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Interview Transcription about African Congregational Church

Name of the Interviewee : Rev J. C Dhlamini
Place of the Interview : Port Shepstone, At Engeni Circuit
Date of the Interview : 2nd October, 1994

1. BACKGROUND OF THE INTERVIEWEE:

Interviewer: It is a great pleasure for me to get this opportunity to meet you baba. Moreover to interview you about how you became a pastor in the African Congregational Church.

Baba, to begin with, when were you born and how old are you now?

Interviewee: I am about 64 years of age, I was born in 1920. And I feel now that I am getting old.

Interviewer: I can realise that you are reasonably old, and you might be full of experiences in life. Baba, would you tell me about your life background?

Interviewee: I was born at Emseni in 1920. We are bona fide of the area. My father was a pastor of the Baptist Church and my grandfather was an evangelist. My father, after he had trained as a pastor, he left the Baptist Church because the church leaders did not like him becoming a pastor. Then in 1927, he joined the African Congregational Church, which was started in 1917 by Muyana. Rev B. Muyana was dissatisfied with the church administration of the missionaries in the American Board, what is today called United Congregational Church. The missionaries had a tendency of taking all the money overseas, to America and did not do anything for the Black pastors and black schools. Muyana, then organised the people to break off from the American Board to join this church. Muyana had this idea from 1917, and in 1934. They finally broke away from the mission Church.

In 1937, the church got an official recognition by

the government. Myself, I grew up in this church, but in the beginning, I did not train as a minister. I trained as a teacher and today I am still teaching. I served in the church as an active member and I was elected as a National Executive member in 1972, at a church conference at Cape Town.

After my father died I decided to become a pastor like him. Whilst my father was alive some people always wanted me to become a pastor, but I told them that time had not come for me to be a pastor. Now I work both as a principal of a high school, and as a pastor too.

Interviewer: When you trained as a teacher, what was the level of your education at the time.

Interviewee: At that time, I had finished my Matric and I went to train as a teacher at Amanzimtoti College in 1946, training for a Diploma in teaching.

2. THE DECISION TO BECOME A MINISTER/PRIEST

Interviewer: What drove you personally to become a pastor, since you had a training already?

Interviewee: After my father's death, I then decided to become a minister. I felt called to do the work of God, to serve the people.

Interviewer: How did your family, and community react when you decided to become a minister?

Interviewee: I just told my wife and children that now I am going to train for ministry and my wife was happy with the decision, but only concerned about my work as a teacher. I told her that I am not abandoning my teaching work. Instead, I will ask for a study leave from the government of Zululand.

Concerning the community, some ordinary people in the community were happy about my decision. However, in the case of the church council, they were strongly against me going to train for ministry.

Interviewer: Why did the church council refuse for you to go for ministry?

Interviewee: As a matter of fact, not only the church council was against me, but even a large number of pastors who refused me. In the church, I am known as a powerful person and influential one. They were afraid that if I can become a pastor, I can end up being voted as a dean, because of my intellectual power and capabilities in doing things.

The Dean was the only person who was on my side, because he was my father's friend.

Interviewer: So, what happened later, how did you succeed in becoming a pastor?

Interviewee: It took me four years until I got a permission to go for training. And that permission was granted by the dean secretary, without the awareness of the pastors and those members of the council who refused me permission to go and study.

Interviewer: How was the reaction from other members of the church, beside the pastors and the church council?

Interviewee: The members of the church, in fact were very happy about my decision. They encouraged me to take up ministry. This was because people generally love me wherever I am, in meeting and everywhere.

Interviewer: What was the relationship between you and other indigenous clergy. Did they accept you as one brother among them, bearing in mind all the resentment you had experienced in your church.

Interviewee: As a matter of fact, other people did not

understand as to what was happening to me. They were all asking themselves this question. Other clergies accepted me wholeheartedly without any inclinations to resentments. In fact, they were happy for me to join ministry.

3. TRAINING

Interviewer: Now, you finally succeeded to go for your training - where actually did you train as a pastor?

Interviewee: Normally the african Congregational Church train their pastors at the U.B.I, which stands for Union Bible Institute, at Pietermaritzburg at Sweetwaters. However, I personally was not trained there. I was trained at Durban christian Centre in Durban. I did not want to ask for a study leave for a lower training at U.B.I where training is ever only done in Zulu language.

Interviewer: How was Durban christian Centre different from union Bible Institute?

Interviewee: Durban Christian Centre is a theological College which is multiracial in nature. During my time at training, we were only two black students, and five coloureds. The rest were white people. The lessons were taught in english right through, and the level of training was considerably high. My training at Durban Christian Centre was another bone of contention which caused the pastors in my church to stand against me, because among other reasons, I did not train where all pastors of the church were trained. They thought that I was building my theological training, coupled with my teaching profession in order to become a dean or bishop.

