models was unjust and absurd. On the other hand, Løken triumphantly declared that Verwoerd was entirely factual in complaining that the curricula of the mission schools had not evinced any respect for the National Party's apartheid policy.³⁴

By 1955, every Scandinavian missionary body operating schools in South Africa, like nearly every non-Scandinavian counterpart, had capitulated and turned its educational institutions over to the state. This broad relinquishing of the schools terminated a major chapter in South African mission history. As part of this, one of the cornerstones of the Scandinavian missionary endeavour in the cities of South Africa came to an ignominious end before it became consistently well developed. The NMS continued to administer its evening schools for adults for a few more years with teachers who received their salaries from the government, but by the end of the 1950s the state had withdrawn that last remnant of support as well. Those institutions, which had served the needs of black migrants to Durban for more than half a century, thus also largely disappeared from the urban scene.³⁵

Towards Zulu ecclesiastical autonomy: NMS endeavours in Durban during the 1950s

The loss of the schools profoundly affected the Norwegian missionary role in Natal and, at least to a minor degree, lessened its supervisory importance. Concomitantly, the part that African churchmen played in leading the churches sponsored by the NMS continued to ascend during the 1950s. The most relevant extant documentation, much of it in the form of annual reports by the NMS superintendent of the field and the Zulu pastors in Durban, indicates that the work functioned smoothly and that the NMS churches there grew and remained very active. This presumably instilled in the NMS confidence in the ability of the African churchmen in question to administer their own congregations. The transition to black leadership was thus a natural and uncomplicated development, one whose roots antedated National Party rule of the Union of South Africa by decades and, although it harmonised with the vision of apartheid ideologues like Verwoerd, was not a consequence of their ideology.

³² Church of Sweden Mission Archives, A I : 14, *Svenska Kyrkans Missionsstyrelses Protokoll 1954-57*, 9 December 1954.

³³ Göran Widmark, "På tal om", *Svenska Kyrkans Missionstidning*, LXXX, no. 3 (1 February 1955), p. 35.

³⁴ A. Løken, "En kirke tar form", *Guds kirke bygges. Det Norske Misjonsselskap 1954-1957* (Stavanger: Det Norske Misjonsselskap, 1957), p. 32.

³⁵ Interview with Paulus Ndlovu, Durban, 4 March 1991; interview with Peter Mkhize, Durban, 6 March 1991.

The NMS continued to maintain a small Norwegian missionary staff in Durban throughout the 1950s, usually consisting of only one or two men, one of whom was unordained. They served in a variety of ministries, none of which was conventional evangelism, a task which had already been relinquished to their Zulu colleagues.

Hodne, though born in Chicago, was a Norwegian who got his theological education at the NMS training school in Stavanger as well as at the Independent Faculty of Theology in Oslo (*Menighetsfakultetet*). He arrived in South Africa in 1947 and initially served at rural stations in Natal, was the “school missionary” from 1950 until 1953 and again, though in a greatly reduced capacity, from 1955 until 1960. While in Durban, during the early 1950s he also functioned as a prison chaplain.

Arthur Harstad, a native of Kristiansand, was also an alumnus of the NMS institution in Stavanger. He too landed in Natal in 1947 and first served rural stations. Following a furlough in Norway in the mid-1950s, he returned to Durban and was the director of Lutheran Publishing House there from 1957 until 1963. Like Hodne, Harstad was also a prison and hospital chaplain.

The NMS lay missionary in Durban during much of this time was Kåre Hauge. Educated in Norway first as a businessman and subsequently as a deacon, he arrived in South Africa in 1950. Following language and further commercial studies in Durban, he administered the Lutheran Publishing House from 1952 until 1957, when he returned to Norway. This small and changing staff witnessed the ongoing transfer of responsibility to African counterparts in Durban but continued to support in areas where their expertise was needed.

Administratively, the NMS Zulu churches in the Durban area changed during the 1950s as a prelude to a merger with other Zulu Lutheran bodies at the start of the 1960s. In 1954 the vicinity became an urban mission district within the NMS Zulu synod. It then consisted of twelve congregations with three chapels, two parish houses, and thirteen preaching places. The evolution involved more than ecclesiastical polity. A striking characteristic of the churches which NMS missionaries and their Zulu colleagues had founded and led in the Durban area was their continuing growth during the 1950s. Most of this numerical increase was in the townships; as a consequence of apartheid the original chapel in Moore Road in central Durban was forced to close, although some of the ministry which had been conducted at that venue was continued at the Durban South Parish.³⁶ The other inner city NMS chapel, however, that in Milne Street, continued to function at its site. Yet the greatest amount of energy went into ministering to the enormous masses of Africans who swelled the townships near Durban.

