

THE INTERVIEW CONDUCTED
IN CONNECTION WITH THE
AFRICAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

THE MAKING OF AN INDIGENOUS
CLERGY

HC 302

LECTURE: DR P. DENNIS

BY

SITHEMBISO NTSHANGASE

FROM

EVANGELICAL BIBLE SEMINARY
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

DATE:

THE MAKING OF AN INDIGENOUS CLERGY (HC 302)

The interview conducted about the African Congregational Church

INTERVIEWER: SITHEMBISO NTSHANGASE
INTERVIEWEE: MR T. P. N. NDULI
PLACE : GRANGE

INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that we met with the interviewee on three occasions informally. I was unable to conduct a formal interview because the interviewee since he is not a clergy person in the church he could not release all the information about the church without the approval of the president of the above mentioned church. I could not get all the information I required because he insisted that he wants the president's approval about the whole issue. Eventually along the process I managed to get the information I have but I do not claim that all I have in this interview is a complete historical event.

When I was asking for the interviewee's biography he could not give me because he did not want to involve himself in the whole issue. He did not want his name to be written down.

IDENTITY OF THE INTERVIEWEE

The interviewee's name is Mr T P N Nduli. Mr Nduli was born in 1927. His parents were the congregants of the African Congregational Church. Mr Nduli was born in the christian family. Mr Nduli is a teacher of profession. He is a retired principal of one of the schools in Ushdown in Pietermaritzburg. He was trained in one of his Church's mission schools to become a teacher. As he was carrying on with his profession he also became the general secretary of his church in the Natal Midlands Region. It is most unfortunate that I could not get deeper than what I got about the interviewee's background. I think it is important to note that the person I interviewed has a lot to say in a form of oral tradition. He knew even the years in which after wards when we compared our data and found that he was very accurate on what he gave me. The interview was conducted to trace the indigenous clergy in his church.

After introduction I asked the following questions and received the following responses.

SITHEMBISO: Tell me something about your church. Is your Church connected with the missionaries?

- NDULI: Yes, the African Congregational Church had connections with missionaries originally but not any more.
- SITHEMBISO: It is very interesting to know that it had some connections but not any more. Please tell me what happened?
- NDULI: The African Congregational Church (nBandla lama Afrika) originated from the American Board Mission. The American Board Missionaries were the leaders in the Church and the Black converts were the evangelists and preachers under the white missionaries.
- SITHEMBISO: Did the black converts end up at evangelist and preachers office?
- NDULI: No, eventually they were promoted to the ordained ministry.
- SITHEMBISO: What actually caused the split. What was the problem?
- NDULI: The split from the missionary church was caused by the missionaries themselves. The collections that were paid by both black and white congregants were sent overseas and would not help the church in South Africa.
- SITHEMBISO: Is there any other reason either than what you are telling me?
- NDULI: What I have told you is the primary issue which caused tensions and eventually the split.
- SITHEMBISO: When did the split take place?
- NDULI: The split took place in 1917 after five years from when the African National Congress was born. That is why the people of the community confused it with the A.N.C. They thought it was born out of the A.N.C. and the church was associated with it.
- SITHEMBISO: Do the church have any connections with the A.N.C.?
- NDULI: No the church does not have any ties with the African National Congress.
- SITHEMBISO: Who initiated the split?
- NDULI: It was initiated by Rev. Mvuyana.

- SITHEMBISO: Who was Rev Mvuyana? Can you tell me about his history?
- NDULI: Rev Gardener Bartman Mvuyana was a revolutionary priest. He is the founder of the African Congregational Church. (iBandla lama Afrika). He was the first Black president for this church.
- SITHEMBISO: When was he born?
- NDULI: He was born on the 6th February 1866. He was already a qualified teacher in 1886. In 1890 he became an evangelist in the American Board Mission. In the same year he was ordained to be a priest.
- SITHEMBISO: Where did he go for his Theological training?
- NDULI: It was a usual procedure than that those days one was ordained without any formal theological training. The training was done but not formally.
- SITHEMBISO: Tell me more about how it was conducted?
- NDULI: The training was conducted in a form of in-service training. Having served under a certain white ordained priest as an evangelist v preacher, you were then promoted to ordained ministry.
- SITHEMBISO: You said the split occurred in 1917?
- NDULI: Yes it occurred on the 3rd September 1917. Rev. Mvuyana came out of the American Board Mission with followers and formed the African Congregational Church.
- SITHEMBISO: Did Rev. Mvuyana write the white missionary church a letter? How did it happen.
- NDULI: This split took place in Johannesburg. There was a great confusion which took place in the meeting that was held there. Rev. Bartman Mvuyana and his followers announced that they are separating themselves from the white church.
- SITHEMBISO: What happened after they have announced that they are splitting.

- NDULI: During those days, they hired a hall in no. 36 Strail Street, Doornfontein so that they could be able to worship God there. With enthusiasm they collected money and bought three stands which were no. 890, 891 and 901 in 24 Lower Street, in Doornfontein.
- SITHEMBISO: Where did they get money to buy the plots and to build the churches.
- NDULI: When the question was raised about where they were going to get money from, for the tasks which were ahead of them to build the churches? All who were at that meeting responded with one voice, "from our biceps," pointing at their arms.
- SITHEMBISO: When and where was the president appointed? Was he self appointed?
- NDULI: The first conference was held at Doornfontein for the first time under the name African Congregational Church. The first black president was elected during the conference in 8 August 1918. The Rt. Rev. G B Mvuyana was elected to be their first black president.
- SITHEMBISO: What happened to the plots / land that was bought for the building of church structures.
- NDULI: On 10th July 1919 all the plots which were bought by the ACC had structures. The church grew from Johannesburg to other places like Natal, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique.
- SITHEMBISO: What is the term of office of presidency?
- NDULI: It is five years. If the people still wants you, they can still vote you in.
- SITHEMBISO: Is Rev. Mvuyana still alive?
- NDULI: Rev. Mvuyana died on the 1st August 1925. He worked very hard for the church.
- SITHEMBISO: Tell me something, still today ministers do not have any Theological background?
- NDULI: They do have a Theological training.
- SITHEMBISO: Where do you train your ministers and for how long.

NDULI: There is a president who had a major contribution to this church because he was a peace loving person and build many churches. Over and above that he encouraged the potential ministers to gain some Theological training. He sent his potential ministers to Union Bible Institute.

SITHEMBISO: Why he had to choose Union Bible College out of all other institutions?

NDULI: UBI has no set standard of education for admission. There at UBI they use venacular language. So they are no limitations if someone feels the call to serve. Our ministers train for three years full time or by correspondence.

SITHEMBISO: Where does the church stand on the issue of ordinance of women?

NDULI: I do not want to get into those issues but there is one woman who trained some where and was ordained some where? She is not recognized as a priest in the church. She is in the church and working under a certain priest like any other lay person in the church. We do not ordain woman in this church.

SITHEMBISO: Do you have any other race in this church either than blacks?

NDULI: We are open to all the races in this church but so far we are only blacks.

SITHEMBISO: For how do the ministers stay at the particular church?

NDULI: The period of stay in a particular place by the ministers depend on the need. Others stay long and others for a short period of time.

SUCCESSION OF PRESIDENTS

1. RT Rev. G B Mnuyana 1918 - 1925
2. RT Rev. B M Ndwandwe 1925 - 1931
3. RT Rev. M S Dube 1931 - 1942
4. RT Rev. L M Makhoba 1942 - 1967
5. RT Rev. A A Ngcobo 1967 - 1986
6. RT Rev. C B Gwala 1986 -

Some terminated their offices because of death. some because their term of office over and some because of illness.