Interviewer: When and how long did your training take?

Interviewee: I finally succeeded to go for training in 1983 and I finished in 1984. The training took me two years.

Interviewer: Who paid for your studies in Durban Christian Centre?

Interviewee: Since the church body did not want to grant me permission to go and train as a pastor, they refused to pay for me at the college, using an argument that I trained at a different college, which the church doesn't use. This argument however, was secondary to the primary one, that they did not want me to train as a pastor at all.

Interviewer: What happened after you had finished your training, Did the church accept you?

Interviewee: According to the church's procedure, I was supposed to be already ordained in 1984, when I was doing my final year at the college. However, the matter concerning my ordination was never discussed. In church meetings, it did not appear even in the agenda.

Interviewer: What did you do then after you realised that you were not going to be ordained.

Interviewee: I asked the dean in 1984, if I was going to be ordained in the conference which was going to be in Johannesburg, and the Dean told me that I was not going to be ordained. I personally understood the dean what he meant. He meant that the church council still refused me to be ordained. And I personally did not have problems with the dean. When we were at the conference, my local congregation of Port Shepstone, at Emsoni, told the dean and the church council members that I must be ordained. They were so angry and pushy, such that I was then ordained right there, without some necessary preparations.

4. MINISTRY

Interviewer: As an ordained pastor, when and where did you start your ministry?

Interviewee: After I was ordained in 1984, I stayed for about four years without being assigned a parish or congregation. I only continued with my work as a teacher and helped by preaching in my local congregation. Until 1988, when I decided to drop the church position of being an executive member, that I was given the Emseni and Gumulethu congregations to minister.

Interviewer: What experiences of segregation did you have, may be politically as you became a pastor in the South African Socio-Political context?

Interviewee: There were no severe political experiences of segregation I experienced. The reason being that, our church doesn't directly involve herself in politics. We only commit ourselves to preaching the gospel. I can say that, we have experienced that segregation, but it was not too obvious.

Interviewer: What influence have African culture had on you when you took ministry and today?

Interviewee: As a Christian, I have grown to distinguish what is good and what is bad. In my culture there are bad things a Christian shouldn't do, like ancestry veneration. There are other things like respect, Africans had before, that I think can be maintained.

5. ORAL TRADITION

Interviewer: What are your personal and other people's perceptions concerning previous indigenous clergy?

Interviewee: I think the indigenous clergy, especially Rev

Muyana, have done a good job for the church in South Africa. They have planted a seed or a spirit of self-reliance, that an african too, have leadership roles. This has challenged the missionary churches to realize that africans can do better things also. Many people are happy with the indigenous clergies.

Interviewer: What can you say about your personal experience as an indigenous clergy among others in South Africa?

Interviewee: I am very happy about it. There is a lot of motivation, I get from the members of the church. The congregants are so zealous in giving offering. This is motivated by the fact that they are doing their own work for their own church.

Interviewer: How do other churches view your church, as an indigenous church? Do they accept it or oppose it?

Interviewee: The churches in South Africa, are very happy about us. They are happy to work with us in the society, and we are open to share the gospel with them.

However, at the beginning, the American Board was at logger head with us. They thought we were going to fail to become a church, but now they want us to unite with them, to form one church.

Interviewer: What does your church say about uniting with American Board or United Congregational Church?

Interviewee: So far, we have not thought about uniting, because also it is only the American Board church in America which cherish this idea. The one here in South Africa hasn't said anything about that matter.

Interviewer: What are the church practices or rituals you observe in your church?

Interviewee: We celebrate holy communion services, we do infant

baptism, as an official church baptism, but I personally don't go along with infant baptism. For me it is not biblical. I believe that Jesus himself set the example of immersion baptism. Therefore, I think the church should follow him as a perfect model.

Interviewer: Are you are the only one who has this problem of infant baptism in the church or are there others who share the same feeling as you do?

Interviewee: I am not the only one. There are those who think the same way, but we don't force those who want infant baptism, let them do it if they want it, but I don't believe in it.

Interviewer: Baba, in your own view, what is the future of indigenous clergy? Are there difficulties or successes?

Interviewee: I don't see any problem. The indigenous churches are becoming more stronger than before. Many churches, even the mainline churches, come to us to ask for advices, as to how to make fundraising. How to enhance offering in the church. Our church has got a powerful motivation in offering, each person could offer a thousand by him or herself. So there is no fear of the future. It is very bright for us.

Interviewer: Thank you Baba Ohlamini for allowing me this good time to interview you. I have gained a lot of experience from you.