Given the transitory nature of the members and unofficial participants in the services of worship and other activities, precise statistics are of limited value. Nevertheless, they confirm subjective impressions of growth which both the Norwegian missionaries and the Zulu pastors in Durban recorded. In 1950 the official membership of the various congregations which comprised the NMS Durban sector was 1 054. The total field then encompassed 26 096 members at thirteen rural stations in addition to the work in Durban. Five of the rural stations reported more than 2 000 members each, and one, at Ekombe, had no fewer than 4 385.³⁷ Durban, in other words, was significant but numerically secondary. This was still the case in 1956, when 1 428 people, 440 of them children, were attached to the NMS Durban congregations and 27 282 in the entire field.³⁸ By 1959, membership in Durban had inched up to 1 580, including 550 children, in seven congregations. There were then three African pastors and three unordained evangelists.³⁹

The statistics for 1959 show clearly that at the end of our chronological framework the NMS churches in Durban were decidedly family-oriented congregations which bore relatively little resemblance to the loose assemblies of migratory labourers from upcountry to whom Ole Stavem had originally ministered during the early years of NMS urban work in the 1890s. In 1959, 113 people were baptised, only fourteen of whom were adults, and 36 weddings took place in the chapels. Only 23 new members were received, while 38 cancelled their membership for unrecorded reasons.⁴⁰

The NMS employed only a very small number of Zulu pastors in the Durban vicinity during the early 1950s. Indeed, during the first three years of the decade there was usually only one, Andreas Magubane, in whom the NMS had enough confidence to underwrite a visit of several months to Norway in 1952. This solitary African cleric thus had to rely heavily on the assistance of unremunerated lay volunteers. Magubane reported in 1953, near the end of his tenure in Durban, that

³⁶ Ernst Lüdemann (ed.), *A Family in the Faith. Lutherans in Greater Durban* (Durban: The Durban Lutheran Ministers' Fraternal, 1979), p. 13.

³⁷ “Statistikk over Det norske misjonsselskaps arbeide i Sør-Afrika 1950”, *Misjonsskipet går videre. Det norske misjonsselskap 1948-1951*, p. 24.

³⁸ “Statistikk for Sør-Afrika. Hovedstatistikk 1956”, *Guds kirke bygges. Det Norske Misjonsselskap 1954-1957*, p. 180.

³⁹ “Statistikk for Sør-Afrika. Hovedstatistikk 1959”, *Høsten er stor. Det Norske Misjonsselskap 1957-1960* (Stavanger: Nomi Forlag, 1960), p. 161.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

the work for which he was responsible had gone well and that he and his unordained colleagues all noticed widespread spiritual hunger amongst Africans in the area. Collections had risen, and the voluntary Christian associations attached to the church had progressed. Magubane was particularly concerned about ecclesiastical unity, which coincided with the efforts of representatives from several Lutheran missions at that time to work for the merger of the various synods into a national church. He conceded that it could “often be difficult” to gather members of various congregations and synods but also remarked that “among many, however, there is a notable longing for unity, and it is our task to strengthen this”.⁴¹

By 1954 the NMS had two Zulu pastors in Durban, namely A Dladla, who was in charge of the work there, and Raphael Zulu. The superintendent of the field, Nils Follesøe, who inspected the NMS churches in that area that year, declared broadly that “the work in Durban is going very well” and that both Dladla and Zulu were doing “good work”. The only reasons he gave for this conclusion, however, were that attendance at worship was satisfactory and collections were increasing from year to year.⁴² Dladla seemed very enthusiastic about the state of the church in Durban at that time. He corroborated the superintendent’s observation that there was a greater spirit of giving in the congregations and noted that total contributions had risen by £190 from 1953 to 1954. Beyond monetary matters, Dladla reported that attendance at worship was “very good” and that many people travelled great distances by bus to worship together. Participation in the Lord’s Supper, moreover, was “frequent”, and both members of the parish councils and voluntary assistants had visited sick members and those who were absent from worship for prolonged periods. Dladla also expressed gratitude for help from the *abasizikazi*, or church women’s group. On the other hand, sectarian competition of various kinds had given him headaches. Dladla mentioned the Nazarite Baptist followers of the self-styled black messiah Isaiah Shembe, as well as unspecified critics who attacked the practice of worship on Sundays and the Lutheran understanding of baptism as supposedly unbiblical. Other detractors had denied the existence of hell. Dladla assured the NMS that “in order to counter all this we have Bible studies every Friday. At them we seek to help and advise our people, strengthen them, and anchor them in faith and our church’s doctrine”.⁴³

Dladla’s ministry also included an element whose roots lay approximately half a century back in the history of Scandinavian missionary work in Durban, namely prison evangelism. By the mid-1950s he was sharing this duty with Kåre Hauge. Through their joint ministry, about 1 200 inmates at the central prison could participate in weekly devotions. Most of these prisoners were black Africans, although by then some were Indians and Coloureds. The NMS had participated in this task for decades, but the employment of an African for this duty was a new development, one which also signalled a greater role for black ministry, even if in this case it may have been partly a matter of expediency because the NMS had so few Europeans in the Durban area who could have shouldered that difficult task.⁴⁴

During the 1950s another aspect of NMS urban work took on added significance in a way which pointed to the relationship between that society and the black Lutheran church after 1960, namely, one of providing support and expertise in various ways as opposed to the previous pattern of leadership. Since 1952, the printing division of the Co-operating Lutheran Missions in Natal had operated from the old NMS station at 150 Bellevue Road in Durban under Hauge’s direction. Assisted by two Zulu colleagues, he oversaw a printing programme which included general religious books, hymnals, catechisms, Bible stories, and other literature. In the mid-1950s this press began to print baptismal and confirmation certificates, as well as membership cards and other materials on a uniform basis for the increasingly closer synods which were moving towards their merger.⁴⁵ In 1957 this organisation, then called the Lutheran Publishing House, put forward a proposal for opening a book shop in central Durban.⁴⁶ This eventually came to pass.

Throughout the rest of the 1950s the NMS continued to witness growth and steady activity in its churches in the Durban area, as the partial urbanisation of the Zulu population in Natal and Zululand continued. Owing to the continuing tightening of residential legislation, of course, the growth of the

⁴¹ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, box 607, folder 3, Andreas Magubane, “Durban”, *Referat fra konferansen på Eshowe 20-27 januar, 1953*, p. 17.

⁴² Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, box 608, folder 1, “Tilsynsmannens årsberetning”, *Referat fra konferansen på Umpumulo. 16-23 januar 1955*, p. 6.

⁴³ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, box 608, folder 1, A. Dladla, “Durban”, *Referat fra konferansen på Umpumulo. 16-23 januar 1955*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, box 608, folder 1, K. Hauge, “Det fellelutherske forlaget”, *Referat fra konferansen på Umpumulo. 16-23 januar 1955*, p. 20.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, uncatalogued materials, “Fungerende tilsynsmannens årsberetning for 1957”, *Referat fra konferansen på Umpumulo. 12-19 januar, 1958*, p. 14.

urban indigenous population was chiefly in the burgeoning townships which surrounded parts of the city. Reducing the potential numerical growth of the Lutheran congregations, however, was competition from the African initiated churches which multiplied in the townships. At times the presence of these religious bodies, many of which expanded quite rapidly, caused great consternation amongst the missionaries as well as black church leaders. Paulus Ndlovu, an unordained evangelist who had migrated from Umpumulo to Durban shortly before the conclusion of the Second World War and assisted Dladla during the 1950s, recalled bitterly that numerous members of the congregation at Lamontville, including some whom he had regarded as pillars of the church, had simply departed without notifying him that they were terminating their involvement in the Lutheran church.⁴⁷

Such recurrent problems as personal immorality and sectarian competition remained themes in the reports sent to Stavanger from the field. Dladla could thus inform the NMS leadership in 1957 that attendance was still very good, that many children had been baptised during the previous year, that many young men in the congregations did voluntary preaching and other assisting work, and that considerable numbers of members communed regularly. Moreover, a new chapel constructed in Chesterville served a sizeable congregation. On the other hand, Dladla worried about the backsliding of some members into what he called new forms of heathenism. He mentioned specifically an ostensibly new custom of slaughtering goats as sacrifices to ancestral spirits and the wearing of leather thongs as wristbands.⁴⁸ Another retired lay evangelist, Peter Mkhize, related in 1991 that these practices had caused both the Zulu churchmen and the foreign missionaries headaches, and that attempts to assure the latter that the phenomenon was a triviality which they would have to accept were quite in vain. The problem, as seen from his perspective, remained unresolved throughout the period covered by the present study.⁴⁹ Another perennial tribulation for some church leaders was the involvement of young Zulu Christians in conflicts with the Indian population of the Durban area. This, in Ndlovu's words, included an element of "open hatred" and remained a cause of disillusionment, because it ran counter to the spirit of brotherly love which the church was seeking to inculcate in its members, notwithstanding the great dislike of European South Africans that many Zulu Lutherans in Natal were already evincing during the 1950s.⁵⁰

Ironically enough, at least when viewed from a post-apartheid perspective, the forced removal of certain churches to black residential areas reportedly did not cause great consternation or hand-wringing on the part of the NMS or its African personnel, possibly owing to the fact that in most instances it soon proved possible to erect new chapels and establish smoothly functioning programmes of Christian ministry.⁵¹

To cite but one example of this, a year after Dladla reported on general conditions in his region of ministry in 1957, the youth programme in Chesterville appeared to be thriving with numerical advances in both attendance at worship and participation in the Lord's Supper. In the township of Lamontville, meanwhile, work was progressing despite the lack of a manse there and the occasional vandalising of the chapel. It seemed particularly gratifying that by then all the NMS congregations in the area had functioning Sunday schools. Distractions from worship included competition from drinking and dancing functions on Sundays.⁵²

As the decade neared its conclusion, the programme in the Durban vicinity continued to expand somewhat. The population of the area rose steadily, and its mobility affected the NMS churches. During the late 1950s many members moved from Chesterville to the new township of Kwa Mashu and thus sorely needed a chapel. Lamontville still lacked a manse, as the Zulu pastor in charge of that parish lived a considerable distance from it, and in his absence vandals and thieves frequently broke into the chapel. The strong points of the work in general reportedly included the faithful role of the *abasizikazi*, the performance of the parish councils as the merger approached, general attendance at worship, and evening Bible classes, including those which Harstad led at the Moore Road chapel.⁵³ On the eve of the creation of the national Lutheran church, therefore, the NMS endeavour in Durban had

⁴⁷ Interview with Paulus Ndlovu, Durban, 4 March 1991.

⁴⁸ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, uncatalogued materials, A. Dladla, "Durban", *Referat fra konferansen på Umpumulo. 13–21 januar, 1957*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Interview with Peter Mkhize, Durban, 6 March 1991. This evangelist was apparently unaware that according to long-standing instructions from the NMS, its missionaries could not legitimately exercise great discretionary power in tolerating indigenous African practices which were deemed to be incompatible with the Christian faith.

⁵⁰ Interview with Peter Mkhize, Durban, 6 March 1991. This evangelist was apparently unaware that according to long-standing instructions from the NMS, its missionaries could not legitimately exercise great discretionary power in tolerating indigenous African practices which were deemed to be incompatible with the Christian faith.

⁵¹ Interviews with Peter Mkhize, Durban, 6 March 1991, and Paulus Ndlovu, Durban, 4 March 1991.

⁵² Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, uncatalogued materials, A. Dladla, "Durban", *Referat fra konferansen på Umpumulo. 12–19 januar, 1958*, p. 56.

⁵³ Norwegian Missionary Society Archives, uncatalogued materials, A. Dladla, "Durban", *Referat fra konferansen i Durban. 13–19 januar, 1959*, pp. 50–51.

borne rapidly maturing fruit. The Norwegians were receding into the background, providing support in specific areas but with most of the leadership clearly in African hands.

Conclusion

Conspicuously absent from the relatively extensive reports which both the Norwegian missionaries and the Zulu churchmen who served in the NMS sent from Durban is a noteworthy degree of concern about apartheid as such, other than the government's takeover of the mission schools. Whether they reflected about the ethical implications of the social engineering which South Africa was undergoing during the late 1940s and the 1950s without committing their thoughts to paper is virtually impossible to discern from the extant evidence. By at least partial contrast, the Swedish Lutheran missionaries in Johannesburg wrote frequently about the restrictions government bureaucrats were imposing on their programme in that city.⁵⁴ One will search the published and unpublished NMS documents in vain for substantial evidence of Zulu Lutheran support for, or involvement in, such phenomena as the Defiance Campaign beginning in 1952. Men like Dladla were preoccupied with the spiritual dimensions of their ministries, personal moral standards and other private matters; raising a prophetic voice against government policies was apparently not on their agenda.

It is conceivable, though probably not demonstrable, that in this respect the Zulu Lutheran clergymen in Durban had been influenced by the generally apolitical and non-confrontational stance of the Norwegian missionaries who had sponsored and trained them. As indicated earlier, the NMS personnel in Natal lagged behind their Swedish counterparts on the Witwatersrand in speaking out against the National Party and apartheid in the late 1940s, and the former did little during the following decade to distinguish themselves in this respect. Whether they had a different understanding of the Lutheran doctrine of the "two kingdoms", according to which the church respected the role of the civil government to rule in the secular sphere, is similarly difficult to ascertain. It may be that the strongly pietistic elements in the NMS also militated against taking a public stance against, or at least commenting more frequently in reports to the board in Norway about, the racial policies in the Union of South Africa.

In any case, the loss of the schools in the wake of the Bantu Education Act was unquestionably a bitter fruit of apartheid, one which significantly altered both the urban and rural components of the NMS programme. Furthermore, the implementation of full-scale apartheid may have accelerated long-standing trends towards the emergence of an autonomous Zulu Lutheran church in which the Africans administered their own ecclesiastical affairs.

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